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UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

The Influence of Administrators' Allocations of the Local Control Funding Formula  
on African American Students' Academic Achievement

A dissertation presented in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Leadership for Educational Justice

By  
Robin McIver-Brown  
April 2020

Dissertation Committee:  
Nicol R. Howard, Ph.D. Committee Chair,  
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Wilbert L. Greer, Jr., Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

The Influence of Administrators' Allocations of the Local Control Funding Formula  
on African American Students' Academic Achievement

Robin McIver-Brown  
Doctor of Education, 2020  
University of Redlands  
Advisor: Nicol R. Howard, PhD.

This qualitative phenomenological research explored how administrators perceive Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) resources and their influence on African American student achievement. The central phenomenon was the role of district office administrators in determining LCFF resource allocations. A nonrandom recruitment selection of 10 public-school transitional kindergarten through Grade 12 district employees in a southern California county from seven districts with African American student populations of 8% or higher participated in the study. The district administrators who participated in semistructured interviews were superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors. Seven themes emerged from the collected and analyzed data: (a) African American students indirectly addressed by LCFF, (b) African American achievement indirectly impacted by LCFF, (c) LCFF statutory regulations: intentional policy and practice, (d) LCFF metrics to determine effective versus ineffective expenditures, (e) LCFF resource allocation methodology, (f) LCFF voice: advocacy and stakeholder engagement, and (g) culturally responsive school leadership. Districts have flexibility with LCFF to allocate resources to meet local needs and address disparities and inequities that impact historically underperforming student groups. In order to understand how to eradicate the persistent underperformance by African American students, this study looks at the perspective of those who have the LCFF decision-making power to allocate resources in districts.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the extraordinary family members in my life who have challenged, motivated, and shaped me to be the person I am today. This journey would have been a dream, but now it is a reality! “The race is not given to the swift nor strong, but he who endures until the end” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

My dear husband, [REDACTED], provided me with unconditional prayers, love, support, and encouragement to pursue my goals. We truly are a team and have conquered this endeavor together. I also dedicate this dissertation to my girls, [REDACTED] [REDACTED], whom I love to the moon and back. I thank them for being so patient with me, never complaining, checking to make sure that I was working on my dissertation, and being the best “study buddies” I could ever have. If they continue to stay strong in their faith, allow education to light their path, use their knowledge to do good for others, they will make a difference in this world.

I am grateful to my parents, [REDACTED], for teaching me that God has more windows than doors, to be honest, to have integrity, and to live by Galatians 6:9: “And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

To my nieces and nephews: They know that Auntie Robin loves all of them so much. May the path I have traveled provide them with lessons of perseverance, hope for tomorrow, and the audacity to turn their dreams into reality.

## Acknowledgments

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I thank my family and friends for their love, prayers, and support. Their belief in me kept me moving forward. Thanks to my outstanding dissertation chair, Dr. Nicol Howard, for her steadfast leadership, guidance, and unwavering patience throughout the dissertation process. A special thank you goes to my dedicated dissertation team, Dr. Alayne Sullivan and Dr. Wil Greer. Their thought-provoking input enhanced the dissertation process, and I am deeply grateful for their time and efforts to assist me with completing my goal. Thank you to the district administrators who participated in the research study. Their commitment to social justice, equitable practices, and closing the achievement gap for historically underperforming student groups exemplifies the best of education and the belief in social justice.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Chapter 1 outlines the significance of this research study. Topics covered are Background of the Problem, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Question, Significance of the Study, Nature of the Study, Definition of Terms, Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Study.

Differentiated funding to achieve equity is the foundation for the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF; California Department of Education, 2020b). The passage of the LCFF in 2013 marked replacement of a 40-year-old funding formula and the beginning of California's new era of school finance. With a focus on equity, community engagement, and local control, the LCFF is designed to level the playing field for all students and eliminates more than 40 categorical funding streams, providing districts the flexibility to make decisions regarding resource allocations to close the achievement gap for historically underserved and underperforming student groups (Humphrey et al., 2014; Humphrey et al., 2017; Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; Koppich et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016). This substantial change in funding included supplemental and concentration grant funds for additional targeted supports and services addressing Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth (Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; Koppich et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016). The change in funding public schools in California provides a unique opportunity to address the persistent achievement gaps of African American students. As districts in California engage stakeholders in the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP; California Department of Education, 2020a) decision-making process to address student needs and increase achievement, it is imperative that intentionality be given to allocating resources to support African American students. The time is now to take advantage of



California's flexible funding formula and address the academic needs of and persistent low performance by African American students.

There has been an ongoing debate regarding whether the increase in financial resources to public schools improves academic outcomes for all students, and in particular student groups that have historically been underserved and underperforming (Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015). Since the Coleman study (Coleman, 1966), many have questioned whether school spending affects student outcomes. School finance reforms that began in the early 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s caused some of the most dramatic changes in the structure of K–12 education spending in U.S. history (Card & Payne, 2002; Hoxby, 2001; Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015; Murray et al., 1998). The motivation behind school finance reforms was to reduce gaps in educational opportunities and the economic well-being of children from both poor and affluent families. In the case of court-mandated school finance reforms, student college entrance scores narrow between low-income and high-income students. However, Hoxby (2001) found mixed evidence related to increased spending due to mandated school finance reforms on high school dropout rates. Downes and Figlio (1997) found no significant changes in the distribution of test scores in the case of mandated school finance reforms. Papke (2005) found that, in some states, mandated school finance reforms improved standardized scores of low-income students. Hoxby (2001) reported a difference in how states implement school finance reforms based on policy makers' choices of what reforms to implement. Coleman (1966), Card and Payne (2002), Downes and Figlio (1997), Hoxby (2001), Jackson (2018), Jackson et al. (2015), Murray et al. (1998), and Papke (2005) indicated that the evidence relating to the impact of school finance reforms on academic achievement is mixed.

“Equality of Educational Opportunity,” known as the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), was mandated by the U.S. Department of Education following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Hanushek, 1986, 1989, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2016; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Written and published more than 50 years ago, the controversial report has been pivotal in directing conversations regarding whether or not increased school funding leads to improved outcomes in student achievement. Since the publication of the report, views about the report have differed regarding the effect of funding on student outcomes and have continued to change the conversation relating to resource allocations and student achievement. The relationship between school resources and student achievement has been controversial because it calls into question a variety of traditional policy approaches. A large amount of research has focused on the relationship between resources devoted to schools and student performance and the resulting policy implications (Hanushek, 1986, 1989, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2016; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Hedges et al., 1994). LCFF is California’s attempt to move the decision-making power to the local level, closest to the students, where stakeholders who have a vested interest in achievement by all students can provide input on how best to allocate resources for student achievement.

Schools in the United States vary significantly in quality (Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015). The differences that are cited to contribute to the achievement gap are parent socioeconomic status and race (Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015). Jackson et al. (2015) indicated, “Education is one of the largest single components of government spending, amassing 7.3% across federal, state, and local expenditures (p. 1).” Coleman’s (1966) large-scale study focused on per-pupil expenditures as the measure of school resource expenditures and teacher ratios and was unrelated to student achievement on standardized tests. Hanushek (1986) used a

new perspective on how and why school spending impacts student outcomes. It is a given that adequate school funding is necessary to provide quality education, and the lack of observed positive relationship between spending and student outcomes is surprising. Does money matter? The answer to an age-old question in school funding, simply stated, is yes, money does matter. It is understood that schools need money to support the daily operations of the organization. Schools also need systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of expenditures to ensure that the use of funds is making a difference in student outcomes. Therefore, additional funding to schools can improve student achievement when coupled with practices that monitor and measure effectiveness related to the use of funds (Baker, 2016a; Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Burtless, 2011; Guryan, 2001; Hedges et al., 1994; Hyman, 2017; Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015; Rebell, 2017).

The need for effective management of resources is well documented in research on school finance. When funding alone is considered as a variable of change, some studies have shown no systematic, positive relationship between student achievement and pupil expenditures, while others have reached the opposite conclusion (Hanushek, 1986, 1989, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2016; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Hedges et al., 1994). Although progress in achievement and opportunities for historically underperforming student groups has been made, the rate of progress for African American students has not been commensurate with the educational growth needs of the nation and the global community (Cooper, 2007; Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). Low high school graduation rates of African American students affect college and career readiness, poverty, health, incarceration, and economic independence (Cooper, 2007; Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). Understanding the historical context of educational opportunities in America provides the

foundation to focus on harnessing the LCFF (Affeldt, 2015; Biggs, 1992) as a vehicle for systemic change and is critical to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

It has often been stated that the LCFF provides California with a “golden opportunity” to change the narrative of student achievement (Fullan, 2015; Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2017; Imazeki, 2011). California has not only the opportunity to change the narrative of achievement for all students but in particular, the “golden opportunity” to change the narrative of achievement by African American students (Baltazar-Sabbah, 2017). The persistent challenge of closing the achievement gap for African American students is one that must be addressed for the benefit of democracy, the nation, the state, and all communities (Baker et al., 2016; Barton & Coley, 2010; Cohen et al., 2012). A qualitative approach was used in this study to explore views on how administrators’ experiences with resource allocations influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students.

### **Background of the Problem**

The United States has a history of educational inequities. The historical inequities were initially formed around race and class. While some historical inequities have appeared to subside gradually, racial inequities persist (Howard, 2010). Academic achievement gaps persist between African American and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts throughout the United States (Papke, 2005). Closing the achievement gap is the most pressing education challenge that states continue to encounter (Papke, 2005). In the case of African Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement, causing generational education deficits. In order to address the achievement gap for African American students, it is necessary to understand the impact of denial of education on a race of people in the United States.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 required an educational study to be conducted concerning the lack of equal educational opportunities for individuals on the basis of race, religion, or national origin in institutions of public education (Coleman, 1966, 1995; Hanushek, 2016; Rivkin, 2016). In other words, the report was intended to show where the country stood regarding desegregation and segregation, a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education* and funding (Coleman, 1966, 1995; Hanushek, 2016; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Rivkin, 2016). There was very little information at that time about public schools. In addition, there was no information pertaining to school funding and resource allocations, and standardized tests did not exist across all states. Coleman analyzed the elements of successful learning. After 2 years, the Equality of Educational Opportunity report, commonly known as the 1966 Coleman Report (after its lead author) was completed. The Coleman Report revealed the first evidence relating to achievement differences between Black and White students that continue to exist today (Coleman, 1966, 1995; Hanushek, 2016; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Rivkin, 2016). Hanushek (2016) indicated that, if the rate of improvement by African American students in public education continues at the same rate, it will take approximately two and a half centuries to close the achievement gap.

The outcomes of the Coleman Report focused on the following: (a) the composition of schools (who attends), (b) students' sense of control of the environments and their futures, (c) teachers' verbal skills, and (d) students' family background (Coleman, 1966, 1995; Hanushek, 2016; Rivkin, 2016). The overall indication from the report was that a student's family background, coupled with a diverse socioeconomic mix of students in the classroom, determined how well a child would learn. The family background became the primary area of focus for schools and policies, which led to misinterpretation and debates about public schools. If

resources did not matter and it was about family influence, then increasing school funding would not improve student achievement.

The primary concerns are school finance is equity, efficiency, and adequacy (Wolf & Sands, 2016). California's previous school finance formula was criticized for being inequitable, inefficient, and inadequate in providing funding for districts (Loeb et al., 2008). Efficiency in allocating resources is described as using the least costly approach to produce improved student outcomes (Rice et al., 2010). Equity focuses on the fairness of educational services. It is measured in two ways: (a) horizontal equity—students with similar needs receive the same amount of resources, and (b) vertical equity—students with more significant needs receive sufficient additional resources (Berne & Stiefel, 1984, 1999). Wolf and Sands (2016) stated that adequacy in school funding focuses on providing resources and services that are sufficient to provide all students equal access and opportunity to learn and achieve at high levels.

Prior to the LCFF, schools in California received funding from various sources: (a) 10% from the federal government, (b) 61% from the state government, and (c) 29% from local revenues. Before 1979, district funding came from local sources. Since the 1960s, funding for California schools has been allocated in two forms: (a) unrestricted for general education needs and (b) categorical or restricted funds for specific programs or student groups (Wolf & Sands, 2016). The amount allocated for general education purposes became known as per-pupil allocation (Wolf & Sands, 2016). In 2008, California temporarily suspended categorical spending restrictions for 40 categorical programs that became flex items that could be used as unrestricted funds (Wolf & Sands, 2016). Stakeholders were involved, but resource allocations were generally made by the district; there was no evidence of systemic practices related to allocating resources. Prior studies on fiscal flexibility pointed to the difficulty in analyzing

resource allocations and limited evidence of their effects. There was not enough evidence to assess the impact of funding formulas that focused on local control. California's funding formula became overly complicated and ready for a change to be streamlined, transparent, and equitable.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educational inequities were formed around race, class, and gender. The inequities around race are prevalent today (Jennings & Marvin, 2005). The achievement gap is most talked about and studied in education. The disparities between African American and White students have not closed much since 1965. African American students are overrepresented in special education, suspension, and expulsion numbers and underrepresented in advanced placement, honors, and gifted programs. The 1966 Coleman report indicated the importance of students being placed in racially diverse classrooms. The report was used by some to support the cultural deficit theory, which suggested that schools could not do much to improve achievement by African American children. Steele and Aronson (1998) put forth the idea of "stereotype threats" contributing to the achievement gap. Lee and Wong (2004) focused on cultural mismatches as reasons for the achievement gap. Gay (2010) focused on the school and culturally relevant curriculum as a reason for the achievement gap. Darling-Hammond (2015) focused on culturally relevant teaching practices that could increase or decrease the gap. Coleman (1966) was the first to indicate a gap between African American and White students. The history of slavery is a hallmark in U.S. history and a reminder of the denial of education to a race of people. It was not until 1968 that African American students in the South experienced the opportunity to attend secondary school. Urgent work is required to accelerate progress by African American students and to provide them with excellence and equity in school.

African American students were not named as a high-risk student group in California's LCAP. Nearly 86% of all African American students in California score below grade level in English Language Arts and 80% score below grade level in mathematics. Under the LCFF, district funding is based on average daily attendance, as well as unduplicated counts and concentrations of targeted student groups, identified as Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth. The LCFF premise is to provide more resources to districts that serve targeted students and grant local districts flexibility in deciding how to allocate state funds to best meet local needs and address disparities and inequities in student outcomes. Clarke Louque et al. (2017) found that African American students had needs that were not necessarily addressed by other programs provided for LCFF target populations of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore views on how administrators' experiences with resource allocation influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The central phenomenon was the role that district administrators serve in determining LCFF resource allocations for African American students, as described by the administrators. A nonrandom sample of participants was chosen based on their district administrative responsibilities related to the LCFF, district percentage of African American students (ranging from 8% or higher in a southern California county), the lived experiences of the participants, and their knowledge of school administration in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public school districts.

The educational and practical purpose of the study was to provide district and school administrators an opportunity to examine their decision-making practices related to LCFF



resource allocations and to become culturally responsive leaders in dealing with biases and inequalities that affect African American student achievement and closing the achievement gap.

### **Research Questions**

The LCFF provides districts flexibility in allocating resources to best meet local needs and improve student achievement. The LCFF ensures additional resources to districts that serve significant numbers of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. Districts are charged to engage stakeholders in the decision-making process to determine the allocation of resources that support educational equity.

African American student achievement is not commensurate with that of White student counterparts, which affects their educational success (Baker et al., 2016a; Haycock, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This study focused on how LCFF resource allocation decisions made by district administrators shape the academic trajectory of African American students.

### **Central Question**

How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?

### **Subquestions**

1. What themes emerge relating to administrators' experiences in allocating LCFF funds?
2. What factors are related to administrators' experiences in resource allocations to affect African American academic achievement?

A research question is intended to narrow the purpose of what the research study will address. Good qualitative research questions typically restate the purpose of the study in specific terms. Qualitative research questions usually begin with "what" or "how" and range from five to seven (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The central question is overarching and leads to more focused

open-ended questions relating to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The subquestions in qualitative research refine the central research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that subquestions subdivide the central question into parts that will guide the interview or observation and that can be used in the data collection process.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is essential to understand how decisions made by district administrators with regard to funding determine the trajectory of African American student achievement in public schools. This research has implications relative to researchers, school administrators, and policy makers. This research serves as a resource for educators to assist with understanding how decisions relating to the LCFF resource allocations made by district administrators are perceived to affect the academic trajectory of student achievement in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public schools in California.

The study increases awareness of LCFF resource allocation practices at the district level that affect African American student achievement. Problems with the system as it pertains to resource allocation and closing the achievement gap were explored. The study explored factors that impact district administrator's decision-making practices regarding students of color. These factors are presumably based on race, socioeconomic status, and bias perceptions that are validated only by stereotypes, misinformation, and a lack of intentional awareness.

This research study contributes to awareness and improvement of decision-making practices in the field of education related to resource allocations to improve student achievement by African American students. It is important that the role of district administrators be examined as a key factor in the decision-making process related to resource allocation practices in the educational system.

## **Nature of the Study**

The qualitative inductive approach to this study was appropriate for studying how resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators impact the trajectory of African American student achievement. The inductive study involved experiences of the participants as administrators in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 districts in a southern California county. The district administrators participated in face-to-face semistructured interviews. The demographics of the participants focused on district administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit the LCAP for review and approval to the county office of education located in the southern California county. The administrators varied in years of experience in education, administration, LCFF administration, gender, and race.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach. Phenomenology is a 20-century philosophical movement based on work by Edmund Husserl (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A phenomenological study focuses on the experience itself; through the experience, the participant is able to transform the experiences into consciousness. Phenomenology does not concentrate on categorizing but on the phenomena through lived experiences. This approach centers on the participant's conscious experience of everyday life through a pre-reflective lens (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A pre-reflective lens is a means of looking at the world through one's day-to-day experiences biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences as they relate to a particular situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the use of this method, the researcher delved into the perspectives and feelings of people who had experienced the phenomenon under study. A phenomenological research study is usually conducted through in-depth interviews with small samples of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The administrators in this study shared experiences related to resource allocation in a district setting.

The commonality among the participants was the nature of their job and districts in the same southern California county. The participants were selected because they worked in the same southern California county and had encountered similar experiences in resource allocation in their districts. The participants were interviewed in settings of their choosing. The researcher used semistructured questions to obtain in-depth information with regard to the participants' experiences. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to offer detailed information and the researcher to ask probing and follow-up questions as needed to gain an understanding of the shared experiences. An electronic recording device was used in the interviews.

### **Definition of Terms**

The definition of terms provides an understanding of the key concepts used in research. Each term provides important information relating to the general topic being studied. It was important to define ambiguous terms or terms that were not widely known outside of the discipline. Defining key terms was essential to ensure a common understanding shared between the researcher and the audience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The specific words or expressions defined are achievement gap, adequacy in school funding, culturally responsive (school) leadership, district administrators, efficiency in school funding, equity, LCAP, LCFF, and school finance reform,

*Achievement gap:* This term is defined as any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap can be identified in measures such as grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college completion rates (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Haycock, 2001). The achievement gap is often used to describe performance gaps between African American and Hispanic students at the lower end

of the performance scale and their White peers. Reardon (2013) stated that the achievement gap describes disparities between students from low-income families and students from more affluent households.

*Adequacy:* Wolf and Sands (2016) stated that adequacy in school funding focuses on providing resources and services that are sufficient to provide all students equal access and opportunity to learn and achieve at high levels.

*African American:* African American students represent the ethnicity group that is the focus of the study. Interchangeable words used throughout the study are students of color.

*Culturally responsive (school) leadership:* According to Khalifa (2018), culturally responsive (school) leadership focuses on how school leaders can serve historically marginalized students and communities effectively. Culturally responsive (school) leadership focuses on how leaders can engage students, parents, teachers, and communities in ways that impact learning positively by honoring indigenous heritages and local cultural practices (Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive school leadership described by Khalifa (2018) is made up of specific leadership behaviors, including critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting inclusive school environments, and engaging with students' communities.

*District administrators:* For the purpose of this study, district administrators are participants who have a direct impact on leading, writing, and submitting the LCAP for review and approval.

*Efficiency:* Rice et al. (2010) described efficiency as it relates to school funding as the allocation of resources using the least costly approach to producing improved student outcomes.

*Equity:* This term describes the ability to differentiate instruction, services, and resource distribution to respond effectively to the diverse needs of students through the following lens:

- (a) horizontal equity—students with similar needs receive the same amount of resources and
- (b) vertical equity—students with greater needs receive sufficient additional resources (Berne & Stiefel, 1984, 1999).

*Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP):* The LCAP is a 3-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures that support positive student outcomes and address state and local priorities to improve student outcomes and close the achievement gap.

*Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF):* LCFF is an attempt to address resource inequities by reallocating school finances on the basis of student disadvantage (rather than district property wealth) and relinquishing many of the restrictions on how revenue can be spent (Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; Koppich et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016). With a focus on equity, community engagement, and local control, LCFF is intended to level the playing field for all students by eliminating more than 40 categorical funding streams to provide districts the flexibility to make decisions regarding resource allocations to close the achievement gap for historically underserved and underperforming student groups (Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; Koppich et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016).

*School finance reform:* The motivation behind school finance reforms was to reduce gaps in educational opportunity and the economic well-being of children from both poor and affluent families (Card & Payne, 2002; Hoxby, 2001; Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015; Lafortune et al., 2016; Lafortune et al., 2018; Murray et al., 1998).

### **Assumptions**

Whether the researcher was aware or not, certain philosophical assumptions and beliefs were brought to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Sometimes, there are views about the type of problem that should be studied, the research question that should be asked, or how to collect data

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher should to be aware of their assumptions and beliefs and whether their beliefs will be incorporated into the study. Often, philosophical assumptions guide the researcher's selection of theories and guide the research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) described four philosophical assumptions. Ontological assumptions focus on the researcher embracing and reporting through the participants' words many ideas relating to the nature of reality and its characteristics. Different researchers embrace various realities, as do the participants, along with the readers of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). With regard to epistemological assumptions, the researcher attempts to get as close as possible to the participant to understand how the known knowledge of the participant has been formulated through the subjective experiences of the participant's life. It is essential to conduct the study in the field, where participants live and work, to understand how they know what they know (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Axiological assumptions relate to the role that values bring to the research. Qualitative researchers make their values known in the study by reporting their values and biases and position themselves in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Methodology or the procedures used in qualitative research were characterized by Creswell and Poth (2017) as inductive and shaped by the researcher's experience with collecting and analyzing data. Analysis of the data provides detailed knowledge of the topic being studied.

Interpretive frameworks are a basic set of beliefs that guides action (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this research study, the theories were rooted in social justice interpretive frameworks, which seek to bring about change by addressing social issues in society, with a goal of understanding specific issues and conditions that bring about inequities in society (Creswell & Poth, 2017). One of the main interpretive frameworks applied in this study was critical race theory. When examining critical race theory, researchers place attention on race and racism

within the context of American society (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Racism has shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways in which people think about laws, racial categories, and privilege. Critical race theory has three main goals: (a) present stories of discrimination from the perspective of people of color related to discriminatory practices, (b) argue for the abolition of racial suppression while recognizing that race is a social construct (fluid based on political pressures), and (c) address areas of difference such as gender, class, and inequities experienced by individuals.

The goal of this study was to examine administrators' experiences with resource allocation and to determine whether it influences efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The resource allocation decisions made by administrators may impact African American student achievement, in particular, due to the historical denial of education and continued persistence of the achievement gap based on race.

Social constructivism also served as an interpretive framework for this study. The framework is designed to understand the world in which the participants in the study live and work and causes the researcher to look for complexity in the participants' views rather than narrow the meaning in a few categories or ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The participants' experiences were formed through interaction or social construction related to historical and cultural norms that are part of the participants' lives (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The current research involved asking open-ended questions to the participants. The background of the administrators shaped their interpretation of the phenomenon being studied, which ultimately generated a pattern of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In qualitative research, the researcher must make assumptions relevant to the study, or the study will lack meaning and purpose. The method of qualitative research was inductive, and the researcher



obtained meaning from the information observed and recorded in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questions were broad and general, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2017) and Moustakas (1994), which allowed for authentic conversation in which participants described their lived experiences.

Three general assumptions were made pertaining to this study. The first assumption was that the participants had direct knowledge of resource allocation decisions made by administrators in districts and were willing to respond to interview questions and share their experiences and views.

The second assumption involved the participants' willingness to be open and honest about their experiences and not withhold information for fear of someone in the workplace finding out about their responses to the interview questions. The researcher assumed that the collection of the participants' informational data was reflective of their personal experiences in the public school system working with the LCFF, LCAP, and resource allocation.

The third assumption was that the LCFF and LCAP developmental process would influence resource allocation decision-making practices for African American students. The information was collected from administrators in districts in a southern California county that had an African American student population that represented a minimum of 8% of the total district population. The researcher interviewed 10 administrators in the reflective study of district-level practices in resource allocation.

Phenomenological approaches to research are designed to study lived experiences of participants' everyday lives and social interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The heterogeneous group involved in this research had experienced the phenomenon. Prior beliefs and experiences were set aside to focus on the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Although the researcher had some experiences related to the phenomenon, it is important that the view and experiences of the participants be interpreted as they relate to the phenomenon and not to the views and experiences of the researcher.

### **Limitations**

Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology, in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals relating to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Vital to qualitative research is the desire to expose the human part of a story to allow for the participant's personal expression of the lived experience to emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Within the phenomenological design are strengths and weaknesses that lead to limitations relating to the design of the research study.

Phenomenological design in qualitative research has many strengths. One strength is the ability of the researcher to use their motivation and personal interest to guide the study; this is seen as an advantage when the researcher is invested in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Another strength is related to data collection. Through the interview processes, the researcher can gain first-hand knowledge regarding what participants' experienced through broad and open-ended questions; the responses allow the researcher to construct themes and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The greatest strength of a phenomenological study is the human factor.

Although a phenomenological research design provides compelling research data, there are also limitations. For one, and perhaps the concern of many, is researcher bias, which is difficult to determine and detect. Phenomenology requires researcher interpretation, making the researcher's purposeful reduction of their biases, assumptions, and preconceived ideas relating to the experience or phenomenon important. The second limitation of a qualitative study can be time. The researcher should understand the time factor before assuming a phenomenological

qualitative study. Another limitation focuses on data. The collection of data cannot be generalized (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Therefore, the researcher must do their best in the interview phase to present the data and communicate what the data reveal, given the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). Finally, there are limitations linked to credibility and reliability. The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the findings are based on the participant's voice relating to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher must be aware of the limitations relating to the research study.

In order to reduce the limitations of the research design in the current study, a semistructured approach was used to ensure consistency during the interview process. A nonrandom sampling technique was applied, as is widely used in qualitative research for identification and selection of persons who are knowledgeable of the experience related to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The interview questions were predetermined, allowing flexibility during the interview for the participant to add information to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The availability and willingness of participants indicated a desire to provide authentic information related to the event.

Limitations that cannot be controlled associated with this study included participants' unwillingness to volunteer, work schedules, participants changing positions during the school year, bias information, interruptions, and fear of disclosure. District administrators in a southern California county were asked by the researcher to participate in the study. A minimum of 10 to 15 districts were eligible to participate in the study based on the job responsibility of one who leads, writes, or submits the district LCAP for review and approval. The participants were delimited based on the percentage of African American students enrolled in the district (at least 8% of the study population). The participants represented various years of experience in

education, administration, LCFF, gender, and race. Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that the goal in qualitative research is to interview enough participants until saturation (redundancy in gathered information) is reached.

In spite of the limitations associated with conducting a phenomenological study, the information that was collected adds value to the field of education and provides useful information to administrators, teachers, parents, and educational scholars regarding how resource allocation decisions made by administrators influence the trajectory of African American student achievement.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries that define the scope of the study. Different from limitations, delimitations are based on specific unconscious and conscious controllable decisions made by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The common types of choices made by the researcher relate to the problem addressed in the study, participants, and theoretical perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A single research study cannot explore all aspects of a phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested that delimitations provide the researcher space to outline a clear focus of the study and to delineate what the research is not intended to address.

Conscious and unconscious decisions are made when determining what to include or exclude when developing a research study. By identifying the participants who will be included in the study, the researcher also determines who will be excluded. This study examined administrators' experiences with resource allocation to determine whether it influences efforts to address academic achievement by African American students.

The role of administrators in determining the trajectory of other racial groups' student achievement based on the LCFF resource allocations was not explored. The study did not include

teachers, members of the community who do not work in the school district, administrators from higher education, parents, or students who do not lead, develop, write, or submit the LCAP for review and approval. The administrators who were selected to participate in the study came from districts in one southern California county, out of 58 county offices of education in California. Other populations with differing opinions about administrators and their LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices related to African American students were not explored.

The study did not include every district in the targeted southern California county. Districts in the county were invited to participate if they had an overall African American student population of at least 8%. Based on the number of districts in the targeted county, the researcher anticipated 10 to 15 participants, based on willingness to participate, schedules, and time constraints associated with conducting face-to-face interviews.

An additional delimitation of the study was the research question. The study focused on how LCFF resource allocation decisions made by district administrators shape the academic trajectory of African American students. The research question was, “How do administrators perceive Local Control Funding Formula resources and African American student achievement?” Parents, teachers, students, site-level administrators, community members, and other school staff were not interviewed to determine their role in the LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices and the impact on the trajectory of African American students.

The researcher interviewed participants only once, and all questions were asked during the 1 hour allotted for the face-to-face interview, unless the participant requested to discuss the interview questions in additional sessions, based on scheduling needs. A follow-up interview could be requested by the participant or the researcher. However, to conduct more than one interview was not feasible based on time constraints of the researcher and participants.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative phenomenological study to explore the experiences of administrators with resource allocation in determining the trajectory of African American student achievement. This study brings attention to the LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices made by administrators that impact African American students. There was a need to study this topic due to the limited research focusing on administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit for review and approval the LCAP to county offices of education and how the flexibility of the LCFF directly influences the trajectory of African American student achievement.

This study provided district administrators an opportunity to examine their decision-making practices related to resource allocations. The researcher addressed a social justice issue in society relating to persistent underperformance by African American students through a focus on the shared experiences of district administrators with regard to LCFF resource allocation. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature, including the theoretical frameworks supporting the study related to LCFF resource allocation and its application to African American students from a historical perspective and current trends.

The information provided in Chapter 1 relates to the overarching goal of the study and frames the need for this research study on LCFF and the impact on African American student achievement in the field of education. Chapter 2 builds on the information provided in Chapter 1 by connecting the problem, purpose, and research question from the study to current research in the field that supports identification of the need and research that focuses on how the experiences of district administrators with resource allocation influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to this study. Topics are Methodology of the Literature Review, Education of African American Students in the United States, Supreme Court Rulings and Funding Public Education in California, California's System of School Financing, The Impact of School Funding on Student Achievement, Implementation and Follow-Through of Institutional Policies, Theoretical Frameworks, and Synthesis of the Literature.

Each state's constitution requires provision of public education and finances to support the educational system. Education is one of the most significant single components of government spending, amassing 7.3% of gross profit dollars across federal, state, and local expenditures (Jackson et al., 2015). School finance reforms that started in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s caused some of the most dramatic changes in kindergarten through Grade 12 education spending in the history of the United States (Jackson et al., 2015).

Kindergarten through Grade 12 public schools vary significantly in quality, which has been documented in a broad range of studies (Jackson et al., 2015). Parent income and race have often been cited as major contributing factors to school quality in kindergarten through Grade 12 public schools (Jackson et al., 2015). Through legislative policies, states, which control about 90% of school funding, put in place systems of funding public education that determine the allocation of state revenue to school districts (Vasquez et al., 2014). While discussions relating to funding responsibilities usually focus on the amount of state and local money spent on public education and how those funds are allocated across districts, Rose and Weston (2013) claimed that little attention has been given to including resource accountability protocols for ensuring that

local districts use funds effectively and efficiently to provide essential resources in schools and classrooms to close the achievement gap.

Coleman (1966) conducted the first national quantitative analysis of the variation in school resources and student achievement on standardized tests. Coleman employed data from a cross-section of students from 1965 and 1966. The report findings indicated that the variation in student achievement on standardized tests as measured by per-pupil spending and student-teacher ratios was unrelated (Coleman, 1966, 1995). Since then, the question of how school spending affects student academic performance has been studied extensively, given that adequate school funding is a necessary condition for the provision of quality education (Jackson et al., 2015). California has taken the lead to pursue school finance reform that not only provides equitable and adequate school funding but also encompasses resource accountability that focuses on effective and efficient application of funds at the local level as reflected in each district's LCAP Annual Update section (Loeb & Strunk, 2007; Rubenstein, 2002). California has pioneered the LCFF to support local education agencies' decision-making processes and implementation of proven educational programs and services that provide intentional opportunities for students to meet state and federal academic learning standards and close achievement and opportunity gaps among historically underperforming student groups.

The United States bears a long history of racism, exclusion, and low expectations for African American students (Biggs, 1992). The persistent challenge of closing achievement gaps for African American students must be addressed for the benefit of democracy, nation, state, and communities (Cohen et al., 2012). Although progress in achievement and opportunities for historically underperforming student groups have been made, the rate of progress for African American students has not been commensurate with the educational growth needs of the nation



and the global community (Cooper, 2007; Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Noguera, 2008). Low high school graduation rates of African American students affect college and career readiness, poverty, health, incarceration, and economic independence (Cooper, 2007; Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). California has taken a bold step to reshape the future of California's students through a weighted student funding formula that allows flexible funding at the local level to support student needs based on data that identify historically underperforming student groups (Cooper, 2007; Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). The LCFF provides local education agencies the opportunity to confront educational disparities and address historical paradigms of African American achievement and opportunity gaps in the LCAP, with inclusion of actions and services that can intentionally address the educational divide (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2010; Holt & Smith, 2005; Kieffer, 2012; Pitre, 2014; Simone et al., 2006; B. L. Walker, 2014). The LCFF charges all administrators in kindergarten through Grade 12 education to support all students to achieve their full potential (Cooper, 2007). Cooper (2007) highlighted the moral imperative that education is a civil right, deeply rooted in the historical and social-political context of the nation, and now part of California's LCFF and LCAP.

The literature review examines articles on the achievement gap of African American students, with an emphasis on the implications for graduating college and being ready for a career. In this review, the *achievement gap* is a term used to describe the difference in educational performance and improvement between African American and White students as reflected in the outcomes of grades, standardized test scores, and graduation rates (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2009). Howard (2010) moved the concept of the achievement gap beyond elimination of achievement gaps in grades, standardized test scores, and graduation to include an understanding of historical experiences of

marginalized groups of people and the social-political context that has contributed to systemic exclusion of students from educational opportunities. Reference to the *opportunity gap* in this literature review is slightly different from the achievement gap and indicates how race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors perpetuate persistent low education expectations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of marginalized people (Howard, 2010). In other words, the opportunity gap refers to inputs or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities, while the achievement gap refers to outputs or unequal distribution of educational findings (Howard, 2010). In California, the LCFF and LCAP have the potential to address the achievement and opportunity gaps of African American students.

As California implements college and career indicator measures that determine how well local educational agencies are preparing students for success after graduation, a comprehensive approach to resource accountability is fundamental to establishing the effectiveness of the allocation of resources that will enable students to meet rigorous standards (Verstegen, 2015). School funding systems that link the cost of delivering academic standards to all students, including those with additional programmatic needs, lead to achievement gains that benefit all students (Verstegen, 2015).

California has constructed the LCFF on the foundation of transparency, subsidiarity, and equity. With the adoption of the LCFF, California committed to establishing an education system driven by the goal of continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015). The focus on equity centers on closing the achievement and opportunity gaps for underperforming student groups and connects state standards to resource accountability, guided by eight state priorities and measured using the California School Dashboard. The complimentary companion piece to the LCFF requires districts and county offices of education to write LCAPs that align goals,

actions, and services to meet annual measurable outcomes set by the district or county office of education. Affeldt (2015) noted that California's accountability system took a politically difficult but crucial step to close the achievement gap for underrepresented students with a history of marginal performance and serves as a framework for school finance reform nationwide that is fundamental to closing the achievement and opportunity gaps of historically underperforming student groups.

The literature review contains four sections. The first section focuses on the historical perspective of the education of African American students in the United States and serves as a frame of reference for understanding the persistent achievement gaps in student academic outcomes. The second section focuses on the history and supreme court rulings relating to the constitutionality of funding public education in California. The third section focuses on California's new system of school financing to remediate achievement and opportunity gaps. The fourth section focuses on implementation and follow-through of institutional policies that support flexible funding and improved outcomes for African American students. Although the literature varies in research methodology regarding the California's opportunity with the LCFF and LCAP, the literature indicates that longstanding disparities in educational funding for African American students are contributing to persistent achievement and opportunity gaps (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010). Through intentional use of flexible funding, equitable and adequate funding can be achieved (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010). When measures are designed to include resource accountability, closing the racial achievement and opportunity gaps can begin to change the trajectory of African American student achievement.

## **Literature Review Methodology**

The literature review for this research study was drawn from multiple types of sources. The variety in resources provided the opportunity to understand the need for the research study, themes that emerged from the process, and analysis of the findings related to district administrators' decision-making practices regarding LCFF resources and African American student achievement. Resources include the following: seven articles, 14 books, one conference paper, one dissertation, one essay, five journals, 64 peer-reviewed articles, one periodical, 15 reports, four research briefs, and nine working papers, for a total of 122 sources. Peer-reviewed articles are vetted for importance and quality by scholars in the field for a high standard of writing, research, and content (Bowen, 2010). Sixty-four of the resources cited in this study were peer reviewed based on the level of scholarly standard and served as a high-quality frame to support the basis for the research study.

Although this was a qualitative phenomenological research study, the use of quantitative, mixed methods and theoretical sources provided additional perspectives to the central research question. Due to the central research question focusing on California's LCFF and LCAP introduced in 2013, the reports and research briefs provided current information on a topic that is in its infancy in implementation and research regarding effectiveness. All sources listed in Table 1 supported the need for this research study of the unique perspectives of district administrators in their experiences with resource allocation and how it influences efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The LCFF has the intent of subsidiarity (local control), transparency (inclusion of stakeholders for meaningful input related to resource expenditures), and closing the achievement gap for historically underperforming student groups. At this time, there are no qualitative studies related to the decision-making practices pertaining to

**Table 1***Types of Sources Cited in the Literature Review*

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Source type	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	Theoretical
Articles	1			6
Books				14
Conference papers				1
Dissertations		1		
Essays				1
Journals				5
Peer reviewed	28	22	2	12
Periodicals				1
Reports	8	5	2	
Research briefs	3			1
Working papers	3	4	1	1

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resource allocations to interrupt years of persistent low performance (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010).

The researcher noted the title, source, purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, conclusions, and any additional relevant points of each study. The notes from the sources were captured in an Excel spreadsheet and frequently reviewed until the following major themes became apparent: (a) education of African American students in the United States, (b) Supreme Court rulings and funding public education in California, (c) California's new system of school financing, (d) the impact of school funding on student achievement, and (e)

implementation and follow-through of institutional policies. Subordinate themes were clustered under the first three major themes: (a) historical context; (b) *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Serrano v. Priest*, revenue limits, and categorical funding; and (c) LCFF, equitable and adequate funding, and resource accountability. No subthemes emerged from the sources relating to the fourth and fifth. Themes were color coded and referenced as needed to support the research study and organization of the literature review.

## **Education of African American Students in the United States:**

### **Historical Context**

Many groups have come to the United States prospered but African Americans have not advanced at a rate commensurate to the time spent in this country (B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). The lack of progress in African American student achievement can be attributed to four major points in history: (a) disruption of a close-knit African kinship that was at the core of all political, economic, and social functioning; (b) the middle passage and the brutality of the slave trade; (c) 2½ centuries of slavery with its imposed dependency, inferior treatment, and no opportunity for improvement; and (d) the release of slaves into a hostile environment in both the North and the South, leaving them neither slave nor citizen (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). Based on the experiences of African Americans in the United States, educational inequities are no different and have spanned hundreds of years. The deliberate oppression supported by policies allowed the dominant culture to remain in power and impact economic and educational opportunities (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996).

Slavery intentionally separated family members. Intentional separation caused the breakdown of family traditions, which varied based on each slave's origin and religion (Davis-

Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). The educational inequities for African American students span hundreds of years (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). Families could be sold separately because the U.S. did not recognize the families of slaves. African Americans had no rights because they were property (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Since slaves were property, they could not legally marry, and living as a family was not part of a slave's life (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). Illiteracy of slaves was ingrained in society, and institutional laws made it illegal to teach slaves to read and write. This denial of slaves' access for more than a hundred years to literacy, skills, and information affected African Americans; it is still prevalent in the achievement and opportunity gaps that persist today (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996).

Disparities in the investment of education for African Americans have taken place at every level (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Slavin & Madden, 2006). It became necessary to move from uneducated and unskilled to highly educated and skilled in one generation, as opposed to three generations for immigrant groups (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). Economic and social mobility in society continues to be rooted in access to quality education (Holt & Smith, 2005). There is a need for those in decision-making positions in the school system to have critical conversations regarding race, unconscious biases, and adequate and equitable funding. These conversations will shed light on how to reform the educational system so that all students will be able to achieve (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Slavin & Madden, 2006). It is imperative to acknowledge the historical marginalization of African Americans that has cultivated the achievement and opportunity gaps (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Slavin & Madden, 2006).

Opportunity and achievement gaps will not be resolved unless there is an intentional commitment to improving the quality of education for African American students (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nettles et al., 2003).

Understanding the historical context of educational opportunities in America provides the foundation to focus on harnessing the LCFF and LCAP as vehicles to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for African American students (Affeldt, 2015; Biggs, 1992). The effects of centuries of years of slavery are still being felt today (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nettles et al., 2003). Affirmative action programs have tried to rectify the racial gap in institutions of higher education (Biggs, 1992). Since 1865 and years later after the Civil Rights movement, the gap showed evidence of narrowing; however, in recent years, the gap is increasing, confirming the deeply rooted disparities of African Americans in the educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2009). Fixed mindsets regarding the abilities of African American students to learn were ingrained in the fabric of the country and the hearts and minds of African American people (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2009). The emancipation of slaves did not abolish racism in the United States (Biggs, 1992). The context in which achievement and opportunity gaps have been shaped influences the moves to address the gaps (Biggs, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2009). Affeldt (2015) and Murtadha and Watts (2005) suggested that the challenges of today make it increasingly essential to eradicate the achievement and opportunity gaps. The LCFF and LCAP hold promise to rectify the historical inequities in education and funding to support African American student achievement.



## Supreme Court Rulings and Funding Public Education in California

### *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*

In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were not only unequal but also unconstitutional. B. L. Walker (2014) and V. S. Walker (1996) focused on the longstanding debate regarding achievement by African American students since the ruling. African Americans faced not only racial segregation but deeply ingrained denial of opportunities that education provides (B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). After 63 years, *Brown v. Board of Education* is still one of the most important Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century (Ashenfelter et al., 2004; Heise, 1995, 2004). Although *Brown* succeeded in launching a desegregation movement in public schools, it failed to integrate and fund public school education for a majority of students throughout the nation.

The *Brown* decision influenced litigation in the areas of school segregation and equitable school funding. Since 1970, states have changed their school finance systems with improvement of equity as their primary goal (Stiefel & Berne, 1981). The changes have been labeled school finance reforms and have often occurred in response to state court cases. For example, in the 1971 case of *Serrano v. Priest*, the California Supreme Court ruled that the state system of school funding was unconstitutional because it failed to provide a fair distribution between local property value and educational expenditures (Stiefel & Berne, 1981). A large number of state court cases have been filed with similar findings in an attempt to neutralize wealth.

The state of school funding in the post-*Brown* era has brought about many changes in school finance systems. Despite these gains, there are still substantial problems in equity and adequacy of school funding in poor urban schools, attended primarily by minority students (Baker, 2016b). As achievement continues to suffer among students in urban areas with

inadequate resources, there has been an attempt to combat the issue of inequities in education through the adoption of flexible funding models (Baker, 2016b).

### **California's Landmark School Funding Case: *Serrano v. Priest***

California's education funding reforms in the 1970s were principally in response to a series of rulings in *Serrano v. Priest* (Downes, 1992). In 1967, John Serrano met with the principal of a school in Los Angeles to express concerns about the quality of his son's education. The principal insinuated that the Los Angeles Unified School District could not afford to provide a better education for his son and suggested that the family move to a wealthier district. The Serrano family moved but joined with others and sued California's system of funding public schools. The lawsuit was filed in a Los Angeles court in 1969, beginning a long legal battle over education finance reform (Downes, 1992).

An initial dismissal of *Serrano* (*Serrano I*) was reversed in 1971 by the California Supreme Court and the case was ordered to the district court for trial. The California Supreme Court's decision in 1971 established that the inequalities of the state's education system violated the equal protection of the law guaranteed in both the state and federal Constitutions, and the court ordered the matter back to the appellate court for further trial. In 1976, *Serrano II* confirmed that, even with school finance reforms, the state public school finance system was unconstitutional (Downes, 1992). Two districts with the same tax rate but with different taxable wealth per pupil would have different per-pupil spending. It was argued that the finance system denied students in poorer districts equal access to educational opportunities. Vasquez et al. (2014) confirmed that the court ordered the state to develop a system of school funding that did not depend on district wealth: a system of fiscal neutrality.

The intent of the California Supreme Court ruling in *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) was to put an end to discrimination against the poor. Enactment of the LCFF, nearly four decades later, was an effort to end discrimination and to create equitable and adequate funding in public schools. Affeldt (2015) demonstrated that the formula continues to include an element of property taxes; however, the purpose of LCFF is to provide schools with high-needs students the additional support and equitable and adequate resources that are necessary to close the achievement gap.

### **Revenue Limits**

Since 1960, California funding for public education has been allocated to districts in two forms: (a) unrestricted funds for general education purposes; and (b) categorical, or restricted, funds for specific purposes (Weston, 2010). Before *Serrano I*, California's school finance system was based on the foundation system (Downes, 1992). District revenues were drawn from four areas: (a) local property taxes, (b) equalization assistance, (c) basic state aid, and (d) state and federal categorical aid (Downes, 1992). All districts were guaranteed basic state aid of 125 dollars per pupil. Districts that were unable to fund the foundation level of spending through property taxes were provided equalization assistance (Downes, 1992). *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) required California to equalize per-pupil expenditures for general education purposes in districts serving the same grade spans with similar student enrollment. In 1972, the California legislature limited the amount that districts could spend per pupil for general education purposes: an amount that became known as the "per-pupil revenue limit." Murray et al. (1998) noted one problem with revenue limits: They focused on equalizing resources across districts, without regard for the funding needed to provide students an adequate education or understanding of equitable funding to account for the differences in costs of educating students with different programmatic needs across districts.

In the *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), the U.S. Supreme Court found that the Constitution did not guarantee education as a fundamental right and that the equal protection clause did not apply in cases of financial inequity (Delahaye, 2016). Due to this decision, the California Supreme Court reconsidered and reaffirmed its prior ruling in *Serrano II*, under the justification that the state Constitution's equal protection clause still applied to the education finance disparities, even if the federal Constitution did not guarantee equal educational opportunities (Murray et al., 1998). However, in both *Serrano I* and *Serrano II* decisions, the court adopted a doctrine described as "fiscal neutrality," which focused on equalizing funding across districts. Weston (2010) indicated that the court required the state to bring the disparities in per-pupil funding across districts within one hundred dollars by 1980.

Following the *Serrano II* decision, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 65 into law in 1977 to fulfill the mandate to equalize district funding levels and transfer funding from affluent districts to those with lower property tax revenues (Weston, 2010). *Serrano II* did not require equalization of expenditures, but the decision required the funding of public education independently from taxable wealth (Downes, 1992; Weston, 2010). In 1978, voters passed Proposition 13, in response to increasing property taxes, to create a uniform statewide property tax of 1% and limited increases in property taxes to 2% per year (Quinn & Steinberg, 2015). Quinn and Steinberg (2015) specified that the passage of Proposition 13 led to a 50% reduction in local revenues for public education and that most districts began to rely on state aid. While other states implemented laws similar to Proposition 13, they did not enforce per-pupil revenue limits; the combination of per-pupil revenue limits and Proposition 13 substantially hindered districts' ability to raise money for public education locally.

Approximately 3% of districts exceed the per-pupil revenue limit and do not receive state aid for general education purposes, although these districts may still receive state categorical funds; these districts are referred to as basic aid or excess revenue districts. Basic aid districts typically have higher per-pupil expenditures and serve lower proportions of targeted students, compared to other districts in the state.

Given concern about insufficient funding to public education, Proposition 98 was passed by voters in 1988. Proposition 98 guarantees that the state will allocate a certain proportion of its revenues for public kindergarten through Grade 12 and community college education. However, Rubenstein (2002) found that funding for public education in California depends on the success of the economy.

### **Categorical Funding**

Another critical component of California's education finance system is categorical funding. Before the LCFF, categorical funds comprised roughly one third of state funding for public education (Fullan, 2015). Categorical funds are restricted funds; each categorical fund may be used only for a specific program or student group. Thus, district administrators cannot transfer funds from one categorical program to another or spend categorical funds for general education purposes. State categorical funds do not count toward a district's per-pupil revenue limits.

Categorical funding began in the 1960s as state legislators reacted to political pressure to address the needs of disadvantaged children. Categorical funding grew in the 1970s and was used by politicians to prevent increased state aid being spent on teacher salaries. The number of categorical funds increased dramatically over time. In 1993, 57 categorical programs were identified; due to lack of accessible documentation, it was difficult to determine the exact

number and purposes of the categorical programs (Rose & Weston, 2013). Rose and Weston (2013) documented 253 state and federal categorical programs and determined that multiple categorical programs were designed to achieve the same purpose.

Due to the political nature of categorical funding, it was argued that funds were not equitably allocated across districts. Although districts serving higher numbers of low-income students generally received more categorical funding than other districts, the funding was not systematically allocated to districts based on student needs (Faitar, 2011). Also, the state's categorical funding system was not seen as designed to assist district leaders to meet student performance goals. Rather, categorical programs were seen as designed to monitor district compliance to meet state and federal regulations (Faitar, 2011). Faitar (2011) indicated that it is important to note that categorical funding was found to correlate with supporting districts with closing the achievement gap.

Experts in California school finance have argued that, in the past 30 to 40 years, California's education finance system became overly complicated due to political pressure. Thus, the system has little coherence or clarity (Yergin, 2015). Fullan (2015) noted that the state's education finance system was ready for a change in 2013, when Governor Jerry Brown and the California legislature enacted LCFF, which replaced California's previous school funding formula with a more streamlined, transparent, and equitable formula.

### **California's New System of School Financing**

#### **Local Control Funding Formula**

This section relates to the research question regarding how district administrators' experiences with resource allocation influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students in that the literature supports allocating resources to students who

have the need. In 2013, California adopted LCFF, which considers the higher costs of educating Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. The LCFF simplified the state system for distributing funds to school districts. Also, LCFF changed how the state calculates the amount of state funding to local education agencies, school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education. The LCFF provides a base per-pupil amount for each district's average daily attendance plus adjustments of 10.4% for kindergarten through Grade 3 students to reduce class size in the early grades, 20% for Low-Income, English Learners, or Foster Youth students, and 50% for districts that exceed 55% of the district's enrollment made up of either Low-Income, English Learners, or Foster Youth (Affeldt, 2015). The reform also mandates that local education agencies utilize stakeholders to develop LCAPs that focus on resource accountability to close the achievement gap. The adoption of LCFF gave local education agencies authority to use fiscal resources in new and innovative ways to improve educational outcomes of all students, with a particular focus on historically underperforming student groups (Murphy, 2017). In order to maximize LCFF flexibility, Murray et al. (1998) agreed that district leaders would need to rethink budgeting allocation practices to ensure alignment with district priorities.

The LCFF has three main goals (Delahaye, 2016). The first goal is to simplify the state school funding system. The LCFF consolidates many funding streams into three types of school grants: base, supplemental, and concentration. Each local education agency receives state funds based on the total number of students. The percentage of "high-need" students in a district is also considered in funding (Koppich et al., 2015). The state identifies Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students as high-need populations.

The second goal of LCFF is to allocate additional funds to districts with a higher concentration of "high-need" students. Local education agencies with a higher concentration of

high-needs students receive additional supplemental and concentration grant funding, respectively. Local education agencies that receive supplemental and concentration grant funds must spend those dollars on increased or improved services for high-need students. The spending of those funds must be reflected in the LCAP, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Koppich et al., 2015).

The third main goal of LCFF is to increase transparency, subsidiarity (local control) and accountability of school spending to close the achievement gap (Koppich et al., 2015). The LCFF shifts some spending control from the state to local education agencies by requiring stakeholder engagement that includes parents, students, administrators, bargaining unions, other school personnel, and community partners to provide input on establishing funding priorities based on data to determine how best to allocate resources. In order for districts to ensure inclusivity in the planning process and a shift in practices with a focus on continuous improvement, the following overarching ideas should be applied: (a) integration of strategic planning with district budgeting, (b) focus on critical questions using an equity lens to ensure that budgeting decisions close achievement and opportunity gaps (what works, under which conditions, and for what student groups), and (c) development of internal structures that sustain the strategic budgeting approach by reflecting on the impact of budget decisions on improving student outcomes for historically underperforming student groups (Murphy, 2017). Adopting strategic budgeting practices is a step toward developing an equitable and adequate system of resource allocation that responds not only to stakeholder recommendations but, most important, to students' needs that will change the trajectory of their future (Murphy, 2017). The LCFF goals and expenditure plans are now documented and updated annually through each district's LCAP. Murphy (2017) noted that expectations for the budgeting process under the LCFF shift district



budgeting environments to a locally-driven, transparent, and strategic process, with a focus on continuous improvement rather than compliance.

### **Equitable and Adequate Funding**

Equity, efficiency, and adequacy are concerns about school finance (BenDavid-Hadar & Paulino, 2009; Weishart, 2014). California’s previous school funding formula was criticized for not providing districts with equitable or adequate funding. Efficiency in allocating resources involves maximizing student outcomes using the least costly combination of resources (BenDavid-Hadar & Paulino, 2009; Clune, 1994; Weishart, 2014). Equity focuses on the fairness of educational services, and is measured in two ways: (a) horizontal equity—achieved when students with similar characteristics receive the same amount of resources and (b) vertical equity—achieved when students with more significant educational needs receive sufficient additional resources (BenDavid-Hadar & Paulino, 2009; Weishart, 2014). Adequacy is measured as the extent to which resources and services are sufficient to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn and meet rigorous state standards (Berne & Stiefel, 1999; Ejdemyr & Shores, 2017; Rubenstein, 2002).

The concepts of equity, efficiency, and adequacy of opportunity and the role of the state in providing an education to the citizenry have been part of the national political discourse since the founding of the republic (Verstegen, 2015). Thomas Jefferson may well have been the first “education president” because of his belief in the need for an enlightened society. According to Jefferson, only an educated citizenry could create a just society in which all people would have the right and opportunity to live their lives to the fullest (Verstegen, 2015).

In most instances, school finance-related courts and advocates have based their arguments for equality of educational opportunity on equity and adequacy. Rothstein (2008)

indicated that court decisions have identified that all students, regardless of economic background, need access to sufficient resources that give them equal opportunities to achieve academic proficiency.

### **Resource Accountability**

This section addresses the research question in that it critically examines LCFF resource allocation as a key factor in determining its effect on academic achievement by African American students. The section is important because it looks at California's flexibility to allocate resources to student groups that are historically underperforming. Although the laws are clear that the purpose of education is to ensure that all students achieve, the allocation of resources targeted to student groups have a significant impact on consistency and sustainability of their achievement. California has pursued resource flexibility by developing a weighted funding formula based on student needs, assigning a higher weight to Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. Thus, many California school districts receive large infusions of new resources under the LCFF. The law is designed to hold local districts accountable for intelligent and equitable use of these funds. While LCFF makes the distribution of resources in California's education system fairer, it does not increase the total resources available to districts. Educational spending in California remains far below the national average (Baker, 2016). Many instructional programs that were eliminated in 2006-2007 when the state's and nation's economic crisis began have yet to recover fully. California still has far to go in providing educators the resources to achieve the goal of college and career readiness and to close the achievement gap. The increases for instruction and support services are consistent with the significant positive effects of those services for low-income families (Jackson et al., 2015).

California's new accountability system is a statewide reform that focuses on closing the achievement gap through resource accountability (Lee & Wong, 2004). California's state priorities guide how money should be spent. In contrast to categorical funding, the LCFF allows districts the discretion to allocate resources to support effective educational strategies that target district needs (Murphy, 2017). Local education agencies are required to prepare LCAPs in consultation with district and community stakeholders (Murphy, 2017). Each local education agencies LCAP is designed to articulate goals, actions, and services that support unique student needs that are in alignment with the eight state priorities (Murray et al., 2018).

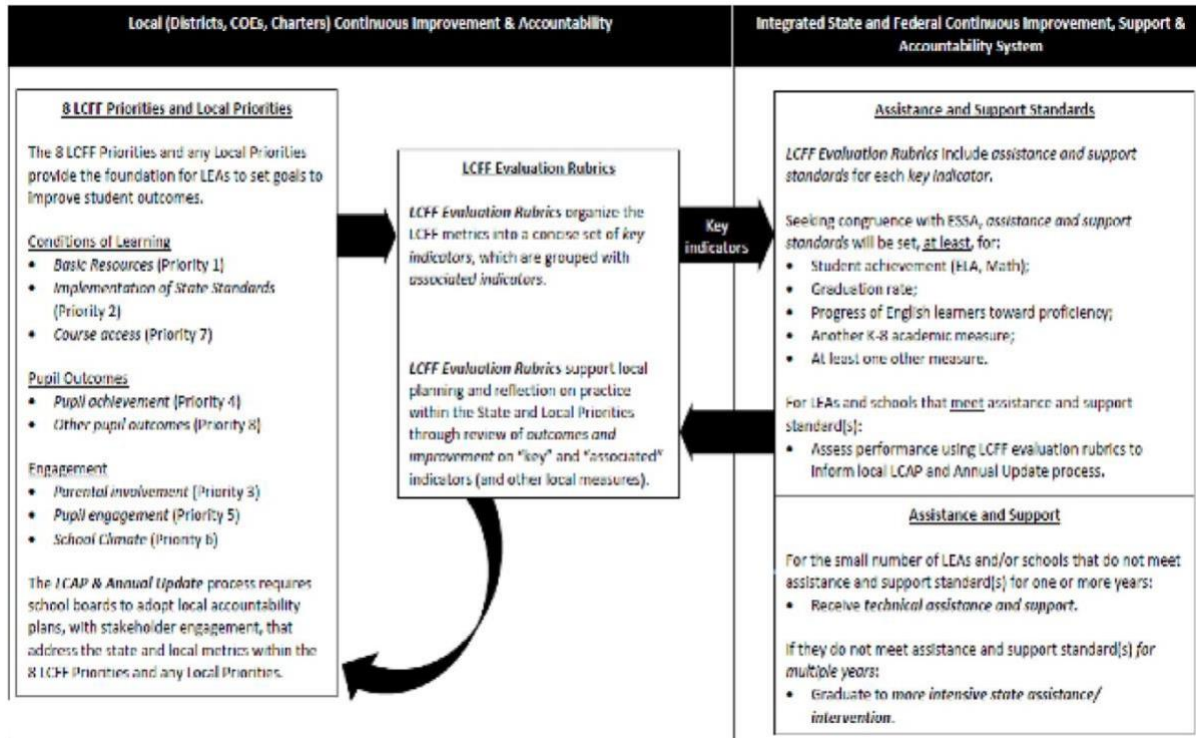
The foundation of the accountability system is the LCFF and complementary LCAP, including an annual update evaluation rubric (California School Dashboard) and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence support structure. All function as central components of the new system. Since the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), California can streamline local, state, and federal requirements into a single coherent accountability and continuous improvement system (Lee & Wong, 2004). Each part of the emerging system is aligned with the LCFF to support continuous learning and improvement, equity, transparency, and resource accountability that is supported by the LCFF evaluation rubric (California School Dashboard). Local education agencies continue to learn how to integrate the budget planning process to support alignment of actions and services to achieve indicated goals and measurable objects to improve long-term outcomes (Murphy, 2017). Although LCFF has increased flexibility of spending, LEAs are still faced with decisions regarding where best to allocate finite resources to support effective educational strategies that lead to improved student outcomes (Murphy, 2017).

The California School Dashboard is an integral part of the LCFF and the new academic and resource accountability system. The LCFF California School Dashboard directs attention to key state and local academic indicator areas in need of support to meet the adopted performance standards and improvement expectations for local education agencies, student subgroups, and school performance relative to the eight state priorities required in California Education Code § 52064.5. Specifically, the California School Dashboard will (a) assist local education agencies in evaluating their strengths, weaknesses, and areas that require improvement, (b) assist county superintendents of schools in identifying local education agencies in need of technical assistance and providing resources for technical assistance, and (c) assist the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in identifying local education agencies for which technical support and/or intervention is warranted (Fullan, 2015). The California School Dashboard serves as a tool and resource that aligns with the LCFF’s approach to improving student outcomes based on strategic planning, alignment of resources to support accountability, technical assistance, and intervention.

The design of California’s single coherent accountability system that integrates resource accountability is structured around two graphics. Figure 1 is a flowchart representing the interaction of the LCAP and Annual Update, California School Dashboard (LCFF evaluation rubrics) and the support and assistance system from a policy perspective. Figure 2 illustrates similar information from a process perspective, focusing on the integration in a fiscal year (which coincides with the annual budget, LCAP, and Annual Update cycles) from the perspective of a local education agency. It reflects similar information about the potential design of the system but in the context of a local education agency’s annual budget cycle (which is also the LCAP and Annual Update cycle). The circle in the graphic coincides to a calendar year, with July 1 at the top and January 1 at the bottom.

**Figure 1**

*California’s Emerging Accountability System: Potential Architecture of a Single, Coherent System*

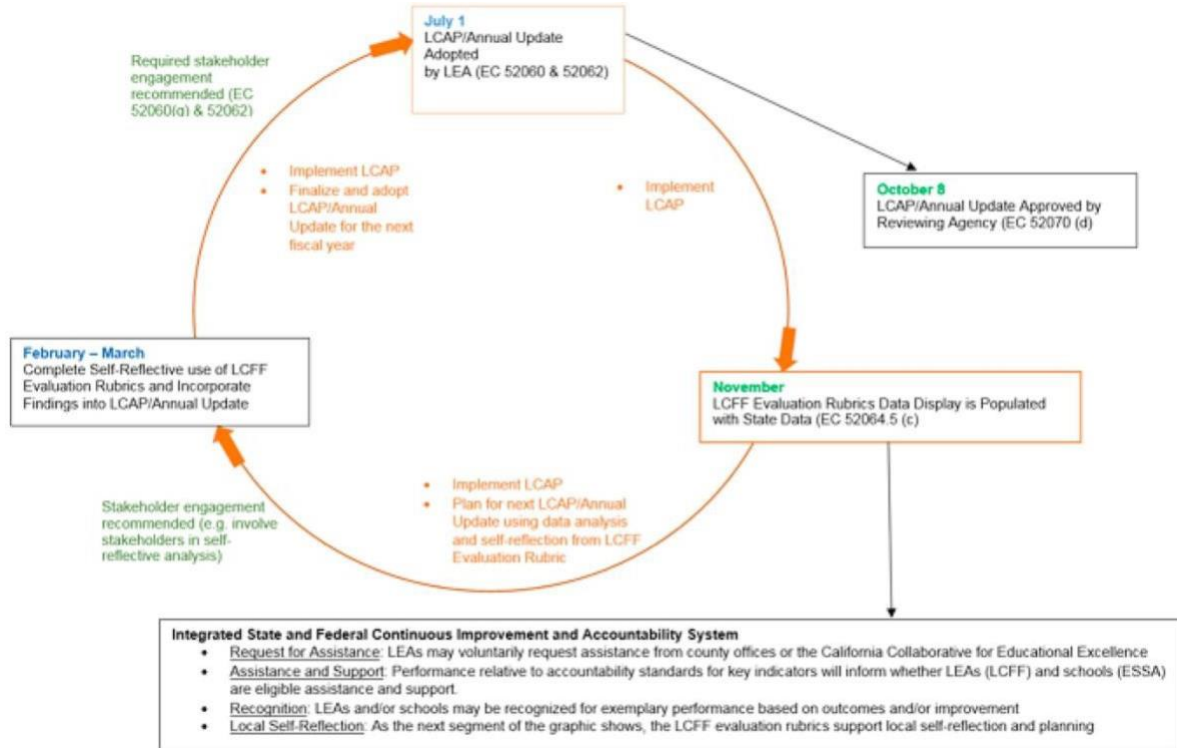


*Note.* LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula; LEA = local education agency; COE = county office of education; LCAP = Local Control and Accountability Plan. From *February 2016 Information Memoranda*, by California State Board of Education, 2016, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/infomemofeb2016.asp>

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the current LCFF and LCAP and how they are important components of an integrated, coherent accountability system that intentionally integrates resource accountability. The integrated cycle supports the approach found in Murphy (2017), which indicates an effective plan development process that includes (a) planning and preparing, (b) collaboratively identifying instructional priorities with stakeholders, (c) allocating resources to fund identified priorities, (d) implementing the plan, and (e) progress monitoring the plan to ensure sustainability.

**Figure 2**

*Annual Interaction Among the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the LCFF Evaluation Rubrics, and Assistance and Support Process*



*Note.* LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula; LEA = local education agency; LCAP = Local Control and Accountability Plan; EC = Education Code. From *February 2016 Information Memoranda*, by California State Board of Education, 2016, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/infomemofeb2016.asp>

Resource accountability is realized by investing sufficient educational resources, equitably distributed to ensure access to quality teaching and rigorous curriculum for all students, including Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015). Resource accountability also requires applying resources effectively to address student needs.

Measuring access to each key resource and ensuring that gaps in access are closed is the only foreseeable journey to ensuring equity in education and funding (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015).

Improving school finance, in and of itself, is not likely to close the achievement gap; a look at how the money is used may be just as important (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015).

### **The Impact of School Funding on Student Achievement**

The Coleman Report (1966) was one of the earliest investigations of the impact of school resources on student achievement (Hanushek, 1997). The startling findings suggested that schools were not the primary influence on student achievement. It pointed to family influences, peers, and schools (in that order) as being the determinants of school success. Much of the work in this area in recent years following *Brown v. Board of Education* centered on various resources in schools and their impact on student achievement. However, Card and Payne (2002) find that court-mandated school finance reforms reduced scholastic aptitude test score gaps between low- and high-income students. Hoxby (2001) found mixed evidence on the effect of increased spending due to school finance reforms on high-school dropout rates. Downes and Figlio (1997) found no significant changes in the distribution of test scores. Looking at individual states, Guryan (2001), Papke (2005), and Roy (2011) found that reforms improved test scores in low-income districts in Massachusetts and Michigan.

Overall, the evidence of the effects of school finance reforms on academic outcomes is mixed. Student performance before and after *Serrano II* focused on inequities in expenditures but the primary concern of the court was not inequities in expenditures but inequities in quality of educational opportunities, which are a byproduct of inequities in financial resources (Downes, 1992). The relationship between an increase in district funding and increased student achievement has shown little correlation to date. Studies conducted by Downes (1992) and Hanushek (1986) supported the finding of a weak relationship between the increase in district

funding and improvement of student outcomes. Thus, the literature implies that finance reform policies alone do not lead to improved student outcomes.

When examining school resources, three measures are commonly employed: (a) resources of the classroom teacher (teacher education, teacher experience, teacher-student ratios), (b) financial resources (expenditures per pupil and teacher salary), and (c) other resources (teacher characteristic, administrative input, facilities). Thus, a study of educational performance includes a variety of measures of resources (Hanushek, 1997). The financial resource category is usually the main focus of studies because it paints a picture of resources spent at the classroom level with a direct impact on students. Researchers can look at per-pupil spending and teacher salaries because salaries in education are based on a teacher's level of education and experience. When combined, these two factors show variations in the instructional resources in classrooms.

Increased funding for higher salaries and per-pupil spending were studied; the concept of monetary compensation was not supported by the literature in terms of large increases in improved student performance. Studies pointed to only a 20% positive impact on students when salaries are increased and only a 27% positive improvement in achievement when per-pupil spending is increased. There are stronger positive findings for impact on student achievement when a teacher scores higher on required state tests that demonstrate subject-level competence. Hanushek (1997) noted that teachers who pass competency tests have a positive impact of 37% on student achievement. One of the least important factors was administrative input, which had only a 12% impact on improved student achievement.

The simple interpretation of these findings is that no strong relationship is found between increased school resources and improved student performance. Merely adding resources to schools cannot ensure student success. The important factor is not increased funding but the



combination of funding and accountability for the funding that includes a reflection on the effectiveness of programs and practices that affect student achievement. When the effective management of a school's resources cannot be measured, no measurable student outcome gains can be expected. This is not to say that all schools and teachers are the same. There is evidence that substantial differences in teacher quality make a difference. However, this quality is not related to teacher salaries or other measured financial resources devoted to programs.

The findings of the Coleman Report have often been oversimplified to support the position that resources are not the reason for the differences in student achievement but that the greatest impact resides outside of the school. In itself, this is not true; Coleman's (1966) report indicated that schools have an impact on student achievement but also states that other resources, such as family and peer influences and socioeconomic status, show a more considerable influence as contributing factors to a student's success.

Many studies have shown outcomes opposite those of the Coleman Report. Card and Kreuger (1992) reported a relationship between school funding and earning differences among workers once they entered the workforce. The study focused on workers entering the job market from 1920s to the 1970s, when levels of school resource variations were far beyond what they are today. The study did not consider that the political economy of schools has dramatically changed over time. It is possible that educational resources had a more significant impact on outcomes during the first half of the century. More recent studies are mixed in finding no effect on a student's overall success based on resources allocated to districts (Hanushek, 1997). The findings have demonstrated that districts that benefit most from finance reforms to increase student achievement have effectively integrated additional resources to increase student outcomes (Downes, 1992).

What will be the difference in California's school finance reform in the short and long run that will impact student outcomes, in particular those of African American students who have been historically underperforming? Only time will tell. California's implementation of the LCAP is an attempt to change the mixed outcomes to verifiable proof that the process of having intra-district budget practices in place to support high-need student groups and monitoring goals, actions, and services through measure effectiveness of actions and expenditures in the Annual Update will improve student outcomes for historically underperforming student groups.

### **Implementation and Follow-Through of Institutional Policies**

Literature with a focus on policies directed at closing the achievement gap for African American students was examined. One prominent question of desegregation and educational reform initiatives is whether or not African American students have benefitted (B. L. Walker, 2014). B. L. Walker (2014) examined legal and policy fictions in school education reform initiatives, beginning with the *Brown* ruling and considering more current reform efforts of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). B. L. Walker (2014) identified strategies regarding the persistence of the achievement gap and the legal and policy fiction for African American learners and students with disabilities. Sperling and Vaughan (2009) noted that inaccurate beliefs about what causes the achievement gap have led to school reforms that perpetuate rather than resolve racial differences in achievement. They supported the idea that the lack of structural systems in the educational system for African American students results in the persistence of the achievement gap. McLaughlin (2007) supported the idea that policies on teacher diversity, curriculum, and parent academies change the perception of African American student achievement and provide an opportunity to address public educational policies.

In 2012, President Obama signed an executive order to establish the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans. The LCFF was adopted by California in 2013 as a new way to provide flexible funding to California schools to close the achievement gap of student groups that have been historically underperforming. The White House Initiative focused on ensuring that African American students receive an education that prepares them for college, career, citizenship through support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities by providing early support to students at every grade to improve the educational outcomes for all African American students. The initiative's long-term goal was to increase the number of African American students entering college by 2020. This executive order from the national level provided an articulated plan for states and local communities to move educational systems forward and to ensure intentional support for African American students. The concern is the lack of data to determine whether states and local districts used the executive order to leverage their focus on African American student achievement. Regarding California, should the LCFF statutory regulations include intentional language to provide resources for African American students as a way to support the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans?

California has instituted several policies in an attempt to bring attention to the need for dedicated support to improve achievement by African American students. In 2008, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction published a report on closing the achievement gap. A year later, the California State Board of Education supported implementation of an African American Advisory Committee to understand the needs of African American students and to address educational disparities. In 2012, the State Assembly formed a select committee with a focus on addressing the pressing needs of men and boys of color. In 2015, the Committee for Women and

Girls of Color in California was formed. The focus of the committee was to identify factors that impact the lives of women and girls of color. Reports and action plans are pending from the two new committees but focus groups and meetings to gather input have occurred.

The LCFF and its companion, the LCAP, have provided the most significant reform to California's educational system in more than 40 years (Affeldt, 2015). Like many school reforms, there are questions related to the positive and negative aspects and whether or not the funding that is intended to support Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students will be used to close the achievement gap for underrepresented students. The guiding principles of the LCFF and LCAP are as follows: (a) subsidiarity—decisions are best made at the local level, (b) transparency—stakeholders have a voice in how resources are allocated to support student achievement, and (c) closing the achievement gap for underperforming students (Affeldt, 2015). As the nation moves from NCLB to the ESSA and California implements the LCFF and LCAP, reviewing the ESSA, LCFF, and LCAP statutory regulations regarding the intentional benefits for African American students to close the achievement gap is imperative. This research study linked the intent of the LCFF to the current practice of district administrators with regard to their decision-making practices related to allocation of resources for African American students in the LCAP, above and beyond Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory is the theoretical framework that was used to support the literature review. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described critical race theory as a movement that focuses on studying the intersectionality of race, racism, and power. Critical race theory challenges the

foundation of equality and provides legal reasoning and a construct to the order and design of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory grew out of the 1970s from a group of lawyers and activists. They studied the advances of civil rights in the 1960s and determined that those advances seemed have declined (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory provided a framework to address subtle and unconscious forms of racism that were not as overt.

Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado gave life to a movement in 1989 that involved clarifying critical issues plaguing the community; later, others of different races joined the movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory builds on the concepts of critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The movement was intended address the historical inequalities of African Americans and brought about cohesiveness of groups of people and their situations related to race and racism in the United States.

The foundational ideas related to critical race theory are based on the insight of Derrick Bell (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory has rapidly spread beyond legal issues to other areas of education, with expansion in education to discipline practices, tracking hierarchy, affirmative action, and other areas. Critical race theory is an attempt to understand the social and political context in which marginalized people live and to their transform lives for the better. Critical race theory in education focuses on the application of deficit theory as an educational approach that has hindered achievement outcomes of marginalized students. Critical race theory in politics focuses on policies and practices, while critical race theory in women's studies emphasizes intersectionality. Many other entities within and outside of education, such as health care, apply critical race theory and its ideas when analyzing issues of access related to discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) concluded that,

unlike other theories, critical race theory contains a dimension of activism, which is a call not only to identify inequalities in society but to transform those wrongs through intentional action.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described the following basic tenets of critical race theory. The first is that racism is ordinary and is the shared experience of most people of color. Second, White privilege serves the dominant group. The third tenet refers to race as a “social construct” that has placed people into categories based on color and contends that society has the influence to retire racial categories when they no longer serve a purpose. The fourth tenet is that society racializes different minority groups at different times in response to the needs of the labor market. The fifth tenet extends to the intersectionality of a race with gender, religion, and sexuality. The sixth tenet focuses on the unique voices of people of color and allows them to tell their own stories related to race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory uses the foundational tenets to bring meaning to the movement and provide a call to action in society.

The current research study focused on the intent of the LCFF, compared to the larger political context of policy versus practice. Most educators understand that the moral imperative of their work is to provide a quality education for all students. At times, in the face of the moral imperative, conflicts related to allocation of resources for African American students can be challenging, regardless of student data findings. Critical race theory explains that racism is difficult to address because it is not acknowledged and that society prefers to be neutral or “color-blind” about race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory is designed to develop a self-awareness of common issues that are uncomfortable and to bring out the fact that race permeates all aspects of life, whether or not perceived (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and

Stefancic (2017) concluded that, regardless of the changes in society, racism continues to hold a place that is evident for people of color, regardless of social or economic capital that is gained.

There are various beliefs regarding race and racism that critical race theory seeks to acknowledge and move toward eradication. Idealists believe that race is a social construct identified to place people within a social stratification. A different thought is that of “realist” or economic determinists, who contend that racism is a means for society to grant privilege to certain groups of people. This group holds that negative thoughts about African Americans came about with the institution of slavery and the development of capitalism. Materialists seek to maintain the subordination of marginalized groups based on the change in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In other words, when the need arises, some groups may flow in and out of marginalization, based on the historical context of the time and labor demands.

The strength of critical race theory is the power of stories by marginalized groups that provide a voice to the movement. The power of stories told by marginalized people cannot be replaced and the stories are at the heart of encapsulating the struggles of people of color. The stories reveal the similarities within groups of marginalized people and provide a construct for the experiences of people that can eventually be addressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The belief that people of color are the best to tell their stories has grown out of critical race theory and may be how society begins to understand the experiences of people of color and begin to dismantle racism.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Tate (1997) focused on the critical race theory perspective in education on three points as a foundation for inequity: (a) the focus on race in the United States, (b) the concept of property rights versus human rights, and (c) the intersection of race and property as a rationale for the impact of race on the educational system. Ladson-Billings

and Tate (1995) indicated that a focus on diversity moved the conversation from focusing on race as an underlying factor of educational inequities.

Critical race theory challenges the foundation of equality and provides legal reasoning and a construct to the order and design of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) addressed the idea that race is an untheorized concept that provides a foundation for addressing inequities in education as a result of a racialized society. The continued focus on race in the United States as a factor in determining inequity is the first perspective that supports critical race theory in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described two popular schools of thought related to race. The first is an ideological construct related to race as a concept that is constructed by society and that does not have an impact on people's lives. The second idea focuses on an objective condition that identifies race as a real factor in the persistent educational inequities that cannot be ignored but challenges the idea that people can be placed in categories based on race. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted that geneticists assert that there are many intersectionalities relating to race; however, even when race does not make sense, the common practice is to employ a racial identification system that is embedded in society's daily discourse.

The racial formation theory is defined as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created and linked to the evolution of hegemony or power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory in education builds on the foundation of Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois that holds that race supports the inequities that are present in society because class and gender alone are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences in school education and experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Even when a class is held constant, there is evidence that African Americans still do not perform at the same level as their White



counterparts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); therefore, race as a theoretical framework in education to address differences is plausible.

The other perspective that supports a critical race theory of education focuses on property rights versus human rights. Racism is deeply ingrained in society legally, culturally, and psychologically. In the 1950s and 1960s, social justice pleas were predicated on civil and human rights but ignored the fact that society was based on property rights. The tension between property rights and human rights is linked to the onset of slavery. Slaves were property, and the Constitution was constructed to protect the rights of the property owner and not the rights of African Americans based on race. Also, property manifests in education for marginalized groups of students because of its link to the allocation of resources to schools based on property. In education, property equates to school resources (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This is evident in low-income schools and impacts opportunities to learn.

The final perspective that supports a critical race theory of education focuses on understanding the intersection of race and property and its application to educational inequities. The hierarchy of Whites is linked to the legal oppression of African Americans as slaves. The taking of Native American land was also connected to property and White privilege, and it used race as a justification for the actions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Whiteness is the ultimate valuable property asset: (a) When White culture and norms are sanctioned, the sense of White property is being alienable or transferred to others; (b) rights to use and enjoy the privilege of Whiteness are reflected in the structure of curriculum and offerings to certain minority groups; and (c) the right to exclude, which was demonstrated when African Americans were prohibited from school, then manifested into separate schools, followed by White flight with the onset of

integration, and currently through the application of vouchers and the re-segregation of schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The shift to multicultural education as a reform movement was designed to change schools and other institutions to support educational equality, with a focus on emphasizing assimilation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The multicultural movement was reduced from a focus on the cultural history of marginalized people to ethnic foods and holidays relating to marginalized groups. The movement changed to multiculturalism under the guidance of tolerance for differences and is used interchangeably with diversity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Music, clothes, and books, to name a few, represent a growing awareness of diversity with a limited discussion on tensions between groups of people. Critical race theory of education is an attempt to bring about an understanding that race has a deep history in society and must be recognized as a guiding factor for educational inequities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). History confirms that African Americans were oppressed based on race and that, in order to change this fact, there is a need to address race as a factor in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) sought to provide a foundational understanding of race in society and its impact on the educational system. It is tempting to dismiss race based on the genetic fact that there are no separate identifying factors within humans that explain race as being a viable way to classify people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Nevertheless, the argument is launched for critical race theory of education that rests on the foundation that the persistent differences in educational outcomes for African American and marginalized students cannot be linked solely to class and gender.

Critical race theory framework provides the tools to challenge and analyze the historical structures that create and maintain racial inequalities in education through the lens of practices

that impact resource allocations from the perspective of administrators (Jennings & Marvin, 2005). California now has a valuable chance to dismantle previous discriminatory processes and build an education system that learns from and supports achievement by African American students. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) indicated that critical race theory assists in examining how race plays a part in school operations.

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Culturally responsive school leadership will also be used as a theoretical framework to support the research study relating to the historical and social-political context of the racial achievement and opportunity gaps for African American students (Khalifa et al., 2016). The literature review indicates the historical challenges that the United States country faces concerning the education of African American students. Although there are research-based cultural and pedagogical strategies that support African American students, a change in California's statewide system of school funding and resource accountability is an opportunity for closing the achievement gap. LCFF provides an opportunity for district leaders to hear the voices of students, parents, and the community to provide input on the needs of African American students. The LCAP brings a great deal of hope, promise, and optimism; all stakeholders who have a vested interest in student achievement can be part of the decision-making process. On the other hand, the social and political landscape of the country, state, and local governing brings about a sense of apprehension concerning whether or not African American parents will be included in the process (Blankstein & Houston, 2011; Branch et al., 2013). Grades, standardized scores, and graduation rates indicate that growth is being made, although not commensurate with the rate of their White peers. The question that remains unanswered is, "Why do achievement and opportunity gaps continue to persist for African American students?" We do know that there

are leaders at all levels throughout a learning organization. California has adopted the LCFF, which has allowed districts the flexibility to distribute state resources based on student data to increase achievement by persistently low-performing student groups. Although districts must address Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students, the regulations allow funds to be used to support any underperforming student group; however, most districts have not explicitly provided district resources to target African American students.

Districts are spending resources to provide leadership development and training for administrators focusing on Michal Fullan's coherence framework or variations of the model. What appears to be missing in the new model of school leadership training is a focus on culturally responsive school leadership. Culturally responsive school leadership focuses on culturally responsive education reform and social justice school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). The focus of culturally responsive school leadership is to make not only the teachers but the entire school environment responsive to student cultures and an advocate for community needs (Khalifa et al., 2016). Gay (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2004) have suggested that school leaders have a mandate similar to that of teachers, in that they must understand the social and cultural needs of students. However, this form of leadership training has not spread to school administrators, who are a critical part of school reform. Branch et al. (2013) stated that the principal is the most recognized leader in a school and is empowered by district and state policies regarding the education of students.

Culturally responsive school leadership behaviors focus on four areas: (a) critical self-awareness or consciousness awareness of culture and race, (b) culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, (c) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments that are willing to change the culture of the school, and (d) engaging students and parents in community context

by building welcoming community environments (Khalifa et al., 2016). The behavior of culturally responsive school leadership has promise for schools and the leaders who serve students by focusing on resisting exclusionary practices, promoting inclusivity, and integrating student culture in all aspects of the school and engaging the community in the school by establishing spaces for engagement.

### **Synthesis of the Literature**

African American student achievement is improving; with the onset of the LCFF, districts have an opportunity to allow data to drive their decisions and intentionally provide resources for African American students that will allow their achievement to improve further. The challenge is for districts to leverage California's new law to ensure resources target African American students. Or will the districts conclude that the implicit flexibility does not provide political backing to support the practice of targeting resources for African American students? The LCFF outlined Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students who require actions and services to meet their needs. The research question is designed to address the relationship between district administrators' experiences with resource allocation and how that allocation affects the academic achievement of African American based on the intent of the LCFF.

Solutions to ensuring that funding formulas for allocating financial resources to districts are equitable and adequate to meet the needs of diverse student populations and to close the achievement gap are quite complex (Wolf & Sands, 2016). The critical question is how to make the complicated simple. Wolf and Sands (2016) identified systems of funding that incorporate a weighted method of allocating fiscal resources that take into consideration high-need students

and the cost to provide services for students who have specific programmatic needs; these systems are critical to closing the achievement gap.

Replacing the current school finance system with one more closely tied to the costs of educating students, known as a weighted student formula, is the direction that California has begun to pursue. A weighted student formula could also ensure that schools with higher costs per student, and those with larger groups of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, receive greater funding per student (Wolf & Sands, 2016). California's move to LCFF and LCAP represents an attempt to systemically reform funding of public education. California should be applauded for achieving a community-based school finance framework that has both the local coherence and principles that the former formula did not have. State and local roles and responsibilities, program control, and accountability have finally involved community-based input in school finance and accountability policy (Vasquez et al., 2014). Now that California has spent the political time to engage in comprehensive school finance reform, it remains to be seen whether its state and local entities have the will and capacity to engage communities in equitable locally based school finance and accountability.

Through the LCFF and LCAP, stakeholders can be involved in the decision-making process as it relates to educational goals and services provided to close the achievement gap. Rethinking the historical context of education for African Americans and understanding the intentionality of acknowledging historical barriers will allow the educational system to move forward and change the trajectory of African American student achievement. It will take persistence but, through California's changing landscape of accountability reform efforts, districts have a prime opportunity to envision the future for California students and turn that vision into a reality through the flexibility given to reform educational practices to meet the

individual needs of students and change the achievement and opportunity gaps for African American students in California. Possibly in the future, the federal government may consider using California's plan of action as a blueprint for the nation. As California looks to make a bold effort in redesigning schools for student achievement by underrepresented populations, the state has an opportunity to implement research-based practices that can change the trajectory of African American students and close the achievement and opportunity gaps.

The theme throughout all of the reviewed literature relating to public education funding systems was the need for an intentional focus on resource accountability as a necessary component of school finance reform policies aimed at closing the achievement gap. Equitable and adequate funding matters, but increased funding alone without resource accountability will not close the achievement and opportunity gaps (Lee & Wong, 2004). When additional funds are coupled with effective decision-making processes and procedures, closing the achievement gap can be accomplished. The LCFF and LCAP allow districts to analyze student data to determine what policies, practices, and procedures should be implemented to meet the needs of students. Legislators and other advocates have indicated that LCFF regulations give districts too much flexibility to decide how to spend money targeted for high-needs students (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). The historical battle between state and local control continues as LCFF evolves.

California's LCFF and LCAP approach is an alternative to the top-down approach that has been the dominant paradigm for the past decades of California's public education funding policies. The LCFF and LCAP present an approach to school finance and resource accountability that has community-based components. Will it work? The future of California's students is at stake, so it is worth the effort to support this new system that encompasses resource

accountability and that is driven by continuous improvement to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for historically underperforming student groups.

### **Chapter Summary**

Each reviewed article contributed to the understanding that there is still much work to do to close the achievement and opportunity gaps. California's new LCFF and LCAP are steps in the right direction. Funding student learning is hard work. It represents systemwide change, redefines roles and responsibilities of elected officials and educators, and challenges interests that benefit from the status quo (Quinn & Steinberg, 2015). It will take persistence but, through California's changing landscape of accountability reform efforts, districts have a prime opportunity to envision the future for California students and turn that vision into a reality through the flexibility given to reform educational practices to meet the individual needs of students. Possibly in the future, the federal government may consider using California's plan of action as a blueprint for the nation. As California looks to make a bold effort in redesigning schools for student achievement that serve the needs of underrepresented populations, the state has an opportunity to implement research-based practices through resource accountability that can change the trajectory of high-need students and close the achievement and opportunity gaps. Adams (2009) and Knoepfel et al. (2014) confirmed that a robust financial system is an essential component of a healthy education system.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provided a historical foundation relating to the education of African American students in the United States, an overview of school finance reform, and the promise of California's LCFF and LCAP to provide resources and close the achievement gap for African American students. The literature informed the present study that



focused on how LCFF resource allocations decisions made by administrators shape the academic trajectory of African American students.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

This study used a phenomenological design to explore how administrators' experiences with resource allocation influence efforts to address the academic achievement of African American students. The goal was to understand how decision-making practices of district administrators influence the academic trajectory of African American students. The design and methodology allowed for exploration of district office administrators' perceptions on resource allocations and closing the achievement gap. Individual face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted. The data collected from the participants allowed for in-depth analysis and interpretation of district employees' reality in their own words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Research studies have been conducted regarding LCFF expenditures for Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. The methodology permitted this researcher to explore a phenomenon that has not been explicitly researched regarding LCFF decision-making practices related to resource allocations for African American students.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research approach and methodology used in this study in the following topics Research Questions, Research Design, District Background and Selection, Participants, Human Subjects Consideration, Instrumentation, Data Collection, Data Analysis Approach, Limitations, Validity, and Informed Consent.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Central Question**

How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?

## **Subquestions**

1. What themes emerged relating to administrators' experiences with allocating LCFF funds?
2. What factors are related to administrators' experiences in resource allocations to affect African American academic achievement?

## **Interview Questions**

1. Do you feel LCFF addresses African American student achievement?
2. What are your perceptions on how LCFF impacts achievement for African American students?
3. How might LCFF funding be used to impact African American student achievement?
4. Describe your experience with resource accountability.
5. What criteria are used by district administrators to allocate resources for African American students?

## **Research Design**

Qualitative research is the creative and systemic inquiry approach of study to describe life experiences and give them meaning. The goal of qualitative research is to gain insight by exploring the depth and complexity that are inherent in the phenomenon. Qualitative research analyzes data from fieldwork observations gathered through open-ended questions; the interviewer is an integral part of the investigation (Astalin, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Astalin (2013), Creswell and Poth (2017), Merriam and Tisdell (2015) indicated that qualitative research is defined primarily as a process of organizing data into categories and identifying trends among those categories. Qualitative data collection approaches involve direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis or direct communication with

individuals in a group setting. Data collection methods are time consuming, so data are usually collected from a small respondent sample that knows of the study (Astalin, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The method of collecting data provides deep insight into the phenomenon that is being studied. The main methods of collecting data are individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and action research. Research questions generally are designed to learn how people behave, how attitudes and opinions are formed, how people are affected by the events around them, why cultures have developed in certain ways, and what are the differences between social groups (Astalin, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research focuses on how people construct meaning based on their lives and the world around them.

Phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study are the four most commonly used qualitative research designs. Phenomenology is a particular type of qualitative research design that examines a phenomenon and describes the collective meaning of lived experiences and feelings through unbiased interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The focus is on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. A phenomenon may be events, situations, the uniqueness of an individual's lived experiences, and reality or concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research focusing on the exploration of feelings or experiences and how experiencing something is translated into consciousness. There is a focus on describing something that exists as an integral part of the world but may not be understood (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Van Manen, 2016). Wherever there is a gap in understanding and clarification or explanation is needed, using a systematic approach, phenomenological research will not necessarily provide definitive explanations but it can raise

awareness and increase insight about the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Van Manen, 2016). The purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence or a grasp of the very nature of the “thing.”

With this in mind, the present study used a phenomenological design to examine the experiences of how administrators make decisions that determine the trajectory of African American students based on their LCFF resource allocation and accountability practices. The goal of this study was to examine how the decision-making practices of district administrators related to LCFF resource allocations affect closing the achievement gap for African American students, based on their historical underperformance in student outcomes. Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated that, in a phenomenological study, the phenomenon to be explored is phrased in terms of a single concept or idea.

The task of a phenomenological study is to focus on collecting data from participants in order to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participant has subjective and objective experiences of something in common with other people that are captured during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). In some forms of phenomenological studies, the term “bracketing” is used to acknowledge that the person conducting the study may share lived experiences related to the phenomenon and sets aside personal beliefs in order to focus on the experiences of the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Epoche or bracketing does not insinuate that one forgets what has been experienced; rather, there is a conscious awareness of not letting past knowledge influence the determination of the experiences, which is also described as a phenomenological

reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The practice of epoche or bracketing allows the researcher to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) admitted that epoche or bracketing is seldom achieved, but the attempt to remove one's biases is reflected in the description of the researcher studying the phenomenon by describing the researcher's experiences and bracketing those views prior to proceeding with studying the experiences of others. In other words, the researcher in a phenomenological study uses what is described as a hermeneutical phenomenological approach to describe research that is oriented toward lived experiences (phenomenology) while interpreting life (hermeneutics) to present a new perspective from the experiences of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016). When conducting the phenomenological study relating to administrators' decisions on the LCFE resource allocations and accountability to determine the trajectory of African American students, the researcher applied the bracketing or epoche process.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Philosophical assumptions are essential to understanding qualitative research. Four philosophical assumptions guide the philosophy behind qualitative research: (a) ontology (the nature of reality), (b) epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how claims are justified), (c) axiology (the role of values in research), and (d) methodology (the process of research). The philosophical assumptions were linked to the interpretive frameworks that were applicable to this research study.

#### **Ontology**

Ontology is a philosophical idea that focuses on the nature of reality or what currently exists. Ontological assumption refers to how one views reality from multiple perspectives. It is

concerned with what kind of world is being investigated and the multiple realities within that world. The individual who conducts the study has numerous views of reality, as do the participants in the study; this is a characteristic of ontology (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated that ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question, “What is there that can be known?” or “What is the nature of reality?” The research is conducted in a manner that supports reporting multiple perspectives as themes in the findings.

The variation of experiences in the field of education is a philosophical assumption that has characteristics that embrace multiple experiences of study participants from the same field to share their experiences through many lenses. Also, the researcher brings a personal knowledge base and experiences of the subject matter to the study. In qualitative research, it is incumbent on the researcher to understand that the nature of the reality of the study participants can be seen from different viewpoints, which are reported in the research as themes emerge across study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Ontology provided the space for the joining various voices and experiences to identify emergent themes that were unanticipated and added to the richness of the study and broadened the perspective of the perceived experiences as indicated by the participants. The research method used to investigate the world of multiple perspectives was manifested in the use of different research methods and techniques in the interpretive design, such as interviews. It is part of the ethical process that the researcher reports the findings that emerge from the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The final analysis of the qualitative report illustrated how individuals participating in the same study viewed their experiences that emerged as commonalities or differences related to their beliefs, feelings, and inner thoughts about the research question.

This research study allowed exploration of participant views by conducting individual semistructured interviews. The ontological research method was the main avenue by which information was received from participants relating to the LCFF district administrators and their decision-making practices relating to resource allocations for the purpose of closing the achievement gap and improving African American student achievement. The LCFF began in 2013, and research studies have been conducted relating expenditures to the targeted student populations of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. The phenomenon regarding specific resource allocation practices to change student achievement outcomes for African Americans in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 had not been explored. The richness of information and lived experiences relating to the LCFF have increased over time and provided an opportunity to explore how decision-making practices have changed to support African American students.

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how one knows what one knows (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Epistemology is also concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what knowledge is possible and how one can ensure that the knowledge is both adequate and legitimate (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Epistemology influences how researchers develop research in an attempt to discover knowledge by getting as close as possible to the study participants. Subjective evidence of what is known comes through the individual experiences of people. Looking at the relationship between a subject and object shows how epistemology influences research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is vital to conduct research studies in the field, where the participants live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the field, conducting research with participants, how they “know what they know” is revealed



through first-hand observations. This epistemological assumption ensures the minimization of distance between the researcher and the participant. This approach offers valuable opportunities for authentic information to be captured in the study.

This research study provided an authentic view of how decisions are made relating to the allocation of resources for the purpose of improving African American student achievement. The research questions were designed to encourage participants reflect on how they know what they know as a result of their knowledge relating to the intent of the LCFF since 2013. The research approach of conducting individual interviews in the field allowed participants not only to articulate their increased knowledge of the LCFF and their application of the regulations but also to share artifacts to support their growth in understanding the law. The researcher gained from the participants the authenticity of the subject matter relating to practices that have been implemented in their districts related to allocation of the LCFF to impact African American student achievement. The setting for this research was designed to minimize the distance between the researcher and participants in order to increase what was learned through the subjective experiences of the participants.

### **Axiology**

Axiology focuses on identifying the values that are brought to the qualitative study by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher must acknowledge that research is value laden and that biases are present in relation to the context of the study, as well as values provided by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The positionality of the researcher is reported to provide the perspective of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Positionality includes not only the researcher's value-laden biases but also their social position, such as gender, age, and race (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Based the nature of the study and the implications for practice, it

is incumbent on the researcher to ensure that values, ethnicity, career experiences, and current job role are not inserted in the collection of data.

The researcher conducted this qualitative study in a manner that ensured that her knowledge and experience did not interfere with the data collection, analysis, and report of findings. The researcher is an African American female with 29 years experience in the field of education: 26 years in public education and 3 years in a private school. Twenty-one of the 29 years were spent as a public-school and county office administrator, in positions as assistant principal, principal, director, area director, and county office director. The researcher spent 8 years as a teacher. Prior to teaching, the researcher was an instructional aide for 3 years. The researcher has a background in the allocation and oversight of state and federal programs at the public school site, district, and county levels. The researcher is knowledgeable regarding LCFF and LCAP regulations and provides support to districts. Also, the researcher was an adjunct professor at a university in southern California for 10 years and taught in the administrative credential program courses addressing leadership, law, diversity, and budget. This study required the researcher to acknowledge personal biases to prevent misinterpretation of the participants' voices and their perspectives of the phenomenon addressed in the study.

### **Interpretive Frameworks and Philosophical Beliefs**

Interpretive frameworks can be considered a basic set of beliefs that guide a study. The philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) are embedded within interpretive frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Interpretive frameworks shape the theoretical lens of the study that may be post-positivism, social constructivism, transformation, or postmodern. Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested that theories may have a social science focus

(leadership, attribution, political) or may be social justice or advocacy/participatory seeking to bring out change or address social justice issues in society.

This study provided district administrators an opportunity to examine their decision-making practices related to resource allocations. The researcher addressed a social justice issue in society relating to persistent underperformance by African American students through a focus on the shared experiences of district administrators with regard to LCFF resource allocation. The LCFF's intent is to allow districts local control and flexibility to utilize resources to close the achievement gap for historically underperforming student groups. Although the LCFF targets Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students, it allows districts choices to focus on the needs of all students. The study brought about a reflection relating to intentional district administrators' practices pertaining to LCFF resource allocation to support African American student achievement. The LCFF provides the opportunity for district administrators to act on the intent of the statutory regulations.

Social constructivism is a perspective that combines ontology (the belief that the real world exists independently of one's beliefs) and constructivist epistemology (knowledge of the world is a personal construct; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that participants in these interpretive, theoretically oriented projects often focus on underrepresented or marginalized groups or some intersectionality of the following: gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, and others.

Social constructivism, which is also described as interpretivism, is a different interpretation of world view (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and develop the subjective meaning of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher must look at the complexity of views,

and not try to narrow down the meaning into a few categories or themes. Constructivist epistemology subscribes to the philosophy that truth and meaning come from engagement with the realities that exist in the world (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The goal of the researcher is to rely on the participant's views of the situation. The views of the individuals are important because they emerge from social, historical, and cultural interactions and norms (social constructs) that are a part of people's daily lives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The value of constructivism research is that it generates an understanding of a defined topic or problem in context (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The goal of the study relies on how a participant views a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Research questions are broad and general so that the participant can construct meaning, which allows the researcher to create meaning from the situation based on social interactions with the participants.

Social constructivism was suitable for the study of the perception of administrators in determining the trajectory of African American student achievement based on LCFF resource allocations and accountability. Participant responses to interview questions determined how the data were analyzed, with possible strategies focusing on analyzing significant statements, meaning units, textual and structural description, and descriptions relating the "essence" of the meaning drawing from education (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The participants in the study had their own views based on their administrative roles, which contributed to the variation in perspectives related to the study.

### **Appropriateness of the Phenomenological Research Design**

The six most commonly used qualitative research designs are basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A central characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals

construct reality based on the interactions with social worlds in their daily life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A phenomenological study is designed to understand the essence and underlying structure of the phenomenon; it is the study of people's conscious or "lived experiences" and social action (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. A focus on interviews is the primary method of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The goal of data collection is not focused on categorizing and simplifying information from participants; instead, the focus is on what the individuals have experienced and how they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016). In order to remain open to the participant's lived experiences, prior beliefs about a phenomenon are put aside at least temporarily while conducting the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Research design is chosen based on the problem statement and research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). When there is limited information or when there are inconsistencies in the literature, a qualitative approach may be an appropriate research design.

An appropriate methodology and research design assists in using the proper instruments to collect data. The qualitative phenomenological research methodology was suitable for studying the perceptions of administrators in determining the trajectory of African American student achievement based on LCFF resource allocations and accountability. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested that the methodology enables study of several individuals who have shared lived experiences and social interactions, which leads to describing the essence of those experiences.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how administrators experiences with resource allocation influences efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The qualitative research method was preferred based on the goal of

focusing on administrators' decision-making processes relating to LCFF resource allocations for African American students. The participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs were critical to understanding the decision-making process and its impact on African American student achievement. The data allowed for in-depth analysis and interpretation of the participants' reality. There was limited literature focusing on the research question, "How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?"

### **District Selection and Description**

The districts were chosen based on the researcher's employment access in a southern California county. The researcher has 29 years of experience in education and has held positions such as para-educator, teacher, site administrator, district office administrator, and county office administrator. For the past 5 years, the researcher has had a working relationship with each of the districts in the targeted southern California county. In addition, the researcher was educated in the county in which the study took place. Due to the multiple levels of experiences, the research focused on how the experiences of administrators with resource allocation influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students.

The southern California county where the study was conducted has a total estimated population of 2,128,133 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2016) with a student kindergarten through Grade 12 population of 403,107 (California student enrollment is 6,220,413) attending 573 schools (California number of kindergarten through Grade 12 schools is 10,756), in an area of more than 20,000 square miles. The majority of the residents in the county are ages 18 and above, making up 71% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2016). Youth under age 18 represent 29% of the population. Those ages 25

to 64 years make up 51% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2016). The retirement population (age 65 or older) is 9.6%.

The ethnic composition of the students in the county based on 2017-2018 data (California Department of Education Data Quest) was Latino 64.9% (261,777), White 15.8% (63,626), African American 8.3% (33,607), Asian 3.7% (14,721), unreported ethnicity 3.0% (12,229), two or more races 2.0% (8,255), Filipino 1.3% (5,414), American Indian or Alaska Native 0.5% (1,872), and Pacific Islander 0.4% (1,636). English Learners constituted 17.2% (69,194) of the student population and students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meals constituted 71.7% (288,979) of the student population. Title I funds were received by 83.5% of the districts.

An additional reason for selecting this county was the need to decrease the number of districts identified for Differentiated Assistance based on the African American student group per the fall 2018 California School Dashboard. Six districts were identified based on the African American student group, two of which were identified for Differentiated Assistance on the California School Dashboard based on fall 2017 and fall 2018 data. There is an imperative to focus on resource allocation, alignment, and accountability to close the achievement gap for African American students.

### **Participants**

The study examined the experiences of district administrators with resource allocation and how those experiences influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The research size was determined based on the chosen research method.

When conducting qualitative research, the sample size is smaller than that used by quantitative researchers. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain enough data to describe the phenomenon of interest sufficiently and to address the research questions

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). The goal of qualitative researchers should be attainment of saturation, which occurs when adding participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. Other guidelines have been recommended. For phenomenological studies, Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested 5 to 25 participants. Ultimately, the required number of participants should depend on when saturation is reached (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

A phenomenological research design was selected; therefore, a narrower range of sampling strategies was used because it was essential that all participants had experience relating to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Nonrandom sampling was used for this study. Individuals and sites for the study were selected based on the participants' ability to inform understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The selected individuals were chosen because they could inform understanding of the research problem and the study phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The goal of qualitative research was not to generalize information but to consider a few sites or individuals to collect detailed information.

Criterion sampling was used in this study. Criterion sampling is frequently used in qualitative studies. Criterion sampling works well for research studies that focus on studying people with shared experiences relating to the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The sample population for this study was public school district-level administrators who are part of the LCFF resource allocation decision-making process that impacts African American student achievement. The researcher's goal was to include persons with knowledge of leading, developing, writing, or submitting the LCAP for County Office of Education review and approval, in order to study the decision-making processes related to LCFF resource allocations



that impact African American student achievement and to study the unique occurrences, incidents, or events related to the research topic. The nonrandom sampling procedure focused on administrators who work in districts in the selected county and make decisions that allocate resources to support student achievement. The selected administrators worked in districts where African American students made up at least 8% of the student population in districts ranging from K–12, K–5, K–6, K–8, 7–12, and 9–12 across the selected county.

The demographics of the participants, including ethnicity and gender, varied depending on the administrators assigned to oversee the LCAP process during the 2019-2020 school year and were noted at the time of the interview. Participants' academic background ranged including bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctorates, and teaching credentials. The number of years in the position of LCAP lead, developer, writer, or submitter was collected at the time of the interview. The recruitment of participants was based on districts in the selected county and job responsibilities relate to the LCAP. The purpose of using these criteria was to identify administrators working with the LCAP who were part of the decision-making process pertaining to resource allocations and student achievement. The researcher invited the administrators who met the criteria to participate in the study via recruitment letters.

### **Human Subjects Consideration**

An introductory letter (Appendix A) and district consent form (Appendix B) were sent to the offices of the superintendent and the administrator who oversees the LCAP in the district. Once the district's approval was received and university Institutional Review Board approval was granted (Appendix C), the researcher contacted the identified administrators via email and telephone. Administrators who agreed to participate were given an informed consent form

(Appendix D) that was explained by the researcher. The interview protocol (Appendix E) was reviewed before the interview.

In most forms of qualitative research, there is a high tendency for data to be collected through interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). An interview is considered a process in which a researcher and participant use questions to engage in a conversation related to the research study. The main goal of the interview is to obtain information pertaining to what is on the mind of the person related to the topic that cannot be directly observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview allows the researcher to learn from the other person's perspective.

The participants were exposed to minimal risks during the study. There was a time limit for the interview and a predetermined number of interview questions that fit within the time limit. The interviewees were provided an informed consent form and the interview questions (Appendices D and E) before the interview. Each interview took place in a location that was comfortable for the participant, without distractions or interruptions. The time of each interview was approximately 60 minutes.

Each participant was asked semistructured questions; responses were audio recorded. During a semistructured interview, questions are flexibly worded but there may be a structured section to the interview. A semistructured interview allowed the researcher to respond to the situation at hand if new ideas emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher listened to the participants as they answered the questions and captured the experiences, perceptions, and guiding principles of administrators who are part of the decision-making process relating to the LCFF resource allocations that impact African American student achievement.

Collecting information through the interview process has been part of research for centuries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher created a positive environment so that the

respondent felt comfortable. The researcher was respectful and nonjudgmental. The researcher remained courteous, responsive, and respectful at all times throughout the interview process, paying close attention to monitoring body language and oral responses in order not to insert bias in the interview process. By recording the interview, the researcher was able to be an active listener during the process. Participants were allowed to express themselves and have their responses recorded to protect the authenticity of their ideas and voice. The interviewer-respondent interaction is complicated; however, with planning and preparation, the researcher can collect data that lift the voice of the participant's experiences to add value to the research study.

The term "participant" is used by the qualitative researcher to describe participants and their willingness to participate in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The participating administrators were not identified by name or where they worked. The district was not named in the study. The researcher assigned each participant a number to ensure anonymity and maintain confidentiality. All interview audio recordings and transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home and will be shredded and destroyed 2 years after completion of the study. The researcher's laptop was password protected and was used to keep notes related to the research.

### **Instrumentation**

Due to the nature of the research question, the interview process was the best method to capture perceptions, thoughts, and feelings related to the question. The type of research design determined the best way to collect data. Conducting interviews is common and appropriate for a qualitative study. A semistructured interview process was used to collect data. The researcher kept in mind the importance of providing an environment in which the participants felt

comfortable to share their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs related to the research questions. The interview consisted of five semistructured questions that were flexibly worded relating to administrator decisions pertaining to resource allocations that impact African American student achievement. The participants were 10 nonrandomly selected district administrators who oversee the LCAP as lead, developer, writer, or submitter to the county office of education for review and approval from districts in the selected county. The participants discussed their experiences, focusing on resource allocation, African American students, and closing the achievement gap. The researcher had the flexibility to modify the wording and order of questions based on responses from participants. Conducting interviews allowed the researcher to collect information that could not be observed, felt, or interpreted without the participant providing information on past events or information that was difficult to replicate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the interview process, natural order and control were maintained by the researcher to capture information from the participants' perspectives.

### **Data Collection**

A researcher must consider ethical issues, gain access and permissions, have a good qualitative sampling strategy, record information, respond to issues that may arise, and keep the data secure and confidential (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Accurate and systematic data collection is critical when conducting research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data for this qualitative research study were collected via semistructured interviews with open-ended questions that allowed for collection of participant perceptions, thoughts, and ideas. Due to the nature of the semistructured interview, the participants could skip questions and answer questions out of order or have the option to pass if they were uncomfortable. The information did not contain names, and all necessary protocols to de-identify participant names and responses were applied. Any

data that were collected or stored electronically in the form of a Word document, Excel spreadsheet, or email were stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and external hard drive.

Qualitative research consists of relationship building with participants. Data were gathered in a conversational manner face to face to encourage participants to respond openly and honestly. Interviews were conducted in locations that were comfortable for the participant and allowed participants to be at ease and to speak freely. The integrity of the participants during the research process was protected by following professional ethics. At any time during the interview, the participant was allowed to take a break or continue the interview at a later time or date if necessary. Participants were protected by obtaining their informed consent and by including an explanation of the nature, purpose, and implications of the study, as well as the confidentiality and security of the data. The collection process consisted of audio recorded interviews.

The researcher utilized transcribed notes of the audio recordings to code the interview data into themes. The researcher transferred the information as needed into NVivo™ and or a word processing document immediately following completion of each interview. When the researcher immediately captured the participant's thoughts following the interview, it was possible to code and develop themes. The researcher used all aspects of data collection to capture the experiences of the participants.

### **Data Analysis Process and Procedures**

The researcher utilized NVivo and hand coding to organize and code the interview data into themes. The researcher went through the data to highlight significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants' experienced the phenomenon

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher created and organized data files (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reading through the text and making notes in the margin was a strategy used by the researcher to form initial codes, looking for collective and individual themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Individual themes are those that are unique to one or a couple of participants. Collective themes are common across a group of participants and can be categorized into group statements or meaning units (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Categorizing the data into themes allowed the researcher to visualize the data and make meaning relating to what experiences were discussed that connected to the research questions. Organizing data into conceptual themes enabled the researcher to develop a structure of the phenomenon as it was experienced by the participants.

The interview data collected from participants were analyzed using NVivo software and hand coding. NVivo is intended to help users to organize and analyze nonnumerical or unstructured data. The software allows users to classify, sort, and arrange information and examine relationships in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). It provides security by storing the database and files in a single file.

Forming codes or categorizing represents the essence of qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher clustered interview statements into themes and used them to write an interpretation of what the participants shed light on relating to their views. After coding was completed, the researcher wrote a composite description that reported the essence of the phenomenon and the shared experiences that emerged from categorizing the participant information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The outcomes were presented to demonstrate understanding of the phenomenon as it was experienced.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

The limitations of the study can be seen based on the focus of the research study. The research focused on district administrators' experiences with resource allocation and the effects on academic achievement by African American students. Many parts to the LCFF were signed into law in 2013. Equity and coherence relate to the intent of the LCFF that are not fully explored in this research study. Also, the LCFF has several aspects of implementation that go beyond resource allocation, including stakeholder engagement and student supports and outcomes for Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students. This research study focused on district administrators' experiences with resource allocation and how they influence efforts for them to address academic achievement by African American students. Another area to point out was the small sample size, delimited to one county. The research design could be seen as a limitation because it relied on the participants' lived experiences in one county and on the researcher's ability to separate personal biases from the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Interpreting the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of participants leaves room for unintended outcomes. Participants may have been uncomfortable in answering questions that could be seen as controversial as they related to personal beliefs about race and equity.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have 29 years experience in education and have held positions such as para-educator, teacher, site administrator, district office administrator, and county office administrator. For the past 5 years, I have been employed with the County Office of Education, not by any district in the southern California county where the study was conducted. I have had a working relationship with each of the districts in the target county. My role in the County Office of Education is to support districts in the county. I do not have any supervisory or evaluative role of authority in

any district or over any employee who participated in the study. Districts and employees were notified that the research study was independent of the County Office of Education and that they were not required to participate; this was done to protect the working relationship between the County Office of Education and districts in the county. Due to my multiple levels of lived experiences and current role and responsibilities, I had a direct interest in how the experiences of administrators with resource allocation influence efforts to address academic achievement by African American students.

Each school district is responsible for allocation of the LCFF to improve academic progress of student groups that have been historically underperforming, based on local district needs. Each selected district is required to submit the LCAP. Each district had a student population of at least 8% African American students and did not allocate resources specifically to address African American student achievement. Based on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress 2018-2019 English Language Arts (ELA) scores, the comparisons are listed as follows for African American students in California at 32.72% Met or Exceeded Standards. The targeted county reported the following Met or Exceed Standards scores in ELA: African American 31.31%, Hispanic 41.08%, and White 56.26%. The county reported the following Met or Exceed Standards scores in mathematics: African American 20.57%. The data for the southern CA county in which the districts were selected were as follows: African American 18.08%, Hispanic 27.57%, and White 43.70%. On the California School Dashboard measure, five of the seven districts that participated in the study reported two of the lowest levels of colors (red and orange, respectively) in the areas of ELA, mathematics, or both. One district reported the middle range color of yellow on the California School Dashboard in ELA and mathematics, followed by one district that earned the second highest color score on the chart,



reflecting green in ELA and mathematics. Based on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress 2018-2019 scores in ELA and mathematics, along with the California School Dashboard measure, the data provided supporting evidence and reflected a need to explore how the experiences of administrators with resource allocation affected academic achievement by African American students.

The role of the researcher is vital when conducting a qualitative study. The researcher's biases can impact how data are collected, interpreted, analyzed, and reported. Interviewing requires researchers to have enough distance to ask real questions and not share assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher must take a stance that is nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the participant. Interviews are sometimes prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the questions from the interviewer and the responses from the participant. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) cautioned the researcher to be careful not to interpret data in a way to manipulate the meaning to show what the researcher wants to represent; this can be done by crafting open-ended questions, maintaining a neutral stance, and avoiding indications there is a "right" answer. This researcher's experiences in education and with resource allocations aided in data collection, analysis, and understanding the process and phenomenon under study. Epoche (bracketing) was used to set aside personal feelings and allow the voices of the participants to drive the findings of the study.

In order to minimize researcher bias, participant interviews were audio recorded to allow the researcher to provide full attention to each participant. After data were compiled, prior to finalizing the transcript, the researcher allowed participants to review their interviews to check for misinterpretation and unintended mistakes in quotes, along with any parts of the interview that they did not want to be used in the study. The researcher made corrections or modifications

to the participants' interview as requested. The ability of the researcher to remain neutral and set aside biases allowed the research to be conducted without influence from the researcher.

Since the researcher is also an administrator who works closely with the LCAP, there are challenges to being subjective, which can be an issue in qualitative research. The researcher knew participants in the study, either directly or indirectly, due to the current role that the researcher holds in the county where the research was conducted. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) indicated advantages to having insider status. Insider status may be welcomed regarding social identities such as race, gender, age, and socioeconomic class. Race, class, and gender interact the sense of power in daily lives; therefore, the interviewing relationship mirrors issues of power and control. In the end, it is vital to have enough distance to enable the participant to explore and share freely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The advantage of this researcher was that relationships had been developed during the previous 5 years, which allowed participants to answer questions without feeling that they had to "dumb down" their responses.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative research is based on subjective, interpretive, and contextual data, making the findings likely to be scrutinized and questioned (Thomson, 2011). Quantitative data should exclude errors associated with qualitative data. Therefore, it is critical that researchers take steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings. The findings must be believable, consistent, applicable, and credible if they are to be useful to readers and other researchers (Thomson, 2011). Validity refers to the believability and trustworthiness of the findings. Study participants are the only ones to decide whether the findings actually reflect the phenomenon of study (Thomson, 2011). Participants in a qualitative study must believe that the findings are

accurate. Thomson (2011) identified triangulation a commonly used method for verifying accuracy that involves cross-checking information from multiple perspectives.

In order to establish the validity of the study, the researcher accounted for personal biases by acknowledging biases in sampling and ongoing critical reflection of methods to ensure depth and relevance of the data collection and analysis. (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Keeping accurate records and notes ensured that interpretation of the data was consistent and transparent. The researcher invited participants to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and to ensure that the themes reflected the phenomenon under investigation. The integrity of the participants was protected; it was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that data were collected efficiently and reported accurately.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent is a voluntary agreement to participate in a research study. It is a process in which the researcher ensures that the participant understands the research and its risks. Informed consent must be obtained for all participants in a research study. When this researcher invited administrators to participate in the study, each was given an informed consent form (Appendix D). Each was given time to consider participation in the study without coercion in order to make an informed decision as to whether to participate. Participants were informed about their rights, the purpose of the study, the procedures, potential risks, and benefits of participation in the study. Participants were provided the consent form in a language that they could understand. Each participant signed the consent form. The researcher answered questions about the study and ensured participants that their names, interviews, and any personal information would remain private.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter described the qualitative design that the researcher used to examine how district administrators' experiences with resource allocation influence their efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. The researcher used a phenomenological methodology to guide the study. It was essential that all participants have experience related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The sample population for this study was public school district-level administrators who had shared experiences with LCFF, which supported the goal of collecting perception data through semistructured interviews. The participants reported a wide range of years in education and experience with LCFF and resource accountability and allocations. The interview process allowed the researcher to hear the voices of the participants as themes began to emerge from the conversations that brought insight to the research question.

The topics covered in Chapter 3 were Research Questions, Research Design, Philosophical Assumptions, Interpretive Frameworks and Philosophical Beliefs, Appropriateness of the Phenomenological Research Design, District Selection and Description, Participants, Human Subjects Consideration, Confidentiality, Instrumentation, Data Collection, Data Analysis Process and Procedures, Limitations of the Research Design, Researcher Bias, Validity and Reliability, and Informed Consent. The chapter presented information regarding the selected districts, demographics of the districts, the participant selection process, and ethical issues related to conducting the study. The research was conducted by using the code of ethics outlined by the Institutional Review Board.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

Chapter 4 contains the data findings of the qualitative phenomenological study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the views and lived experiences of administrators in determining how resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators impact the trajectory of African American student achievement.

The role of the researcher was to examine the central phenomenon of district office administrators' decision-making practices that determine LCFF resource allocations that impact African American students. A purposeful, systematic recruitment selection of district employees in a southern California county from districts serving in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public school districts with knowledge of district-level administration. Each selected district with an African American student population of at least 8% of the total district enrollment was invited to participate. The phenomenological research study was conducted using semistructured interview questions; responses were recorded using an audiotape device. The interview protocol contained a five semistructured questions that allowed the researcher to ask questions that were flexibly worded relating to administrators' decisions on resource allocations that impact African American student achievement. Phenomenological research methods introduced by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2017) were applied to describe data collected in the study.

The role of the researcher was to set aside personal perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied based on more than 29 years of experience as an educator. It was imperative that the researcher not allow the knowledge obtained at the County Office of Education relating to LCFF and LCAP to influence the interpretation of the data. The central question related to how administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student

achievement. The research examined decision-making practices of district administrators in the field that have a direct impact on African American students.

The chapter consists of the following topics: Purpose for the Study, Research Questions, Demographics, Data Collection Approaches, Participant Numbers, Interview Questions, Findings, and Summary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of conducting this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the views and lived experiences of administrators in determining how resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators impact the trajectory of African American student achievement. The central phenomenon was the role of district administrators in determining LCFF resource allocations for African American students, as described by the administrators. The research was conducted to capture data from a selection of current district administrators with responsibilities related to the LCFF. The district percentage of African American students was at least 8% in a southern California county with knowledge of district administration in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public school districts.

The participation criteria for this study were district administrators currently employed in schools in a southern California county. All participants had experiences with resource accountability and the allocation of resources in their administrative positions. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 district administrators varying in gender, race, years of experience in the field of education and administration, district office-level administration, and working with LCAP and LCFF. The participants were recruited from 16 districts in the selected southern California county containing an African American student population of at least 8%. The qualitative phenomenological research method was chosen to engage participants in open-

ended interviews. The interviews captured the nature of their lived experiences regarding resource allocation decision-making practices to impact the trajectory of African American student achievement.

The coding of the data and development of themes were captured through the use of hand coding and NVivo software. The data might assist district administrators to examine their decision-making practices related to LCFF resource allocations and how their decisions shape the academic trajectory of African American students. District administrative leaders may examine their concept of culturally responsive leadership in dealing with the biases and inequalities impacting African American student achievement. The impact of the interviews may have a positive effect on the trajectory of African American student achievement.

### **Research Questions**

The central research question for this qualitative phenomenological study was, “How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?” The central research question was designed to direct the phenomenological study to gain an understanding of how administrators make decisions that determine the trajectory of African American students based on their LCFF resource allocation practices. The goal of this study was to examine how the decision-making practices of district administrators related to LCFF resource allocations affect closing the achievement gap of African American students, based on historical underperformance in student outcomes. The district administrators were experienced with leading, developing, writing, and submitting the LCAP for review and approval to the County Office of Education. Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated that, in a phenomenological study, the phenomenon to be explored is phrased in terms of a single concept or idea. The most effective way to gain the participants’ perspectives of the phenomenon was to collect data through the

interview process. After interviews were conducted, themes and trends emerged that related to the administrators' experiences.

The purpose of the open-ended interview questions was to engage the participants in conversations related to the topic without limiting their responses to yes or no answers. Designing an interview in which participants share their lived experiences frequently causes them to reflect deeply on the questions and respond based on their first-hand knowledge as it relates to the topic.

### **Data Collection Approaches**

Due to the nature of the research question, the interview process was the best method to capture perceptions, thoughts, and feelings related to the research question. A semistructured, open-ended interview process was used by the researcher to collect data. The interview consisted of five semistructured open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to ask questions that were flexibly worded relating to administrators' decisions on resource allocations that impact African American student achievement.

Interview questions were developed based on the topic and the central research question. Interviews were conducted after the University of Redland's Institution Review Board had provided approval. The recruitment of participants took approximately 1 week. The invitation to participate was sent via electronic email to 16 districts, requesting identification of one or two district administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit for review and approval of the LCAP to the County Office of Education. The researcher's contact information was provided, along with a brief overview of the purpose of the study. A follow-up telephone call was made to the districts that did not respond to the email.



The participants were 10 nonrandomly selected school administrators from 16 districts in the selected county who oversee the LCAP as lead, developer, writer, or submitter to the County Office of Education for review and approval. The participants discussed their experiences focused on resource allocation, African American students, and closing the achievement gap. Conducting interviews allowed the researcher to collect information that could not be observed, felt, or interpreted without the participant providing information on past events that are difficult to replicate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the interview process, natural order and control were maintained by the researcher to capture the participants' lived experiences.

Several participants indicated that they were eager to be a part of the research and were eager to participate based on the topic. The participant pool was limited to the first 10 administrators across eight districts who responded positively to the request to participate. The use of nonrandom sampling was successful in achieving the number of participants anticipated for the study, along with a diverse group of administrators from eight districts in the selected southern California county.

The volunteer participants were thanked for their willingness to be a part of the study, provided a brief overview of the purpose of the study, and informed of the Institutional Review Board requirement of completing the consent form (Appendix D). All participants cooperated and were interviewed in a location of their choice using the same semistructured open-ended interview questions (Appendix E) to ensure consistency. The interviews were concluded over 2 weeks based on participants' schedules. The time for the participant interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the participant's willingness to speak freely and openly about the topic. The interview questions were asked in the same manner for consistency.

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Participants were identified using numbers 01 through 10. Participants were allowed to confirm the accuracy of their transcriptions.

### **Demographic Overview**

The semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 participants. The demographic data consisted of educational level, job classification (grade level and position), gender, race, total years in education (including certificated positions and administration), and total years in administration. The study focused on individuals who held the job classification of elementary, middle, or high school principal or assistant principal. All participants were public school administrators in PreK through Grade 12, which provided a purposeful random sample for the study.

To be a certificated administrator in the state of California, a person must have a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree. A Doctorate is not required to be a district administrator; no participants had a doctorate (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Education Level of Participants*

Degree	<i>n</i>	%
Bachelor's	10	100
Master's	10	100
Doctorate	0	0

At the time of the interviews, the administrators' job classifications were either superintendent, assistant superintendent, or director (Table 3). The breakdown of the job classifications was based on their employment at the time of the interviews. Of the 10 participants, 10 were superintendents, 6 were assistant superintendents, and 3 were directors.

**Table 3**

*Job Classification of Participants*

Position	<i>n</i>	%
Superintendent	1	10
Assistant Superintendent	6	60
Director	3	30

The nonrandom sampling of district administrators yielded a mix of gender participation. Forty percent of the participants were males (Table 4). Seventy percent of the participants were White, 10% were African American, and 20% identified as Hispanic or Latino (Table 5).

**Table 4**

*Gender of Participants*

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	4	40
Female	6	60

**Table 5***Race of Participants*

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
White	7	70
African American	1	10
Hispanic or Latino	2	20

The participants' years of experience varied. Experience was categorized in two ways: (a) total of years in the field of education (combining years in certificated teaching and or counseling positions and administration—see Table 6); and (b) years of experience in administrative positions in schools of district office (Table 7). Categories were < 5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and 21+.

**Table 6***Years of Experience in Education*

Years of experience	<i>n</i>	%
< 5	0	00
6–10	0	00
11–15	0	00
16–20	3	30
21+	7	70

**Table 7***Years of Experience in Administration (School or District)*

Years of experience	<i>n</i>	%
< 5	0	00
6–10	3	30
11–15	5	50
16–20	1	10
21+	1	10

The participants' years of administrative experience at the district office varied. Experience was categorized in two ways: (a) total number of years at the district office as an administrator (combining years at the district office in any administrative position—see Table 8); and (b) years of experience at the district office in an administrative position involving work with the LCAP and/or LCFE (lead, developer, writer, and/or submitter for review or approval to the County Office of Education—see Table 9). Categories for the former were < 5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and 21+; categories for the latter were 1, 2–3, 4–5, and 6+.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed to identify relationships and develop common themes that emerged during participant interviews. The data were reviewed upon collection to determine the correlation of lived experiences that yielded similarities for preliminary grouping (Moustakas, 1994). The best way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do so at the same time data are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

**Table 8***Years of Experience in District Office Administration*

Years of experience	<i>n</i>	%
< 5	3	30
6–10	5	50
11–15	2	20
16–20	0	00
21+	0	00

**Table 9***Years of Experience in Administration Involving Local Control Funding Formula or Local Control Accountability Plan*

Years of experience	<i>n</i>	%
1	2	20
2–3	2	20
4–5	1	10
6+	5	50

Data analysis is the making sense of collected data. The researcher reviewed the data and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reading through the text and making notes in the margin was used to form initial codes while looking for collective and

individual themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Different themes were unique to one or a couple of participants. Collective themes were common across a group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Categorizing the data into themes allowed the researcher to visualize the data and make meaning relating to what experiences were discussed that addressed the research questions. Organizing data into conceptual themes enabled the researcher to develop a structure of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants.

The process of coding involved making sense of data collected in the interviews. The researcher conducted the coding after reviewing the data and placing statements into themes that correlated explicitly to the study. The coded data were examined and categorized to write an interpretation of what the participants shed light on in their interviews related to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017). NVivo and hand coding were used to organize and summarize data into a format that assisted with drawing conclusions. After coding was completed, the researcher wrote a composite description that reported the essence of the phenomenon and the shared experiences that emerged from categorizing the participant information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The outcomes were presented to show an understanding of the experience of the phenomenon.

### **Findings of the Study**

The findings of the study were comprised of data collected from the lived experiences of district administrators who answered semistructured interview questions. The central research question for this qualitative phenomenological study was, “How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?”

The central research question was developed to direct the phenomenological study to understand how administrators make decisions that determine the trajectory of African American

students based on their LCFF resource allocation practices. Ten district administrators from eight districts in a southern California county were interviewed. Five research questions were asked to capture the lived experiences of the participants.

Interview Question 1: Do you feel LCFF addresses African American student achievement?

Interview Question 2: What are your perceptions on how LCFF impacts achievement for African American students?

Interview Question 3: How might LCFF funding be used to impact African American student achievement?

Interview Question 4: Describe your experience with resource accountability.

Interview Question 5: What criteria are used by district administrators to allocate resources for African American students?

The data analysis revealed meaningful clusters to gain understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Saldaña (2015) suggested several approaches that were used in this study to identify themes. The approaches were based on a word or short phrase that symbolically assigned a summative, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The approach used in this study to identify themes focused on keywords or short phrases that the participants used in the interviews. Although administrators from different districts, each was familiar with the LCFF and LCAP regulations that govern district funding, creating a similar context of knowledge and understanding. The words and phrases that appeared frequently provided the context for structuring the themes based on the answers to the interview questions pertaining to administrator resource allocations and decision-making practices regarding African American students. From the semistructured open-ended interviews,



commonalities emerged that developed into seven themes: (a) African American students indirectly addressed by LCFF, (b) African American students indirectly impacted by LCFF, (c) LCFF statutory regulations, (d) stakeholder engagement, (e) metrics—effective versus ineffective expenditures, (f) resource allocation methodology, and (g) culturally responsive school leadership.

### **LCFF Indirectly Addresses African American Students**

The district administrators were men and women from various backgrounds and various years of experience in education, administration, and LCFF. Six of the 10 participants acknowledged that LCFF indirectly addresses African American student achievement. Participant 1 said, “I believe it addresses it through requiring data analysis to determine needs. Looking at student groups and seeing gaps, indirectly findings in identifying needs for African American students.” Four participants acknowledged that LCFF does not address African American student achievement. Participant 4 said, “No, because we don’t specifically target that student group with supplemental or concentration grant money.” Participant 9 stated, “I think that’s what it was meant to do. I don’t know that it has accomplished the task.”

### **LCFF Indirectly Impacts African American Achievement**

Nine of the 10 participants stated state LCFF indirectly impacts African American student achievement. Participant 1 noted, “Developing goals, actions, and the end-of-year process that requires reflection on whether or not we met those goals is a means for measuring positive impact on achievement, inclusive of African American students, but on the surface level.” Participant 5 said, “The original intent of LCFF was to allow for greater impact because it gave more flexibility on resources, but districts might not have chosen to funnel money towards the African American student group, because it was not a LCFF priority.” Participant 9 affirmed,

“Unless you are utilizing evidence-based programs, approaches, initiatives that provide personalization of service within subgroups, specifically for African American students, the achievement gap will not close, or there will be no movement.” One of the 10 district administrators was unsure as to whether or not LCFF impacts African American student achievement. Participant 8 said, “I don’t know that I can at least right now point to a particular correlation between the LCFF, LCAP, and African American student achievement as different from all student achievement.” Most of the participants expressed that, in their perception, African American students are not focused on during the LCAP development process.

### **LCFF Statutory Regulations: Policy and Practice**

All 10 administrators acknowledged during the interviews that there should be intentional language embedded in the LCFF statutory regulations to support funding allocations specifically for African American students. Participant 2 stated, “Some resources used to benefit all students and African American students, but to say that particular resources are used for African American students, I don’t know that I’ve ever seen resources used specifically for that student group.” Participant 5 said, “Intentional language would allow for being very focused on strategies that help support African American students, whether that be cultural awareness or instructional strategies.” Participant 6 affirmed, “By directing funds to the group that is not performing and using differentiated assistance as a vehicle to develop intentional plans to support increased student achievement.” The lived experiences described by the participants were in direct correlation with the theme of LCFF statutory regulations.

### **Metrics to Determine Effective Versus Ineffective Expenditures**

The participants were asked to describe their experience with resource accountability. All 10 indicated that metrics would support decision-making practices related to effective versus

ineffective expenditures. Participant 2 noted, “I need to look at the outcome data to determine if it is being effective or not.” Participant 3 explained, “Looking at actions and having people rate them to determine impact based qualitative and quantitative data, and provide that information to the stakeholder groups .....Some services are hard to hold up a mirror and reflect on their effectiveness.” Participant 9 specified, “Conduct a cost-benefit analysis. What is going to be the metric by which we’re going to measure success? Can we sustain this fiscally? Take a look at what you are doing to determine if it is producing findings.” All indicated that determining the effectiveness of programs, practices, and procedures would allow them to make better decisions based on the alignment of resources to impact student achievement.

### **Resource Allocation Methodology**

All 10 participants indicated that they had no clearly articulated criteria to allocate resources to African American students. Participant 1 stated, “Beyond analyzing outcome gaps, there is not a set of criteria, method or methodology we use to allocate resources for African American students.” Participant 2 explained,

The unduplicated student groups of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth, including special education, are the main four student groups that are discussed a lot and targeted for professional development related to instructional strategies and social-emotional strategies for those identified groups, but that does not necessarily include a focus on African American students.

Participant 3 affirmed, “We don’t provide sites with LCFF funding. No money is specifically provided for African American students.” Participant 8 indicated, “Part of that is being willing to show the gap, the vulnerabilities, the areas of need and making sure that the people in the room are equipped to honestly challenge themselves about what might be an issue.”

On the other hand, all 10 participants indicated that the LCAP development process is used to allocate resources for identified unduplicated student groups of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth. LCFF requires districts to engage their local stakeholders in an

annual planning process to evaluate their progress in eight state priority areas encompassing all statutory metrics. Districts document the findings of this planning process in the LCAP template adopted by the State Board of Education. The LCAP planning process serves three distinct but related functions: (a) comprehensive strategic planning, (b) meaningful stakeholder engagement, and (c) accountability and compliance. Comprehensive strategic planning connects budgetary decisions to teaching and learning performance data. Districts continue to evaluate difficult choices about the use of limited resources to meet student and community needs to ensure that opportunities and outcomes are improved for all students.

### **Voice: Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement**

The participants were not asked directly about their perceptions related to stakeholder engagement and resource allocations. Still, it was a theme that emerged from each of the five questions in the interview. All 10 participants acknowledged that parent and student voice was a significant influence on resource allocations for African American students. Participant 1 stated, “If there is an advocacy group or political group in a community, and they interact with the district office leaders, then you will see specific initiatives that come out of that for African American students.” Participant 3 indicated, “Listening to the voices of parents and students has led to ensuring that each of the eight state priorities is addressing African American students in some shape or form, and making sure that the resources are there to match it.” Participant 7 affirmed,

Anytime you have parents advocating for their kids, it’s a wonderful opportunity. They talk about effectiveness, and about how to get the most bang for our buck. Leaders that are willing to walk that walk, teachers willing to embrace it, and talk to students and parents along the way.

Participant 8 stated, “Answers around the kinds of things we believe can be done as a group of community members with that question in front of us, relating to using LCFF resources for African American student achievement, might lead to improving student outcomes.”

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

All participants expressed a need for culturally responsive school leadership. From the reactions related to culturally responsive leadership, three areas of focus emerged: professional development (3 participants), empathy (4 participants), and mindset (3 participants). District administrators are in the position to bring about a culturally responsive culture in their district. The district administrators expressed in their interviews a need for culturally responsive leadership to impact resource allocations for African American students. Nine of the 10 participants exhibited characteristics of culturally responsive school leadership. Responses indicated that a need to build relationships with staff, parents, and students to provide quality service to the district and school communities.

Participant 1 stated, “On the job-embedded opportunities to know how to address and create a positive culture and climate conducive to meeting the needs of different racial student groups is really, really critical.” Participant 2 acknowledged that district leadership and all staff need to have the training to better support students: “The leadership definitely and everyone needs to have some training in that area to better support students.” Participant 3 said that a person is never done with equity training, and there is a need to get the information to the teacher level. Participant 3 stated, “It is difficult for the administrator alone to lift this work to bring it to the classroom.”

Another theme developed out of the district administrator interviews related to empathy as it pertains to culturally responsive school leadership. Participant 2 expressed, “There is a need

for understanding all student groups, especially with diverse populations that might be different.” Participant 2 also indicated, “I don’t think the kids at the start are intentionally trying to be disrespectful and rude. I just think it is a lack of cultural understanding.” Participant 5 affirmed, “Not all people relate to different cultures; training supports the building of empathy. If we understand, we can better serve our students.” Participant 9 noted, “Empathy assists with building the culture of the community.”

Mindset was one of the three areas of focus that emerged from the participant interviews related to culturally responsive leadership. Participant 1 stated, “It really takes a whole community of leaders like a district office team to come together and say this is a priority for us; it can’t be just one person.” Participant 4 expressed, “You need a leader who is willing to have the conversations and build that culture, then be mindful of the need for culturally relevant school leadership, and then have a metric to review where you can measure your competency.” Participant 10 said, “I think it relates to shifting the mindset and deep reflective practices within our leaders so that they can be the kind of role model we need for our students.”

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of conducting this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the views and lived experiences of administrators in determining how resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators impact the trajectory of African American student achievement. The central phenomenon was the role of district administrators in determining LCFF resource allocations for African American students, as described by the administrators. The research was conducted to capture data from a selection of current district administrators with responsibilities related to LCFF to provide insight into the lived experiences of administrators.

The participants were recruited from 16 districts in the selected southern California county containing African American student populations of at least 8%. The qualitative phenomenological research method was chosen to engage participants in an open-ended discussion. The open-ended discussion captured the nature of their lived experiences regarding resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators to impact African American student achievement.

The invitation to participate was sent via electronic email to 16 districts, requesting identification of or two district administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit for review and approval the LCAP to the County Office of Education. A follow-up telephone call was made to districts that did not respond to the email. The researcher's contact information was provided, along with a brief overview of the purpose of the study.

A purposeful nonrandom sample was used, and the first 10 administrators to respond to the invitation participated in the study. Data collection involved the following steps: (a) interview process used for data collection, (b) analysis of data after collection, (c) process of data reduction, (d) identification of relationships and common themes, (e) organization and display of the data, and (f) confirmation of findings.

The coding of the data and development of themes was captured through use of hand coding and NVivo software. The data collected in this study could assist district administrators to examine their decision-making practices related to LCFF resource allocations by administrators and determine how those decisions shape the academic trajectory of African American students. Data analysis resulted in seven core themes that focused on LCFF indirectly addressing and impacting African American students, statutory regulations that include stakeholder engagement,

measuring and monitoring effectiveness of resource allocations and expenditures, and culturally responsive school leadership.

The findings resulted in commonalities across the participant district administrators. The findings relating to Questions 1, 2, and 3 indicated that the intent of LCFF to address, impact, and use funding for African American student achievement is indirectly embedded in the regulations. The participants' lived experiences were validated by their specific examples and detailed accounts of events. All participants addressed Question 4 by indicating that they had direct experience with LCFF and resource allocation in their roles as superintendent, assistant superintendent, or director in a Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 district in the selected southern California county. Many participants shared meaningful experiences about working with LCFF and allocation of resources for all students, although not with a specific focus on African American students.

The participants were thoughtful about Question 5, indicating that the LCFF statutory regulations made it difficult to leverage funds for student success when there is no specific direction to allocate resources to African American students. Participants were open and spoke freely about their experiences as district administrators and the lack of focus on African American students in the use of the LCFF. Some participants talked about their journey in supporting African American students and creating spaces to have conversations within a district. They spoke about the need for culturally responsive leadership based on the long history of building a culture and climate that is welcoming to African American students and parents, which related to each of the five interview questions.



## CHAPTER 5

### Interpretations, Recommendations, Conclusions

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the qualitative phenomenological study. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the views and lived experiences of administrators in determining how resource allocation decision-making practices made by district administrators impact the trajectory of African American student achievement. This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the significant findings, including relating the findings to the literature and future research possibilities to assist with further addressing the research central research question. The chapter contains the sections: Interpretation of Findings and Themes, Implications for Theory and Research, Implications for Practice, Limitations of the Research Study, Researcher Bias, Recommendations for Implementation, Recommendations for Future Research, Discussion, and Conclusion.

The underlying problem addressed in this study related to historical educational inequities in the United States based on race, class, and gender. Educational inequities related to race exist today and are reflected in achievement by African American students (Jennings & Marvin, 2005). The achievement gap is the most talked about and studied problem in education. The disparities between African American and White students have not closed much since 1965. Coleman (1966) was the first to indicate an achievement gap between African American and White students. Still, the report was used by some to support the cultural deficit theory, which suggested schools could not do much to improve achievement by African American students.

The LCFF was designed to provide local districts flexibility to allocate resources and improve student achievement. Although the LCFF provides additional resources to districts serving higher numbers of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students, the underlying problem is that African American students were not intentionally identified as a high-

risk student group to be addressed. Clark Louque et al. (2017) found that African American students have needs that are not necessarily addressed by programs provided for the LCFF target populations of Low-Income, English-Learners, and Foster Youth students.

The central research question for this qualitative phenomenological study was, “How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?” The goal of the central research question was to understand how administrators make decisions that determine the trajectory of African American student achievement based on their LCFF resource allocation practices.

The subquestions for this phenomenological study established the essence of the research and served to clarify the purpose. The subquestions for this study were the following: (a) “What are the themes that emerged relating to administrators’ experiences with allocating LCFF funds?” and (b) “What are the factors related to administrators’ experiences in resource allocations to affect African American academic achievement?” Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that subquestions subdivide the central question into parts that will guide the interview or observation and that can be used in the data collection process.

The educational and practical purpose of the study provided district administrators with an opportunity to examine their decision-making practices related to the LCFF resource allocations. The LCFF is designed to allow districts local control and flexibility to utilize resources to close the achievement gap of historically underperforming student groups. Although the LCFF targets Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth students, it allows districts choices to focus on the needs of all students. The study brought about a reflection relating to intentional district administrators’ practices on LCFF resource allocations to support African American student achievement.

A nonrandom sample was chosen based on district administrative responsibilities related to the LCFF, district percentage of African American students (at least 8%), the lived experiences of the participants, and their knowledge of school administration in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public school districts. The study was conducted using five semistructured interview questions. This structure allowed the researcher to ask questions that were flexibly worded related to administrators' decision-making practices about resource allocations that impact African American student achievement.

The collected data led to identification of common themes in district administrators' perceptions of their experiences of the central phenomenon. Data analysis resulted in seven themes with a focus on direct support of African American students, statutory regulations, equitable resource allocations, and culturally responsive school leadership.

### **Interpretation of Findings and Themes**

Ten district administrators from eight districts in a southern California county were interviewed. The lived experiences, perceptions, and opinions of district administrators (superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors) who had personal experiences with the LCFF and resource allocations to support student achievement were interviewed. Five open-ended interview questions were asked to capture details of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. The central research question for this qualitative phenomenological study, was "How do administrators perceive LCFF resources and African American student achievement?" The central research question was intended to direct the phenomenological study to gain understanding of how administrators make decisions that determine the trajectory of African American students based on their LCFF resource allocation practices.

Seven prominent core themes emerged from the data: (a) African American students indirectly addressed by LCFF, (b) African American students indirectly impacted by LCFF, (c) LCFF statutory regulations, (d) stakeholder engagement, (e) metrics—effective versus ineffective expenditures, (f) resource allocation methodology, and (g) culturally responsive school leadership. Each theme is described in detail in the following sections.

### **Theme 1: LCFF Indirectly Addresses African American Students**

Six of the 10 participants indicated the LCFF indirectly addressed African American student achievement. The literature supports the indirect connection of the LCFF as it relates to African American students. California has pioneered the LCFF to support local education agencies' decision-making processes. The persistent challenge of closing achievement gaps for African American students must be addressed for the benefit of democracy, nation, state, and communities (Cohen et al., 2012). The literature also indicates that the LCFF provides local education agencies the opportunity to confront educational disparities and address historical paradigms of African American achievement in the LCAP (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2010; Holt & Smith, 2005; Kieffer, 2012; Pitre, 2014; Simone et al., 2006; B. L. Walker, 2014). Although the intention is embedded in the statutory regulations, the direct language has impeded districts in directly addressing African American student achievement.

The district administrators who were interviewed were men and women from various backgrounds, years of experience in education and administration, and experience with LCFF. Six of the 10 participants acknowledged that LCFF indirectly addressed African American student achievement, which is consistent with the intent of the law, but they reported lack of follow-through by districts. Participant 1 indicated, "I believe it addresses it through requiring data analysis to determine needs. Looking at student groups and seeing gaps, indirectly findings

in identifying needs for African American students.” Participant 2 stated, “I believe that in terms of the students that are identified, I don’t see it explicitly listed as African American students.” Participant 7 noted, “I think at the local level with African American students, unless you are in differentiated assistance, it’s kind of a choice . . . and that is a little bit of the problem.”

Four of the 10 participants acknowledged that LCFF does not address African American student achievement. Participant 4 indicated, “No, because we don’t specifically target that student group with supplemental or concentration grant money.” Participant 9 stated, “I think that’s what it was meant to do. I don’t know that it has accomplished the task.” The literature indicates that long-standing disparities in educational funding for African American students contribute to persistent achievement and opportunity gaps (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010).

## **Theme 2: LCFF Indirectly Impacts African American Achievement**

Nine of the 10 participants expressed that the LCFF indirectly impacted African American student achievement. The other participant could not answer the question due to a lack of data.

The findings related to the LCFF’s indirect impact on African American student achievement are consistent with the literature regarding the lack of specificity placed on African American students. The literature speaks about the denial of slaves’ access for more than 100 years to literacy for more than 100 years; the impact on education is still prevalent today (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). The literature also indicates that fairness of educational services is measured in two ways: (a) horizontal equity—exists if students with similar characteristics receive the same amount of resources, and (b) vertical equity—achieved when students with more significant educational needs receive sufficient additional

resources (BenDavid-Adar & Paulino, 2009; Weishart, 2014). The LCFF has an opportunity to make an impact on all students who have historically been underperforming. Still, only time will tell whether districts will leverage the flexibility of the law to move forward with supporting students based on need and not based on directives.

Nine of the 10 participants stated that LCFF indirectly impacts African American student achievement. Participant 2 noted, “I would have to say it impacts their achievement indirectly through the targeting those unduplicated student groups that they are a part of.” Participant 3 stated, “I think through the data, looking at the eight state priorities to determine additional supports needed, but you have to really dig into the data.” Participant 9 affirmed, “Unless you are utilizing evidence-based programs, approaches, initiatives that provide personalization of service within subgroups, specifically for African American students, the achievement gap will not close, or there will be no movement.” One participant was unsure about whether LCFF impacts African American student achievement. Participant 8 expressed the following, “I don’t know that I can at least right now point to a particular correlation between the LCFF, LCAP, and African American student achievement as different from all student achievement.”

### **Theme 3: LCFF Statutory Regulations: Intentional Policy and Practice**

All of the participant district administrators indicated that the use of the LCFF would be more of a common practice to support African American students if the language of the law provided an intentional focus on African American students. The literature emphasizes that, due to the lack of educational reforms that target African American students, it is difficult to determine whether African American students benefit (B. L. Walker, 2014). Sperling and Vaughan (2009) noted inaccurate beliefs about what causes the achievement gap have led to school reforms that perpetuate, rather than resolve, racial differences in achievement. The

LCFF's implied policy to address achievement by historically underperforming student groups has allowed districts to intentionally not allocate resources to support African American student achievement.

The literature supports the findings relating to the concept that, without intentional language, there is no deliberate commitment to educational reform for African American students. The opportunity and achievement gaps will not be resolved unless there is an intentional commitment to improving the quality of education for African American students (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nettles et al., 2003).

All 10 participants agreed that there should be intentional language embedded in the LCFF statutory regulations to support funding allocations specifically for African American students. Participant 1 stated, "Specifically, with African Americans, the factors are really truly connected to who's loud, who's complaining, who's speaking out at board meetings, it's very reactionary, very reactionary." Participant 4 specified, "If your African American students fall into one of those unduplicated populations. You can use your general fund or LCFF money needs and prioritize them to meet the achievement of all students and specifically look at your data." Participant 5 affirmed, "Intentional language would allow for being very focused on strategies that help support African American students, whether that be cultural awareness or instructional strategies." The findings concur with the literature regarding the need for intentional language in the LCFF to support African American student achievement.

#### **Theme 4: Metrics to Determine Effective Versus Ineffective Expenditures**

In the literature, commonly cited barriers to student achievement did not specify a lack of funding but rather the determination on the effective use of funds. The findings of this study

support that literature. When the effective management of a school's resources cannot be measured, no measurable student outcome gains can be expected. Rose and Weston (2013) noted that little attention is given to including resource accountability protocols for ensuring that local districts effectively and efficiently use funds to provide essential resources in schools and classrooms to close the achievement gap. Through intentional use of flexible funding, equitable and adequate funding can be achieved and closing the racial achievement and opportunity gaps can begin to change the trajectory of African American student achievement (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010). The LCFF allows districts to allocate resources to support effective educational strategies that target district needs (Murray et al., 1998). Vestegen (2015) indicated that a comprehensive approach to resource accountability is fundamental to establishing the effectiveness of allocation of resources that will enable students to meet rigorous standards.

All participants indicated that metrics would assist with supporting decision-making practices to determine effective versus ineffective expenditures. Participant 1 noted, "My experience with resource accountability is that it is subjective and that there is not a high level of accountability to make sure resources are going to where they need to go." Participant 3 explained, "We need to determine if the use of funds is moving a district in the direction to obtain findings." Participant 6 specified, "I have a sense of accountability placed on myself regarding effectiveness. The board is looking for a return on investment." The literature connects to the findings of these administrators that determining the effectiveness of programs, practices, and procedures allows them to make better decisions based on the alignment of resources to impact student achievement.



## **Theme 5: Resource Allocation Methodology**

The LCFF simplified the state system for distributing funds to school districts. The adoption of the LCFF presented local education agencies the authority to use fiscal resources in new and innovative ways to improve the educational outcomes of all students, with a particular focus on historically underperforming student groups (Murray et al., 1998). The findings supported the literature that indicates a need for clarity in the allocation of resources. However, all participants reported their districts did not have a clearly articulated plan for the allocation of resources to African American students. Murphy (2017) agreed that district leaders would need to rethink budgeting allocation practices to ensure alignment with district priorities. Adopting strategic budgeting practices is a step toward developing an equitable and adequate system of resource allocation that responds to stakeholder recommendations and students needs to change the trajectory of their future (Murphy, 2017). Murphy also indicated that district administrators were working toward practices that would bring tighter alignment of the budget process with district needs assessments. Although LCFF has increased flexibility of spending, local education agencies are still faced with decisions regarding where best to allocate finite resources to support effective educational strategies that lead to improved student outcomes.

All 10 participants indicated that they had no clearly articulated criteria to allocate resources to African American students. Participant 3 stated, “I occasionally hear, from African American parents, it’s not fair that there is English Learner money. The conversation will go away when people begin to believe that you are making sure the students that need the support are getting it.” Participant 2 explained, “The unduplicated student groups are discussed a lot and targeted for professional development related to instructional strategies and social-emotional

strategies for those identified groups, but that does not necessarily include a focus on African American students.”

On the other hand, all 10 participants indicated that the LCAP development process is used to allocate resources for identified unduplicated student groups of Low-Income, English Learners, and Foster Youth. LCFF requires districts to engage their local stakeholders in an annual planning process to evaluate their progress within eight state priority areas encompassing all statutory metrics. Districts document the findings of this planning process in the LCAP template adopted by the State Board of Education. The LCAP planning process serves three distinct but related functions: (a) comprehensive strategic planning, (b) meaningful stakeholder engagement, and (c) accountability and compliance. Comprehensive strategic planning connects budgetary decisions to teaching and learning performance data.

#### **Theme 6: Voice: Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement**

The literature supports the participants’ findings that the voice of the people, advocates, and stakeholders is needed to make an educational change for all students, particularly African American students. The LCFF works at its best for students when voices are included from various agencies that have a vested interest in student achievement. Participants were not asked directly about their perceptions related to stakeholder engagement and resource allocations. Still, the theme emerged from each of the five interview questions and supported the literature related to the LCFF. The LCFF mandates that local education agencies utilize stakeholders to develop LCAPs that focus on resource accountability to close the achievement gap (Affeldt, 2015). The inclusion of the voice of people in the form of community advocates or stakeholders, as outlined in the LCFF, makes it evident that there is no accountability without transparency to the entire school community. Transparency paves the road for accountability of school spending to close

the achievement gap (Koppich et al., 2015). The LCFE shifts some spending control from the state to local education agencies and requires districts to consult with stakeholders, including parents, students, administrators, bargaining unions, other school personnel, and community partners to provide input on establishing funding priorities (Murphy, 2017). Verstegen's (2015) view supports the findings related to voice (advocacy and stakeholder engagement) to ensure access to sufficient resources to result in the same opportunities to achieve academic proficiency.

All 10 participants acknowledged that parent and student voice was a significant influence on resource allocations for African American students. Participant 1 stated, "If there is an advocacy group or political group in a community, and they interact with the district office leaders, then you will see specific initiatives that come out of that for African American students." Participant 3 indicated, "Listening to the voices of parents and students has led to ensuring that each of the eight state priorities is addressing African American students in some shape or form, and making sure that the resources are there to match it." Participant 7 affirmed, "Any time you have parents advocating for their kids, it's a wonderful opportunity."

### **Theme 7: Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

The literature supports all participants' responses regarding the need for culturally responsive school leadership. Culturally responsive school leadership acknowledges the historical challenges that the nation has faced concerning the education of African American students (Khalifa et al., 2016). The LCFE provides an opportunity for district leaders to hear the voices of students, parents, and the community to provide input on the needs of African American students.

The literature connects to the three areas that emerged from the findings related to culturally responsive leadership: (a) professional development (3 participants), (b) empathy (4

participants), and (c) mindset (3 participants). District administrators are in the position to bring about a culturally responsive environment that encompasses leadership behaviors that were aligned to the participants' findings. These district administrators indicated a need for professional development that links to the critical area of culturally responsive school leadership. Culturally responsive school leadership refers to behavior that relates to engaging the school community in critical self-awareness of culture and race, along with managing the instructional program that is inclusive of culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation. The participants' responses revealed empathy as critical to culturally responsive school leadership practices that link leaders to being responsive and willing to change the culture of the school. Also, culturally responsive school leaders focus on inclusive school environments and engaging students and parents in the community. Culturally responsive school leaders build welcoming community environments linked to the participants' findings related to empathy. The findings were supported by research by Khalifa et al. (2016) that indicated a need to build relationships with staff, parents, and students to provide quality service to the district and school communities that they serve.

Participant 1 stated, "Culturally responsive school leadership is messy, and it's touchy because if you are a person of color, and you believe this is important, people will make assumptions that you believe this is important because you are a person of color." Participant 2 acknowledged that district leadership and all staff should have training to support students. Participant 2 stated, "There is a need for staff and administrators, especially with diverse populations, to understand the needs of students and how they might be different." Participant 4 stated, "You need a leader who is willing to have the conversations and build that culture." The literature supported the participants' agreement that culturally responsive school leadership

practices are a necessary component to ensure that school leaders promote inclusivity, integrate student culture, and establish spaces for engaging the community within the school.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**

Chapter 2 described the theoretical frameworks that guided this research study: critical race theory and culturally responsive school leadership. The theoretical frameworks and their connection to the findings are discussed in the following sections.

#### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory challenges the foundation of equality and provides legal reasoning and a construct to the order and design of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this study, critical race theory provided a framework to address subtle and unconscious forms of racism. These district administrators indicated that the LCAP indirectly addresses African American students. Therefore, California's weighted funding formula that was intended to close the achievement gap may perpetuate the persistent achievement gap of African American students.

The LCFF statutory regulations were essential to the study. They provided the policy that participants indicated was not clear in its intention to provide explicit resource allocations to African American students. Critical race theory, at its essence, is an attempt to understand the social and political context in which marginalized people live and to transform lives for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory in education focuses on application of deficit theory as an educational approach that has hindered achievement outcomes for marginalized students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) concluded that, unlike other theories, critical race theory contains a dimension of activism, which is a call not only to identify the inequalities in society but to transform those wrongs through intentional action. The findings of the study indicated that, although district administrators want to support

historically underperforming student groups, their moral imperative is conflicted and challenged based on policies and practices that may contradict current practice.

This study focused on the intent of the LCFF, compared to the broader political context of policy versus practice. Most educators understand that the moral imperative of their work is to provide a quality education for all students. At times, in the face of the moral imperative, conflicts related to the allocation of resources for African American students can be challenging, regardless of student data findings. Critical race theory concedes that racism is difficult to address because it is not acknowledged and that society prefers to be neutral or color blind about race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory aims to develop a self-awareness of common issues that are uncomfortable and seeks to bring out the fact that race permeates all aspects of life, whether or not it is perceived (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) concluded that, regardless of changes in society, racism continues to hold a place that is evident for people of color, irrespective of social or economic capital.

Based on the findings, the critical race theory framework provides tools to challenge and analyze the historical structures that create and maintain racial inequalities in education through the lens of practices that impact resource allocations from the perspective of administrators (Jennings & Marvin, 2005). The participants indicated that, although there is flexible funding in the new system, it does not appear that district administrators are taking the opportunity to dismantle previous discriminatory practices. Districts have the opportunity to build an education system that learns from and supports achievement by African American students. The LCFF is a critical factor in moving African American student achievement forward; it is consistent with critical race theory that the LCFF will be challenged to assist with moving African American

student achievement forward or succumb to race playing a part in perpetuating low student performance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

When comparing the findings of the study to the literature on culturally responsive school leadership, 9 of the 10 participants indicated that this was a need in all school districts. Culturally responsive school leadership was a theoretical framework used to support the research study that focused on the district administrators' decision-making practices related to LCFF resources and African American student achievement. Although there are research-based cultural and pedagogical strategies that support African American students, a change in California's statewide system of school funding and resource accountability is an opportunity to close the achievement gap, as indicated in the participants' interviews. The participants reported that LCFF provides an opportunity for district leaders to hear the voices of students, parents, and the community to provide input on the needs of students. Still, the intentional connection to being responsive to African American student needs is hindered based on explicit language in the policy.

The research findings supported the theoretical framework that what appears to be missing in the new model of school leadership training is a focus on culturally responsive school leadership. Culturally responsive school leadership focuses on culturally responsive education reform and social justice school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). The findings participants indicated a need to support administrators to foster an entire school environment responsive to student cultures and advocate for community needs (Khalifa et al., 2016). Gay (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2004) suggested that school leaders have a mandate similar to that charged to teachers: to understand the social and cultural needs of students. Still, this form of leadership training has not spread to school administrators who are a critical part of school reform. Branch

et al. (2013) validated that the principal is the most recognized leader in a school and is empowered by district and state policies regarding the education of students. The findings support the connection to the theoretical framework that indicates that the behavior of culturally responsive school leadership has promise for schools and the leaders who serve students. Culturally responsive school leadership can be used to focus on resisting exclusionary practices, promoting inclusivity, and integrating student culture in all aspects of the school. Nine of the 10 participants agreed that culturally responsive school leadership is needed to move the conversations to actions regarding African American student achievement.

### **Implications for Practice**

It is essential to understand how the decision-making practices of district administrators regarding resource accountability and resource allocations influence the trajectory of African American student achievement in public schools. This research has implications relative to researchers, district administrators, and policy makers. This research serves as a resource for educators to assist them with understanding how decisions relating to the LCFF resource allocations made by district administrators were perceived to address African American student achievement in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12 public schools in California.

The study increased awareness of LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices at the district level that impact African American student achievement. The intent of the LCFF as it pertains to resource allocation and closing the achievement gap was explored. The study examined factors that impact the district administrator's decision-making practices regarding students of color. These factors are presumably based on race, socioeconomic status, and bias perceptions that are validated only by stereotypes, misinformation, and a lack of intentional awareness. The overall findings indicated the following: (a) a need for state and district clarity



regarding the LCFF statutory regulations, (b) increased voice by African American advocates and or stakeholders at the local level, (c) metrics to determine effective versus ineffective expenditures, (e) a methodology for allocating resources, and (e) professional development relating to culturally responsive school leadership.

This study contributes to the awareness and improvement of decision-making practices in the field of education related to resource allocations to improve student achievement by African Americans. The role of district administrators as critical participant in the decision-making process related to resource allocation practices in the educational system must be examined. Examining the role of district administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit the LCAP for review and approval allowed the focus to be on equitable resource allocation decision-making and improved equitable outcomes.

### **Limitations of the Research Study**

The limitations of the study can be attributed to the area focus for the research project. This phenomenological research study focused on district administrators' lived experiences with resource allocation and how their perceptions influence efforts to address the academic achievement of African American students. Equity and coherence, stakeholder engagement, school-level administrators, and research design can be viewed as limitations of the study.

### **Equity and Coherence**

Equity and coherence relate to the intent of the LCFF that was not fully explored in this research study. The focus of this research study did not consider development of goals and actions written in the LCAP to support African American student achievement. Implicit bias or pedagogy was not explored relating to the LCFF's intent to close the achievement gap. Steel and Aronson (1998) suggested that "stereotype threats" contribute to the achievement gap. Lee and

Wong (2004) focused on cultural mismatches as reasons for the achievement gap in education. Gay (2010) focused on the school and culturally relevant curriculum as a reason for the achievement gap. Darling-Hammond (2015) focused on culturally relevant teaching practices as those that can increase or decrease the gap.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The LCFF has several aspects of implementation that go beyond resource allocation to include stakeholder engagement as critical to decision-making practices. The main goal of the LCFF is to increase transparency, subsidiarity (local control), and accountability of school spending to close the achievement gap (Koppich et al., 2015). Districts are required to include stakeholders as part of transparency with funding to ensure a quality education for all students based on student needs. Stakeholder engagement includes parents, students, administrators, bargaining unions, other school personnel, and community partners' input on establishing funding priorities. Hearing the voices of all stakeholders in the decision-making process could provide depth to the findings.

### **School-Level Administrators**

This research study focused on district administrators' experiences with resource allocation and how they influence efforts to address academic achievement by American students. The sole focus on district administrators limited the study to one group of stakeholders that could have been interviewed for the research study.

### **Research Design**

The research design could be seen as a limitation because it relied on lived experiences of participants from one southern California county. Ten participants were interviewed. Broader sample sizes could have provided a more extensive perspective related to the lived experiences

of district-level administrators' decision-making practices. Districts in other southern California counties could offer expectations to the budgeting process that may or may not confirm the findings of this study.

The study relied on the researcher's ability to separate personal biases from the findings (Creswel & Pothl, 2017). Interpreting the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of participants leaves room for unintended outcomes. Participants may have been uncomfortable in answering questions that could be seen as controversial as they related to personal beliefs about race and equity. Interviewing requires researchers to have enough distance to enable them to ask real questions and not share assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher must take a stance that is nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the participant.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

District administrator training and alignment of local policies and practices on the following are recommendations for implementation to support inclusion of African American students in the LCFF discussions that lead to actions. Professional development regarding the LCFF statutory regulations related to writing actions and allocating funding explicitly to support African American students (McLaughlin, 2007; Sperling & Vaughan, 2009; B. L. Walker, 2014). It is recommended to implement an approach to support districts by increasing the voice of African American advocates and or stakeholders at the local level to address the needs of African American students (Affeldt, 2015). It is recommended to offer professional development regarding the selection of metrics to monitor and measure the effective or ineffective expenditures that ensure the strategic alignment of resources to meet student needs (Cooper, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gay, 2010; Murray et al., 1998). Implementation of a methodology and protocol tool to support alignment and allocation of resources to student needs

would support the intent of the LCFF's purpose pertaining to transparency (resources), subsidiarity (local control), and closing the achievement gap (Baker et al., 2016a). Professional development related to culturally responsive school leadership could promote the following: (a) critical self-awareness or consciousness awareness of culture and race, (b) culturally responsive monitoring of the instructional program and a leader who is willing to coach teachers or have explicit conversations with teachers who are not responsive, (c) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments and a leader who is willing to change the culture of the school, and (d) engagement of students and parents in the context of the community by building welcoming community environments (Khalifa et al., 2016).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While the researcher agrees that a phenomenological research study was the right choice to focus on district administrators' lived experiences, qualitative research tools such as interviews are not designed to capture quantitative data. A focus on equity and coherence, stakeholder engagement, school-level administrators, and research design are recommendations for future research.

Equity and coherence relate to the intent of the LCFF that was not fully explored in this research study. A recommendation is for future studies to focus on development of goals and actions written in the LCAP to support African American student achievement. Implicit bias or pedagogy was not explored relating to the LCFF's intent to close the achievement gap. Steel and Aronson (1998) put forth the idea of "stereotype threats" as contributing to the achievement gap. Gay (2010) focused on the school and culturally relevant curriculum as a reason for the achievement gap. Development of goals and actions to address the needs of African American

students is a topic for future research that has not been explored in the literature on LCFF and LCAPs.

Stakeholder engagement is critical to decision-making practices. Another goal of the LCFF is to increase transparency, subsidiarity (local control), and accountability for school spending to close the achievement gap (Koppich et al., 2015). Districts are required to include stakeholders as part of transparency with funding to ensure a quality education for all students based on student needs. Stakeholder engagement includes input by parents, students, administrators, bargaining unions, other school personnel, and community partners on establishing funding priorities. Adding the voices of African American parents and students in the decision-making process could provide additional depth to the research and add to the field as it relates to meaningful stakeholder engagement as it pertains to the LCFF statutory regulations.

This research study focused on district administrators' experiences with resource allocation and how they influence their efforts to address academic achievement by African American students. A recommendation for future research is to capture data from school-level administrators regarding their experiences with resource allocation and academic achievement by African American students. The LCFF and LCAP have been in existence since 2013, but there is no specific research on administrators' perceptions relating directly to the impact of the LCAP on African American student achievement.

More credibility could be given to this study if it were coupled with quantitative research. For example, a mixed-methods research design that incorporated surveys to collect data and subsequent statistical analysis might offer evidence to strengthen the data that were collected using qualitative research tools. Ten participants were interviewed for the study. Broader sample

sizes could provide a more comprehensive perspective of the lived experiences of district-level administrators regarding their decision-making practices. Districts in other southern California counties could offer expectations to the budgeting process that might or might not confirm the findings of this study. Recommendations for future research are to incorporate quantitative data, broaden the sample size, and extend the research to include more than one county.

### **Discussion**

There has been an ongoing debate regarding whether the increase in financial resources to public schools improves academic outcomes for all students, in particular student groups that have historically been underserved and underperforming (Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015). Since the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), many have questioned whether school spending affects student outcomes. School finance reforms that began in the early 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s caused some of the most dramatic changes in the structure of K–12 education spending in U.S. history (Card & Payne, 2002; Hoxby, 2001; Jackson, 2018; Jackson et al., 2015; Murray et al., 1998). The motivation behind school finance reforms was to reduce gaps in educational opportunities and the economic well-being of children from poor and affluent families. Coleman (1966), Card and Payne (2002), Downes and Figlio (1997), Hoxby (2001), Jackson (2018), Jackson et al. (2015), Murray et al. (1998), and Papke (2005) indicated that the evidence relating to the impact of school finance reforms on academic achievement was mixed.

A large amount of research has focused on the relationship between resources devoted to schools and student performance, as well as the resulting policy implications (Hanushek, 1986, 1989, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2016; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Hedges et al., 1994). The LCFF is California's attempt to move the decision-making power to the local level, closest to the

students, where stakeholders who have a vested interest in achievement by all students can provide input on how best to allocate resources for student achievement.

The shift in funding was from a mostly state-controlled system to one in which decisions about education goals, priorities, and resource allocation are made at the district level based on local needs. In response to the change in school funding in California that focuses on transparency (resources), subsidiarity (local control), and closing the achievement gap (educational equity), school district administrators' decision-making practices are critical (Murray et al., 2018). Districts that develop and integrate a budget planning process to support the alignment of goals, actions, and measurable objectives can make a significant impact on the consistency and sustainability of student achievement by historically underperforming student groups.

### **Conclusion**

Biggs (1992), Cohen et al. (2012), B. L. Walker (2014), and V. S. Walker (1996) focused on the long-standing debate regarding achievement by African American students since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling. African Americans have faced not only racial segregation but deeply ingrained denial of opportunities that education provides (B. L. Walker, 2014; V. S. Walker, 1996). The idea that the achievement gap for African American students still exists is one that educators may feel is out of their control. As achievement continues to suffer among students in urban areas with inadequate resources, there has been an attempt to combat the issue of inequities in education through adoption of flexible funding models (Baker, 2016). The persistent challenge of closing the achievement gap for African American students is one that must be addressed for the benefit of the democracy, nation, state, and communities (Baker et al., 2016b; Barton & Coley, 2010; Cohen et al., 2012).

It has often been stated that the LCFF provides California with a “golden opportunity” to change the narrative of student achievement (Fullan, 2015; Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2017; Imazeki, 2011). California has not only the opportunity to change the narrative of achievement for all students but, in particular, the “golden opportunity” to change the narrative of achievement by African American students (Baltazar-Sabbah, 2017).

This qualitative phenomenological research study explored district administrators’ lived experiences and perceptions of LCFF resources and their influence on African American student achievement. This study brought attention to the LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices made by administrators and their impact on African American students. There was a need to study this topic because of the limited research focusing on administrators who lead, develop, write, or submit for review and approval the LCAP to County Offices of Education and their direct impact on African American student achievement.

Based on the participants’ answers to the five interview questions, the findings suggested seven themes related to administrators’ decision-making practices with regard to LCFF resource allocations: (a) African American students indirectly addressed by LCFF, (b) African American achievement indirectly impacted by LCFF, (c) LCFF statutory regulations: intentional policy and practice, (d) LCFF metrics to determine effective versus ineffective expenditures, (e) LCFF resource allocation methodology, (f) LCFF voice: advocacy and stakeholder engagement, and (g) culturally responsive school leadership. The themes indicated a gap in the intent of LCFF and the actions that administrators take when faced with decisions related to allocation of resources to student groups that are not identified in the LCFF statutory regulations (Affeldt, 2015).

The application of critical race theory as one of the theoretical frameworks calls out the possibility that the LCFF language in and of itself may demonstrate subtle and unconscious bias.



The intent of the LCFF is to support transparency of district budgets through stakeholder engagement and subsidiarity, which focuses on the position that decision-making is best at the local level, and closing the achievement gap for historically underperforming student groups. The literature review confirmed the long-standing achievement gap for African American students that emerged in 1966 (Coleman, 1966). Although the LCFF is intended to close the achievement gap, it is imperative to recognize that, for African Americans, there is a strong connection to lack of achievement and race. Critical race theory supports the need for California to acknowledge that the persistent issues in the education of African American students are connected to race, perceived or not perceived (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). That being said and substantiated by the research findings, LCFF without intentional language to address African American students may continue to perpetuate long-standing underperformance because the lack of resources will unintentionally not be specifically targeted to improve African American student achievement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The critical race theory framework provides tools to challenge and analyze the historical structures that create and maintain racial inequalities in education through the lens of practices that impact resource allocations from the perspective of administrators (Jennings & Marvin, 2005). The research study supported the concept of resource allocation, without resource accountability, which addresses the monitoring and measuring of the effectiveness of resource allocations, is key to closing the achievement gap. The question then becomes whether districts will make the connection of long-standing achievement gaps for African American students with the lack of opportunity and access to increase student achievement, must have a historical and societal connection to race?

Although the participants in this study presented themselves as competent and experienced district administrators who generally love their work, there were concerns regarding

the sensitive nature of how to focus on African American students. The participants grappled with the political realities of district culture and climate, along with community support related to a focus on African American student achievement. The commonality among the participants was their will to improve African American student achievement. Still, they alluded to needing the policy to assist them to move the conversation in their district and the broader community that would give them leverage to address social justice issues related to persistent underperformance by African American students. As California continues to employ local control and stakeholders as part of the decision-making practices, future studies related to the LCAP may focus on how the plan is addressing the academic needs of African American students to close the persistent achievement gap. Until then, there may still be evidence of what districts know they should do and what they actually do to improve academic achievement by African American students.

### **Summary**

This research study of district administrator's perceptions and lived experiences with LCFF and African American student achievement revealed common findings and the need for additional training related to the following: LCFF statutory regulations, stakeholder engagement, metrics that determine effective or ineffective programs and/or practices, methodology and tools to support consistency in the allocation of resources, and culturally responsive school leadership (equity). The literature highlights the intent of the LCFF, the rationale for resource accountability, and culturally responsive school leadership. The historical problem is to how to address African American student achievement. Educators know that the gap exists, but approaching the conversation in a way to intentionally create district and school environments that are receptive and open to the discussion continues to be a challenge.

District administrators must use the intent of the LCF, to break the cycle of historical underperformance by African American students. Differentiated funding to achieve equity is the foundation of the LCFF. The goal is to bring equity to the mindset of resource allocation through engagement of a broad and representative community in decisions about local goals and priorities to improve educational achievement by all students. The passage of the LCFF in 2013 marked replacement of a 40-year-old funding formula and the beginning of California's new era of school finance. With a focus on equity, community engagement, and local control, the LCFF is intended to level the playing field for all students. It eliminated more than 40 categorical funding streams, providing districts flexibility to make decisions regarding resource allocations to close the achievement gap for historically underserved and underperforming student groups (Humphrey et al., 2014; Humphrey et al., 2017; Koppich & Humphrey, 2018; Koppich et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016). The change in funding public schools in California provides a unique opportunity to address the persistent achievement gaps of African American students. As districts in California engage stakeholders in the LCFF decision-making process, intentionality must be given to allocating resources to support African American students. The time is now to take advantage of California's flexible funding formula and address the academic needs and persistent low performance by African American students.

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Appendix A  
Introductory Letter

October 8, 2019

Name  
XXXX District  
Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear XXXX:

This fall I would like to recruit and conduct research in the XXXX School District with district administrators that lead, develop, write, and/or submit for review and approval the LCAP (LCAP) to the [REDACTED] based on district identification. The intent of the research study is to acquire valuable information that may be used to better inform district policies and administrative practices related to closing the achievement gap.

The qualitative phenomenological research study will explore the views on how district office level administrators' experiences with LCFF resources influence African American student achievement.

In your district, I would like to conduct one to two open-ended interviews with district office administrators concerning their views on LCFF resource allocation decision-making practices, with an emphasis on African American student achievement. A total of 10 to 15 district office administrators will participate in the research study. I would like to gain insight regarding current LCFF resource allocation practices instituted by administrators at the district office level. The study will also attempt to determine if the views and lived experiences of district level administrators are consistent with published research on school practices that impact African American student outcomes.

The interviews will take no longer than one hour to complete and will not be conducted during work hours. Also, the interviews will be conducted at a time and location convenient for the participant. The identity of the participant and District will not be reported in the study. District administrator participation in the study is voluntary. A summary of the research findings will be provided by email/mail delivery upon request following completion of the study.

I am seeking your District participation in the research study that will produce valuable information to the field of education, and in particular as it relates to LCFF decision-making practices and the impact on closing the achievement gap. I want to assure you that the research project is independent of [REDACTED]. Agreeing to participate in the research study does not bind your District and/or you to be part of [REDACTED] research project. Districts and/or employees of the districts will not be required to participate in order to protect the working relationship and role of [REDACTED] between districts and/or employees of the districts in [REDACTED]. If you are interested in participating in the study or have any questions, please contact [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

*Robin E. McIver-Brown*  
Robin E. McIver-Brown  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Redlands

Appendix B  
District Consent Form



**Place on District Letterhead**

October 3, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I am writing to grant Robin McIver-Brown permission to conduct her research titled *The California Way – LCFF: The Role of Administrators in Determining the Trajectory of African American Student Achievement* within the XXXX School District. I understand that Robin McIver-Brown will recruit up to two employees and conduct interviews over the next eight to ten weeks. We are happy to participate in this study and contribute to this important research. We have agreed to the following research study procedures:

- Interviews will be conducted over the next eight to ten weeks with district office administrators that lead, develop, write, and/or submit for review and approval the LCAP.
- The interviews will not take place during the work hours of the employees.
- The interviews will take place at the employees district or at the [REDACTED].
- The interviews will take approximately one hour to complete.
- The identity of the administrators and districts will not be reported in the research study.
- A summary of the research study findings will be provided upon request via email/mail following completion of the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and employees of the district may withdraw from the study at any time.

Sincerely,

Title

Appendix C  
Institutional Review Board Approval

November 1, 2019

Robin McIver-Brown  
University of Redlands,  
CA 92373-0999

Dear Robin:

**TITLE OF PROPOSAL: The California way...**

**DATE OF REVIEW: 11/1/2019**

**DECISION: Approved**

**IRB APPROVAL #: 2019-53-REDLANDS**

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your revised project by the University of Redlands Institutional Review Board (IRB).

You are authorized to begin conducting this study as of Date of Final Approval: 11/1/2019. This approval is Valid Until: 11/1/2020.

Please note the following conditions attached to all approval letters.

1. This project must be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the University's IRB Guidelines and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). These federal regulations are available online at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/documents/OHRPRegulations.pdf>.
2. You must notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the status of your research project.
3. You should report to the IRB any anticipated problems involving risks to the participants.
4. No participants may be involved in any study before the Date of Final Approval or after the Valid Until date.
5. Upon completion of the project, please submit a final report to the IRB. The form is on the IRB website.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Chair at [REDACTED]. A signed copy of this letter is on-file.

Sincerely,

**J** [REDACTED]  
Chair, IRB FWA  
00023072

Appendix D  
Participant Informed Consent

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**  
(For use with adult subjects only)

What follows is a consent form that explains what will be happening if you choose to participate in this research study. The first section (Investigator Information) should have been completed by the investigator. If this section is incomplete, do not continue with the study. Do not participate if this study has not been assigned an IRB approval number. The information you need to provide begins on Page 2. Please read each section carefully.

---

**Investigator Information (to be completed by Principle Investigator)**

IRB approval number: 2019-53-REDLANDS

Title of project: The California Way – LCFF: The Role of School Administrators in Determining the Trajectory of African American Students

Name of principle investigator (PI): Robin E. McIver-Brown

Email of PI: [REDACTED]

Telephone number of PI: [REDACTED]

Department or major of PI: School of Education

Position held by PI:

- faculty
- administrator/staff
- student

*If PI is a student or staff, complete the remainder of Investigator Information, otherwise go to next page.*

Name of faculty or administrator sponsor: [REDACTED]

Department or office of sponsor: School of Education

Position held by sponsor:

- faculty
- administrator

## **General information about this study**

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by Robin McIver-Brown from the University of Redlands in Redlands, California. This research study is independent of [REDACTED]. Districts and/or employees of the districts will not be required to participate, or you may stop participating at any time for any reason without any penalty, in order to protect the working relationship and role of [REDACTED] between districts and/or participants in [REDACTED].

The purpose of the study is to explore the views on how administrators' experiences with LCFF influence African American student achievement.

You are being asked to participate in this study that will interview 10-15 administrators to acquire valuable information that may be used to better inform district policies and administrative practices related to closing the achievement gap.

A summary of the findings can be provided at the conclusion of the study, and not dependent on publication.

## **Reasons why you should not participate in this study**

There are two possible risks that have been taken into consideration regarding this study:

1. First, having a person discuss LCFF resource allocation decisions you make as a district officer level administrator may be distressing. Therefore, the questions asked during the interview are not a level of intensity that will create undue stress. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a particular question during the interview, you have the right not to answer the question, ask the researcher to take a break, move on, terminate your involvement in the interview, or withdraw from the study all together. The researcher will also listen for signs of distress and will check your willingness to continue the conversation if any anxiety is detected.
2. Secondly, during the course of the interview, your responses will be audio recorded to ensure the accounts of your lived experiences are accurately transcribed and documented. Participants must be comfortable with their responses being audio recorded, no personal identifiable information will be asked, and all participants will be assigned a participant number for reference of collected data.

## **How long this will take (i.e., duration of participation)**

If you choose to participate in this study, your involvement will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview. This does not include the time to review the interview transcript which could take an additional 30 minutes after the completion of the transcription. The researcher will arrange a time for the participant to review their transcript.

## **What will happen if you participate in this study**

If you participate in this face-to-face study, you will be asked open-ended interview questions regarding how administrators' experiences with LCFF resources and their influence on African American student achievement.

## **Audiotaping**

You will be audiotaped.

## **Protecting your privacy**

All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. Participants will be assigned a participant number for reference of collected data. All the information gathered from the study, will be kept in a secure location and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the information will be deleted, shredded, or destroyed after a period of (2) years.

People who participate in this study will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep the research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is unlikely to happen, but if disclosure is required, the investigator will take whatever steps are allowable by law to protect the privacy of your personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University of Redlands, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

## **What will happen if you experience any problems or discomforts during or after your participation**

It is possible that there are unknown risks or discomforts. Please report any problems immediately to the researcher.

Anything you do, including participating in research, carries with it some chance that something problematic or unwanted may happen. Although the researcher may direct you to medical, psychological, or other services, any costs related to such problems are your or your insurance company's responsibility.

## **Questions about this study**

You may ask and have answered any question about the research. If you have any further questions or concerns, you should contact the Principle Investigator (PI) Robin McIver-Brown, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

## **Questions or concerns about the investigators, staff members, and your participation in the study**

This study is conducted under the supervision of [REDACTED] from the University of Redlands, School of Education. [REDACTED] can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

This study was approved by the University of Redlands Institutional Review Board (IRB). This board tries to ensure that your rights and welfare are protected if you choose to participate in the study. If you have any questions about your role or how you were treated by the research personnel, you may contact the Chair of the IRB at [REDACTED] or by telephone at [REDACTED].

## Participant's Agreement

I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Print Name Above

have read the information presented above. I have asked all questions I had at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant	Date

*To be completed by researcher:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date



Appendix E  
Interview Questions

- Do you feel LCFF addresses African American Student Achievement?
- What are your perceptions on how LCFF impacts achievement for African American students?
- How might LCFF funding be used to impact African American student achievement?
- Describe your experience with resource accountability?
- What criteria are used by district administrators to allocate resources for African American students?