

Excellence and Equity

Theories of Action
Board Workshop
March 18, 2026



VISION

Graduates of Long Beach Unified School District are future-ready. They are trustworthy, ethical and resilient, and are able to learn, collaborate and adapt to changing circumstances. They act confidently in the service of justice.

MISSION

Our mission is to prepare each student for a successful future by providing rigorous, culturally responsive and culturally sustaining learning experiences and removing barriers to student success in a school system that is equitable, affirming, and forward thinking.

THEORY OF ACTION

If we commit to providing high-quality instruction, and culturally responsive and culturally sustaining experiences, removing systemic barriers to student success, partnering with our community, and embracing liberatory mindsets and practices... **then we will** fully support all students, especially our Black students, to thrive in learning, life and career.



2024–2029 Strategic Plan

Creating a Better Future Together, our 2024–2029 Strategic Plan, is the first in a series of multi-year plans outlining the important steps we will take on the road toward realizing our vision. It covers four theme areas, with associated strategies, that will set the foundations for achieving our vision. All themes are necessary to help us achieve Vision 2035, especially the graduate portrait, for all students at LBUSD. Thank you for your engagement and support as we roll up our sleeves to make our plan a reality, and ensure the success of everyone at Long Beach Unified School District.

Theme 1: High-Quality Learning for Students

- Equitable access to high-quality learning experiences (Strategy 5)

Theme 2: Equitable and Liberatory District

- Dismantle systems of oppression by eliminating barriers to equitable access and outcomes (Strategy 3)
- Elevate and center Black students and families (Strategy 4)
- Develop a diverse workforce that reflects the community we serve and improves our system's cultural dexterity and inclusiveness (Strategy 7)

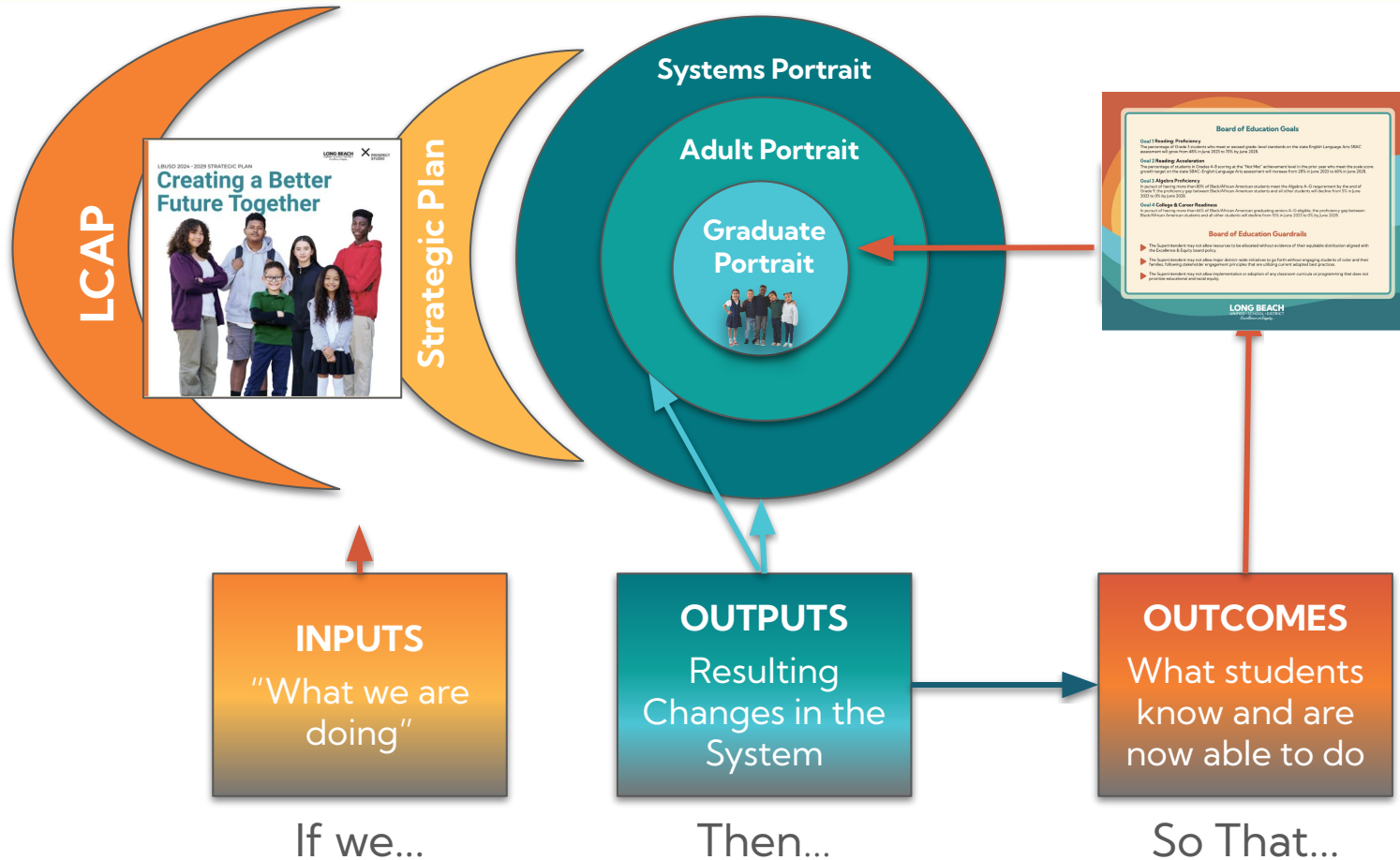
Theme 3: Partnering with Community

- Socialize the Vision and Strategic Plan (Strategy 2)
- Develop a system-wide practice of community engagement (Strategy 6)

Theme 4: Cultivating Transformative Change

- Establish a system-wide project management culture and practice (Strategy 1)
- Strengthen the sustainability and climate resilience of our school district (Strategy 9)
- Develop a coherent, system-wide culture and structure of adult learning (Strategy 8)

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Board Goal 1, Staff Theories of Action (not a complete list):

- If all K–3 teachers participate in high–quality, evidence–based learning experiences that support the classroom implementation of structured literacy, then instructional consistency and teacher efficacy will increase, resulting in a higher percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade–level reading standards by the end of 3rd grade.
- If all K–3 teachers effectively implement structured literacy instructional practices, then increasing numbers of students will reach grade level literacy standards.
- If principals provide precise and actionable feedback to K–3 teachers on structured literacy practices, teachers will enhance their skills in effectively teaching reading resulting in an increased number of students reaching grade level literacy standards.
- If principal supervisors provide actionable feedback on literacy practices, then principals will strengthen their instructional leadership and refine their practice, align expectations, and ensure consistent, high–quality support for teaching and learning across schools.
- If we collect, maintain, and report accurate data, facilitate testing, and use current technology to provide useful and timely information aligned to Board Goals, then staff will have the information they need to support positive student outcomes and increase achievement.
- If principals effectively use data reports and Collaborative Data Study protocol with teachers, classroom actions will reflect the needs of students.

A Special Guardrail: Theories of Action

One of the problems that school systems face as they grow is that it can be tough to get any kind of behavior alignment among the adults, especially if it's not possible to get everyone together in the same place at the same time. The larger the system, the more tools you can benefit from that are aimed at helping people understand how to work in an aligned fashion. So as school systems grow, instead of only having standard Guardrails that protect the community's values, it can be beneficial for the board to collaborate with the superintendent to define a special type of Guardrail: a Theory of Action.

A Theory of Action is a set of high level strategies to which all school system inputs and outputs must be aligned. Because a theory of action is effectively committing a school system to a set of strategies (inputs), they should not be adopted lightly. Normally coaching is that school boards should be agnostic regarding adult inputs; the focus must be student outcomes. But some strategies are so deeply ingrained in a school system's DNA that the school system would rather put in the work to address ineffective implementation than make the completely reasonable choice to reconsider the strategy altogether. These are generally strategies that the school system has built or is building its identity around which is what makes them non-negotiables. Examples include school systems that chose to:

- Bet big on birth-to-kindergarten strategies (nurse family partnership → parents as teachers → preK → kindergarten)
- Focus on all students graduating with an associates degree (redesigned from preK through 12th grade to accomplish this)
- Pay highly effective elementary school teachers 6 figures if they serve in the lowest performing schools
- Implement a system of great school approach or an earned autonomy approach
- Deploy student led restorative practices as a central, guiding tenet of high school design.

Such an approach, when adopted by a school board, also becomes a key filter for which future staff – and particularly superintendent – are appropriate or not since you would only want staff who both believe in and are proficient with the strategies in the Theory of Action. This is a part of what makes a Theory of Action a powerful alignment tool.

To accomplish this function, Theories of Action have a few unique properties:

- If a board opts not to adopt a Theory of Action, that doesn't preclude a superintendent from crafting their own for managerial purposes. For this reason, it's common for the superintendent to have one but the board not to have one. This is different from Goals and other Guardrails; it is not appropriate for the superintendent to assume the role of representing the vision and values of the community.
- Instead of using "shall not" to protect the community's values, a Theory of Action Guardrail uses "if-then" statements. Both standard Guardrails and Theory of Action Guardrails accomplish protection, they just do so through different means.
- Whereas standard Guardrails are focused on more general values held by the community, a Theory of Action is narrowly focused on implementation-level values that are informed by both the community's values and operational insights from the superintendent.
- A Theory of Action is usually made up of ~3 "if" statements that describe the non-negotiable high-level strategies that are believed to be critical to accomplishment of the Goals while honoring the Guardrails.

- A Theory of Action does not have interim measures.

Theory of Action Selection Process

The steps that follow guide a board through development and adoption of a Theory of Action.

Step 1: Sources

With Theory of Action selection there are two important sources of information that must be considered: community values and superintendent recommendations. (This is similar to goal selection, but with goals the two sources are community vision and student data).

Have the board go over the community's values (ideally already collected for the goals/guardrails adoption process) and have the superintendent present their recommendations regarding the most important managerial strategies needed to accomplish the goals (preferably in a 1-3 page document; definitely no more).

Step 2: Brainstorm

Have each board member and the superintendent write down no more than five potential "if" statements based on the sources. Then pair them up and have each pair identify no more than four. Then pair up pairs and have each quad identify no more than three. Then, as a full governance team, discuss the top selections to discuss potential combinations.

Step 3: Prioritization

Have the superintendent take the results of the brainstorming and bring back a coherent proposed draft. The board should discuss and revise as needed. Key questions to ask during this step include:

- What are examples of reasonable educational strategies that would be disallowed by this Theory of Action? If you can't think of any, it's probably a trash Theory of Action; if it doesn't clarify what strategic approaches are off limits, it's not very useful.
- Would this Theory of Action challenge the organization and require adult behavior change? If it's just a feel good list or a list of stuff that's already happening, it's not very useful.
- In what ways would deployment of this Theory of Action support the district's accomplishment of the goals? If this doesn't create clarity about the path to the goals, it's not very useful.
- Which existing strategies will this Theory of Action obligate the district to strategically abandon? If this doesn't trigger and guide a strategic abandonment process, it's not very useful.

Step 4: Communication

The board engages with stakeholders, gets feedback, and, where necessary, refines.

Step 5: Adoption

The board adopts the final Theory of Action.

Examples of Theories of Action may be found in the SOFG Manual: <http://tinyurl.com/SOFG-Manual>.

From the Student Outcome Focused Governance Manual...

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From the Student Outcome Focused Governance Manual...

THEORY OF ACTION EXAMPLES

Sample Theories of Action:

- *Some of these examples are drawn from current or proposed Theories of Action from CGCS member school systems (or adaptations of their policy that meet the Theories of Action definition).*
- **Managed Instruction:**
 - If instructional materials and methods are directed by the central office to ensure that students experience consistency and quality of instructional delivery across a system of campuses;
 - Then central office will be responsible for accomplishing the Board's goals while operating within the Board's other guardrails.
- **Earned Autonomy:**
 - If the central office directly operates some schools and grants varying levels of autonomy to other schools; and
 - If the central office clearly defines operational thresholds that deserve higher levels of autonomy, and the specific autonomies earned, consistent with Board goals and guardrails;
 - Then responsibility for accomplishing the Board's goals while operating within the Board's guardrails will vary between central office and school leaders based on school-level operational capacity and student outcomes.
- **Performance Empowerment:**
 - If the central office devolves autonomy to schools; and
 - If the central office empowers parents to make choices among schools operated by differing partners; and
 - If the central office creates performance contracts with schools, annually evaluates performance of and demand for schools, and makes strategic decisions regarding growing access to high performing schools and addressing low performers;
 - Then school performance contracts will require the school to accomplish the Board's goals while operating within the Board's other guardrails.

Options for the Board to Consider

- Develop a board-level theory of action
- Don't develop a board-level theory of action
- Consider developing a board-level theory of action as part of the next regular update/adoption of Goals & Guardrails
- Other ideas?

Questions & Discussion

