A Racial Justice Equity Plan to Recovery

STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND INVESTMENTS FOR HIGH AND HIGHEST NEED SCHOOLS IN LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PREPARED BY
THE EQUITY ALLIANCE FOR LA’S KIDS
About

YOUTH LEADERS AND ADVOCATES

The Equity Alliance for LA’s Kids is made up of organizations that understand the need to push for comprehensive change in order to address the systems that uphold the legacy of white supremacy through institutionalized racism. The fight for racial justice is one that exists beyond, but includes, the fight for education. At no time has the education system ever served the unique needs of non-white and non-affluent communities but historically marginalized communities have taken up the fight to push for a vision that has created opportunities that move us forward to a racially just and equitable system that addresses current and long-standing gaps.
COVID-19 Impact

HIGH DISPARITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated historic racial and economic inequities in the education system and continues to threaten educational opportunity for far too many students, disproportionately impacting youth living in highest need communities that largely serve the need of low-income Black and Brown families. Schools in highest need areas face the tremendous challenge of educating and supporting students and families under the new challenges of the pandemic while also overcoming pre-existing constraints of being left on the margins of core decision-making that results in schools being under-resourced and underfunded. The Equity Alliance for LA’s kids urges the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to respond to the pandemic with a racial justice equity approach. A racial justice approach requires concrete action steps that support the disproportionate impact of the pandemic.

The current pandemic has punctuated the importance, responsibility, and opportunity to move forward bold racially just policies, like the Student Equity Needs Index (SENI) adopted from the Equity is Justice 2.0 Resolution.
What is SENI?

COMMUNITY DRIVEN

The Student Equity Need Index or “SENI” is a student-based equity need index used to inform the allocation of funds so that LAUSD can efficiently address the achievement gap. The Index includes indicators that measure percentages of targeted student populations, academic and community indicators that determine Highest, High, Moderate, Low, and Lowest need schools throughout all school levels in LAUSD.
Background

LAUSD’S COVID-19 RESPONSE

Despite the LAUSD’s efforts to respond to the rapid needs of families throughout the pandemic and taking steps to develop a distance learning system that equips all students, the severity of the digital divide has persisted and deepened. Families in South LA, East LA and parts of the San Fernando Valley with Black and Latinx students attending high and highest need schools are deeply concerned by the hurdles they are facing as far too many students are disengaged from their learning and families are not given enough support to assist their child. The systems of support for students, families, and school leaders have not been designed to sufficiently engage the highest needs students, and more and more of our Black and Latinx students are falling through the widening cracks, starting from our very youngest students.

These disparities have been documented through the LAUSD’s independent report. The report found that youth who demonstrated lower student engagement in distance learning were Black, Hispanic/Latino, English Learners, students living in low-income households, have a disability, are homeless or in the foster care system—the very populations our highest need schools serve. It is clear the pandemic is not impacting every family, every student, or every school community equally. There is an urgent need for equity in action now.

A Racial Justice Equity Plan to Recovery is a platform that offers the LAUSD solutions that ensure a greater commitment to equity investments and targeted supports. For the 2021-22 budget year, we respectfully request the LAUSD move an additional $282 million into the SENI funding formula and
commit to moving all of the $1.1 billion of LCFF supplemental and concentration dollars into the SENI by 2024.

Solutions

THE RACIAL JUSTICE EQUITY PLAN TO RECOVERY

We offer the following equity centered investments as a path towards recovery to ensure all students are given the opportunity to succeed for the 2020-2021 school year while recognizing that true transformation requires long-term work. First, we offer a path forward to move the LAUSD to center equity in their budget. Second, we recommend creating an Office of Equity to create critical infrastructure and capacity to move towards equity-based funding, support equity programmatic interventions and lead culture and narrative shifts across the LAUSD. We then offer distance learning recommendations and programs that should be invested in at high and highest need schools. True to the vision of SENI, schools should be given local flexibility and support to choose the best programs that meet the unique contours of their school community.

1. **PROTECT AND DOUBLE EQUITY BASED FUNDING FOR 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR.**
   
   It is paramount that highest need schools are given the necessary financial backing to weather this pandemic. The SENI dramatically sharpened equity in the LAUSD by ensuring the allocation of additional dollars for high and highest need schools. These investments have allowed for the creation of math collaboratives, investments in mental health services, additional counseling services, new curriculum materials, administrative capacity to promote necessary interventions, and Assistant Principals. This targeted funding translated into very real changes to school
campuses and is crucial to supporting our highest need students during distance learning. Given the devastating effects of the pandemic, greater investments in equity-based funding for highest needs school communities is needed now more than ever.

The “Worth It: Eight Ways to Prioritize Equity in LA Unified’s Budget” report provides a detailed path forward for the LAUSD to build a more equitable and effective budget. In alignment with the report, the Equity Alliance for LA’s Kids respectfully requests the LAUSD take the following steps to prioritize equity-based funding:

Short-term:

a. Move an additional $282 million into the SENI funding formula for the 2021-22 budget year.

b. Phase out the $24 million SENI hold harmless provision and reinvest funds in the SENI funding formula for the 2021-22 school year.

c. Use the SENI as the mechanism to target any future resources or funding streams that the LAUSD receives this year and in the future.

d. Use the SENI as the basis for distribution and protection when cuts are made to other areas of the budget or when equitable programs sunset.

e. Protect carryover dollars for high and highest need schools as determined by the SENI. A significant portion of carryover comes from vacant positions, unused health benefits, and other funds throughout the year that schools cannot necessarily access until the end of the year. Highest need schools are more likely to experience fluctuations and vacancies in their staffing throughout the year and are more likely to have carryover funding. Therefore, sweeping carryover funds will result in a redistribution of
revenue away from the very same high need schools that need those dollars most.

**Mid-term to Long-term:**

a. Sustain the Primary Promise program for high and highest need schools to ensure long-term impact.

b. Allocate at a minimum $1.1 billion of LCFF supplemental and concentration funds into the SENI formula to ensure high and high-need schools receive more funding on a per-student basis by 2024.

2. **OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY.**

Create a well-staffed and well-funded Office of Racial Equity to allow for greater capacity, funding, and accountability to implement equity-based investments, systemic supports to address the needs of historically underserved students and mandatory all staff trainings to undo structural racism and support culture and narrative shift across the LAUSD. A successful Office of Racial Equity should include the following components:

a. **Community Driven.** The design of the Office should be informed by a community taskforce. Once established, the Office should prioritize trust and relationship building with community-based organizations to co-develop equity and anti-racist policies and practices.

b. **Sufficient Funding and Staff Capacity.** For an Office of Racial to have long-term success, it should start with sufficient funding and staff who are solely focused on carrying out the responsibilities of this office. Along with sufficient capacity, employee expertise and experience are important. Expertise should include understanding of structural and institutional racism, anti-bias and anti-racism
training, creating culture change, and facilitating conversations about race and racism for teachers, leadership and support staff on campus.

c. **Oversee Equity-Based Funding.** The Office of Racial Equity should be tasked with working to identify opportunities to increase investment in the SENI and other ways the SENI can be used to successfully prioritize resources to high and highest need schools. To this end, the Office should complete a racial equity assessment of budget proposals to understand ways in which the budget perpetuates inequities in resources and how to address them.

d. **Governance and Authority.** Establish the Office of Racial Equity within the office of the Superintendent to allow for greatest amount of decision-making power and impact.

e. **Accountability.** The Office of Racial Equity should establish meaningful accountability measures to ensure that all departments and offices genuinely prioritize racial equity.

   Measures could include:

   i. Incorporate priorities to prioritize racial equity in goal setting, assessments, and planning.

   ii. Reflect racial equity goals, strategies, and objectives in all departmental policy, planning, and budget documents.

   iii. Increased equity-based funding for high and highest need schools.

3. **BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.**

   Despite the efforts of the LAUSD to provide students with devices and internet connectivity, an estimated one-third of students (150,000) lack access to broadband internet at home. Students and families report connectivity problems as critical barriers to
participating in education with devastating impacts on learning. Families need technical assistance to navigate online platforms and technology to engage with digital learning. There must be greater efforts to understand the ongoing technology needs of students and families and increase the quality of internet connectivity and access to technology essential to participating in digital learning. To bridge the digital divide, we recommend the following strategies:

**Short-term:**

a. Conduct a digital divide assessment to identify persistent barriers for families to access distance learning including 1) access to functioning technology, 2) quality of internet connectivity, and 3) need for technical support.

b. Ensure equitable access to technology in highest need areas through outreach done by community representatives to safely deliver hardware when necessary and provide technical coaching on use of technology to meet personal needs of all families.

c. Partner with internet service providers to automate eligibility based on free and reduced-price lunch data for families to access low-cost internet and advocate to waive/remove eligibility requirements based on social security number or past financial history for the LAUSD families.

d. Utilize accessible and centralized spaces to expand free public hotspots to at least 100 neighborhoods in highest need areas, with adequate staffing and space for students to access the internet, including the LAUSD, city, and county infrastructure (e.g. schools, early learning centers, parks, libraries, WorkSource Centers, parking lots, housing developments).
Mid-term to Long-term:
   a. Engage city and county leaders and internet service providers to build public high-speed internet infrastructure in highest need areas across the LAUSD. Providing hotspots to families is a temporary and insufficient solution for a larger scale issue. The LAUSD should support local efforts and advocate for prioritizing the internet as a public utility for the LAUSD highest need students first.

4. **CREATE EQUITABLE SYSTEMS FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TO ADDRESS BOTH DISTANCE LEARNING AND SCHOOL FUNDING.**

Parents and caregivers have been crucial to the success of distance learning as they took on the role of co-educators. Parents and caregivers know best what they need to support student success and must be a part of the decision-making process for learning and use of resources. However, families are sharing that they are not being given enough opportunities to provide input on the implementation policies for school reopening and funding distance learning and decisions are made without their guidance. Creating equitable systems to meaningfully engage and connect with the LAUSD families will provide opportunities to uplift needs, strengthen existing approaches, and create space to develop innovative practices that address challenges during these unprecedented times and beyond.

**Short-term:**
   a. Create meaningful opportunities to engage students and families using a variety of approaches (e.g. focus groups, discussions, surveys, etc.) led by the LAUSD staff who are
fully equipped to facilitate linguistically/culturally relevant and solution-oriented discussions. This input should be used to inform and guide the LAUSD decisions around funding priorities.

b. Support schools to engage every family proactively and consistently in a two-way conversation about needs, goals, and support for their students. For example, share weekly learning plans and discuss future learning goals with students and families as part of ongoing connections with families.
   i. Utilize school site community representatives and non-teaching staff to support two-way conversation with students and families and create ongoing opportunities for communication.
   ii. Create conditions including additional time for teachers to have two-way conversations and greater engagement with families to discuss student learning.

c. Ensure greater transparency and engagement of families in the LAUSD and school site budget processes. Create multiple opportunities for two-way budget conversations that allow for families to share their requests and receive correspondence on how investments are allocated in response. The LAUSD should compile a report highlighting what students and families are asking for particularly in high and highest need schools and detail their corresponding investment. During LCAP input sessions or at school site budget committee meetings, the LAUSD leaders and school sites can utilize the WeBudget tool to make budgeting more transparent for families through sharing how funding is allocated at their school.
site and where there are opportunities for community feedback.

**Mid-term to Long-term:**

a. Create school reopening parent council that includes families from high and highest need schools. Provide this council with data informing families about child outcomes in these schools.

5. **INVEST IN BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.**

As South Los Angeles comprises the largest percentage of the Black community in Los Angeles, and subsequently the highest concentration of Black students, we recommend a clustered and targeted investment in a consortium of elementary, middle, and high schools in this area to develop a proof of concept for how this approach can profoundly impact the educational trajectory of Black students. The LAUSD can turn to models such as Brotherhood Crusade’s “Mentor and Me” and Social Justice Learning Institute’s “Urban Scholars Program” as nationally recognized, evidence-based models for academic and social emotional learning for Black students. Similar models can be implemented in elementary and middle schools with higher percentages of Black students and fewer total student populations, and high schools to ensure they have more touch points with community-based organizations. By adopting these programs and looking at the outcomes between grade levels, this will develop a proof of concept that supports the creation of a framework for budget allocations that center Black student achievement. Several key interventions are needed to close the opportunity gap between Black students and other student populations. While each of the following interventions would have positive impacts on Black student achievement, it is imperative to implement all interventions in concert as a
comprehensive program to have the most success possible.

**Short Term:**

a. Create a consortium of elementary, middle, and high schools and provide the following Black Student Achievement approach:
   i. Provide culturally relevant courses that are CSU/UC eligible in the course schedule for all incoming Black freshmen. Ensure similar courses are available to all the LAUSD students as part of the school’s general course offerings that fulfill graduation and A-G requirements. Embed culturally relevant learning across all courses to uplift the assets of all students across courses including math, reading, and history.
   ii. Prioritize and invest in recruiting and retaining Black educators, with priority given to those who majored/minored in African American Studies, have previous work experience in organizations that serve predominantly Black youth, and have demonstrated a strong connection to the Black community.
   iii. Invest in a higher volume of transformative experiences for Black students: curated, in-depth, first-hand exposure to a wide range of social and professional persons and settings that exist beyond their typical point of access. This would come in the form of field trips, internships, guest speakers, etc.
   iv. Expansion of targeted one-on-one support to all Black youth, including but not limited to mental health support,
academic support, and college and career counseling.

v. Prioritize and fully resource the integration of community building programs and activities into the school and classroom. These include organized recreation and student clubs, healing circles, group discussions, and affirmation circles that promote a healthy, safe, and nurturing school climate among Black students.

6. PROVIDE TARGETED AND INTENTIONAL SUPPORT DESIGNED AROUND ENGLISH LEARNERS AND DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

The LAUSD is home to the largest English Learner (EL) population in California, with nearly 120,000 vi EL students enrolled in the LAUSD. EL’s make up nearly 20 percent of the LAUSD’s population. For children ages 0-5 in the state, 60 percent of children live in a household where English is not their primary language – dual language learners – and the LAUSD’s early childhood programs serve many of these children. National vii and California viii data both suggest that DLLs/ELs disproportionately lack access to digital learning technology and internet connectivity. Further language barriers can make it difficult for EL/DLL students and families to engage in distance learning. An April 2020 survey ix from Parent Institute for Quality Education reported that nearly half of the families of EL children were not receiving the supports they needed, and one-third were unable to understand the instructions provided by schools on how to access online learning. It is critical that the LAUSD provide meaningful support to ensure the academic achievement of DLL/EL students via equitable funding, sufficient resources, and attention to the linguistic, academic, socio-emotional
development of DLL/EL students in communities with the highest concentration of EL and DLL students.

**Short term**

a. Provide the LAUSD guidance, support and additional resources to teachers, support staff and administrators on implementing best practices, especially for schools with high percentages of English learners in distance and hybrid learning— including for screening and assessment, comprehensibility, active engagement, oral language interaction, home language supports and socio-emotional resources.

b. Ensure resources and supports are provided for teachers to focus on pedagogy that supports content learning and language acquisitions, and provide additional supports for dually identified English Learners receiving special education services, particularly for schools with high percentages of English learning and students with special education needs:

c. Establish relationships and mechanisms for ongoing stakeholder and community input and communication to inform planning and improvement in home language.

d. Support families as partners in supporting student learning in their home languages that establish clear and regular communication, technical support for virtual learning and workshops for families.

e. Support the socioemotional wellbeing for DLLs/ELs students by building strong partnerships with families, ensuring meaningful access to the full curriculum, and leading with research-based instruction.
f. Support school leaders to review and strengthen their approaches to multilingual communication with families.

7. **EMBED SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND WELLNESS THROUGHOUT THE LAUSD’S DISTANCE LEARNING APPROACH.**

Ensuring that students, families, and school communities are ready to learn and feel supported is foundational to the success of distance learning. Many families living in COVID-19 hot spots have lost family members or are experiencing the tremendous burden of economic and housing instability due to job loss or inability to safely return to work. This disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander students and families in Los Angeles who are living in communities hardest hit by the pandemic. This is causing students to navigate new roles to support their families while also engaging in their education. Students are taking on new jobs to support their family financially and to prevent exposure for higher risk family members. Other students are taking on larger responsibilities caring for their younger siblings. Students are faced with impossible choices on how best to support their family while also pursuing their education. Spring and Fall 2020 distance learning revealed the impact of this as attendance and online engagement dropped off throughout the school year. Taking time to understand what students, families, and the entire school community are navigating is crucial to ensure opportunity gaps are not widened. It is imperative that the LAUSD take steps to ensure highest need schools have access to socio-emotional, health, and wellness supports to ensure students and families are supported emotionally to thrive in their education.

**Short-term:**
socio-emotional needs and services they are looking for through 1:1 virtual engagement and online-surveys. For disengaged students, safe in-person outreach may be required to ensure students and families have what they need to participate in distance learning and to navigate the harm of the pandemic. Engage support staff to help build ongoing check ins and safe-in person outreach efforts.

b. Provide additional flexibility and tailored learning plans for students experiencing mental health challenges. When possible embed academic supports with emotional supports. Work alongside students and families to understand what supports are needed and alternative learning options to address mental health and set them up to be academically successful.

c. Provide additional investments in highest need schools and include support staff to lower staff-student ratios for socio-emotional, health and wellness positions: psychiatric social workers, pupil services and attendance counselors, college counselors, restorative justice counselors, nurses, foster youth liaisons, mental health support coordinators, community school coordinators, and other services as identified necessary by school community input.

d. Maximize the impact of the LAUSD’s Mental Health Support Hotline: 1) assess the impact of the LAUSD’s Mental Health Support Hotline to understand how it has been helpful for students and families in managing fear, anxiety and other challenges related to COVID-19. 2) leverage the hotline to help expand access to telehealth mental health services via referrals to necessary treatment or resources. And 3) ensure students,
families and teachers utilizing the hotline receive follow-up to ensure their needs were met and to understand the best next steps to support them with distance learning.

e. Create peer emotional support groups for both families and students to connect with community navigating similar challenges and strengthen relationships with their school community.

Mid-term to Long-term:

a. Create strategic partnerships with community-based organizations, city, and county entities to provide additional mental health services at the school site level and create greater coordination among schools and wellness supports. For example, the LAUSD can contract with DCFS licensed social workers to support students and families with additional challenges caused by COVID-19 and distance learning.

b. Assess the school MOU process for mental health providers and work to remove barriers to create greater access for students and families to connect with mental health providers. Establish data sharing practices among wellness providers and schools to create greater coherence and coordination.

8. **INVEST IN EARLY CARE EDUCATION.**

The COVID-19 crisis has elevated early care and education (ECE) as an indispensable part of the infrastructure necessary for supporting health care, front-line, and other essential workers. The crisis has also shown how early childhood is foundational to the state’s economic recovery and supporting children and families during this crisis. As early learning and care professionals have swiftly answered the tremendous call to provide care during the pandemic, there has
been tremendous pressure on a system already historically underfunded and under-supported. With financial loss, concerns over potential exposure, and burden of additional safety protocols, the state estimates more than 1,200 licensed childcare programs have closed with the potential to lose 19,000 childcare spaces permanently. Now more than ever, it is critical that the LAUSD continues to invest in early care and education for highest need families.

**Short-term:**

a. Prioritize access to ECE for essential workers in highest need areas as defined by the SENI.

b. Support family childcare providers caring for school aged children during the day through ensuring they have access to internet connectivity necessary to support multiple children participating in distance learning.

c. Advocate at the state level to protect investments in early learning and care programs and support investments in COVID-19 related funding to fortify ECE providers while they implement safety protocols.

**Mid-term to Long-term:**

a. Invest in lower teacher-student ratios for early learning programs co-located at high and highest need schools.

b. Continue to support and expand the Dual Language Early Learning Pilot program in areas of highest need as defined by the SENI. DLL programs for young learners intentionally build on the language and cultural assets of the child and family and address their unique needs as they learn and grow.

C. Implement the Birth through Eight Roadmap through creating alignment and pathways for early learning programs located nearby primary...
promise schools and high and highest need schools.

9. **IMPLEMENT ASSESSMENTS THAT HIGHLIGHT STUDENT GROWTH AND LEARNING AND PROVIDE TARGETED INTERVENTION FOR HIGHEST NEED STUDENTS.**

Distance learning requires an intentional approach to bridge the virtual gaps and pay closer attention to student educational progress. As the LAUSD continues to develop best strategies for engaging and teaching students virtually, there must be careful attention to understanding what is working and assessing student progress.

**Short-term:**

a. Utilize formative assessments to better understand what students are learning and what supports would be most helpful to students to guide teacher instruction and family engagement. Formative assessments help identify students that require targeted intervention and additional supports to succeed during distance learning.

b. Adopt a Community Centered Learning Approach in highest need schools. This includes creating greater mechanisms for bringing in family voices to understand best approaches for supporting their child's learning. Maximize the opportunity that virtual learning presents as a unique opportunity to deepen relationships between teachers and families due to the greater role of caregivers in supporting their child's education. Make intentional connections with families as they may have different purview into the impact of distance learning on their child's educational experience due to the distance caused by virtual learning.
c. Utilize qualitative data from parent and caregiver input to inform distance learning improvements. Use multi-modes of engaging families to elevate best practices and opportunities to improve distance learning either through Schoology, parent portals, parent teacher conferences, surveys, or one-on-one calls.

The Equity Alliance for LA’s Kids uplifts the above path toward recovery as for the LAUSD’s students and families in the hardest hit schools during the pandemic. The LAUSD’s response will define student engagement and achievement beyond the pandemic. There is a great deal at stake, and we must collectively act with tremendous urgency to get it right. This requires collaboration amongst the LAUSD youth, families, support staff and teachers and many others. The Equity Alliance and our partners look forward to working with the LAUSD to make this a reality and to do right by our highest need students and schools.
The Equity Alliance for LA's Kids

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