



# a guide to integrated student supports for college and career pathways: lessons from linked learning high schools

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This illustrative guidebook represents three years of collaborative research, practitioner interviews, multiple school site visits, and observations drawn from numerous research-practice partnerships in school districts across California. As such, it reflects the wisdom and hard-won practical experience of many educators who have contributed generously to this enterprise, and for which my colleagues and I at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities acknowledge a deep sense of gratitude and convey a heartfelt thanks. First among those is Dr. Tameka McGlawn at Berkeley's College and Career Academy Support Network. Her unalloyed dedication to equity in public education serves as a constant reminder of the urgency of our mission to create pathways to opportunity for every student. We would not have gotten very far without Marisa Saunders at UCLA and Talma Shultz at the Center for Powerful Public Schools. Their professional generosity, wise counsel, and theoretical perspectives on school reform informed this project from beginning to end. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Anne B. Stanton at the Linked Learning Alliance. She encouraged us to persist with this project and continues to inspire with her own audacious and unremitting efforts to tackle what is arguably the most change-resistant sector of the K-12 education system: the American high school. And, not least, to our friends and partners Elizabeth González and April Yee at the James Irvine Foundation: thank you for the privilege and opportunity to make this contribution to the field.

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.  
Editor

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Chapter One

introduction

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.*

## introduction

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.*

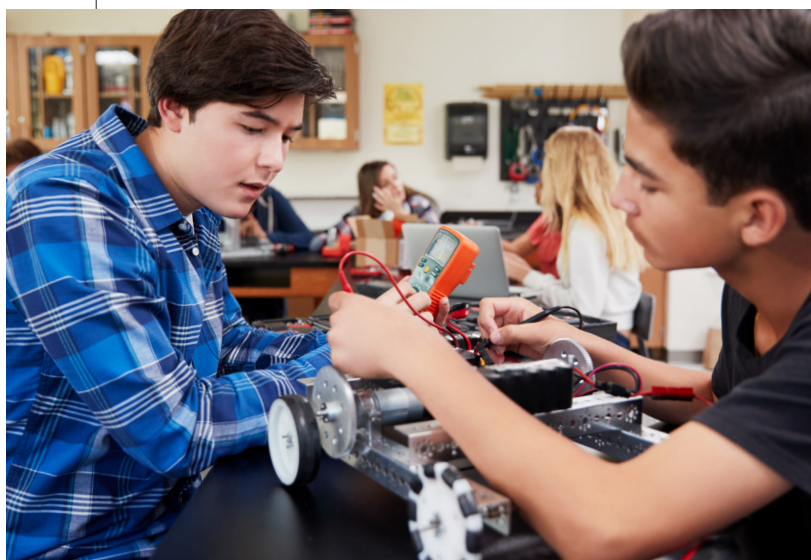
Equitable access to high quality career-themed high school pathways requires that school staff and all pathway partners work in concert to address each student’s developmental needs, skills, strengths, interests, and aspirations. To this end, effective student supports are designed to reach beyond the academic domain, to meet all students where they are, scaffold their engagement with a standards-based curriculum, and address their learning and personal youth development needs. This guidebook continues an exploration of integrated student supports for universal college and career readiness that we began in *Equitable Access by Design* (2016) (<https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/equitable-access-design-conceptual-framework-integrated-student-supports-within-linked>). That earlier report introduced a conceptual framework for implementing a system of comprehensive and integrated student supports that provides equitable access to a coherent, student-centered program of learning via Linked Learning pathways in high schools. This work is intended as a companion to Marisa Saunders’ excellent and

widely used *Linked Learning: A Guide for Making High School Work* (<https://ampersand.gseis.ucla.edu/marisa-saunders-new-book-examines-successes-of-linked-learning-in-high-schools/>), published by the University of California, Los Angeles in 2013. The chapters that follow offer seven illustrative profiles of educators and their partners in California high schools who are working collaboratively to develop comprehensive student supports that “link together” a rigorous academic curriculum, technical education, and workplace opportunities into a coherent learning experience for every youth in their school.

## Background

### FROM THE “SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL” TO LINKED LEARNING

To fully comprehend the revolutionary reconceptualization of high school teaching and learning represented by the following chapters, one has to consider the high school as Arthur Powell and his colleagues found it in 1985 (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). In a five-year study of American secondary education, Powell and his fellow researchers concluded that the typical American high school had come to resemble a shopping mall in terms of variety, choice, and neutrality about whether and to what extent youth as “consumers” learned in them. They describe a cafeteria-style education where youth could choose a college-bound pathway that offered rigorous deeper learning opportunities, but more often than not, were steered into pathways that led to nowhere. They described schools characterized by a day of disconnected experiences as students moved from uninspired academic classes—where teachers focused on content delivered in a standard one-size-fits-all pedagogical style—to vocational courses that were often disconnected





from professional or industry standards, to afterschool experiences that were likewise divorced from what was happening in classrooms. The result for most students was an incoherent educational experience that served only to exacerbate inequality among groups, with particularly dire consequences for youth from low-income minority families.

In contrast, the Linked Learning approach joins together rigorous college-prep academics, a challenging career, or profession-themed curriculum that meets industry standards, and an opportunity for students to apply classroom learning through work-based or other real-world experiences in their communities. Beyond this defining core, however, Linked Learning encapsulates a broader and clearly transformative vision for the American high school. The clear thrust behind the Linked Learning design standards is an ambitious goal to retool the high school of tomorrow into an American institution that prepares all students for both college and career—not one or the other (California Department of Education, 2010). The approach encompasses many of the research-based strategies endorsed by the U.S. Education Department for creating “next generation high schools” that provide students with rich, student-centered coursework and hands-on experiences aligned to postsecondary and career-readiness standards (ED, 2016). It also recognizes that “educating the whole student requires rethinking teaching and learning so that academic content and students’ social, emotional, and cognitive development are joined not just occasionally, but throughout the day” (Aspen Institute, 2019). This new vision recognizes that, more than ever, education is the key to social and economic mobility.

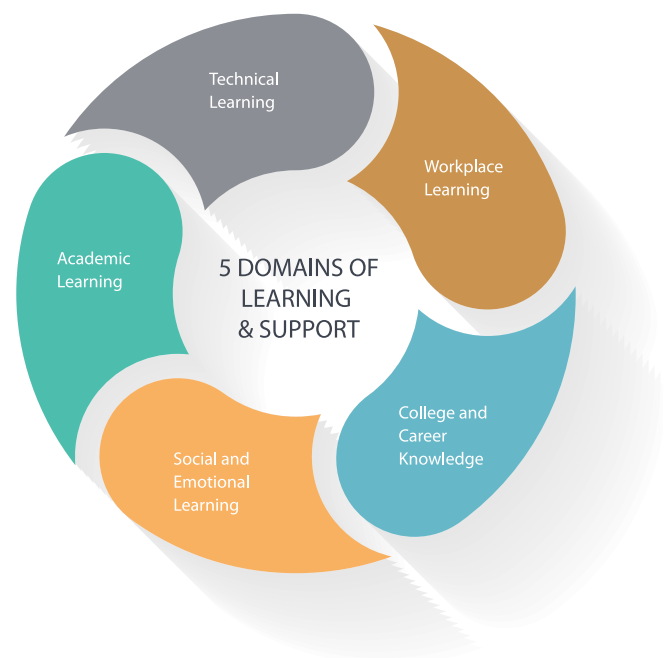
As education analyst David Conley has aptly summarized it, “success in the future will be much more a function not simply of what people have learned but of what they are capable of learning. Schooling will truly need to be about enabling students to learn throughout their careers. Creating lifelong learners...will become an increasingly critical and compelling goal of education” (Conley, 2014, p.20).

## Advancing Equity through Comprehensive and Integrated Student Supports

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Equitable access to high-quality Linked Learning pathways requires that school staff and all pathway partners work in concert to address and support each student’s individual developmental needs, skills, strengths, interests, and aspirations. To this end, effective student support programs are designed to reach beyond the academic domain, to wrap around and remove academic and non-academic barriers to learning, “increasing students’ chances to succeed in school and expanding students’ opportunities for positive youth development” (Child Trends, 2014).

Comprehensive student supports build or scaffold student competencies in five domains of learning and support:



**Supports for Academic Learning** ensure that all students, regardless of their academic background, are supported to graduate from high school with a level of academic competence that prepares them for postsecondary education. Whether they plan to attend college or workforce training programs after graduation, students need key academic content knowledge and cognitive skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking, to continue learning after high school.

**Supports for Technical Learning** ensure that all students have the technical skills and knowledge to complete the requirements of specific career-themed pathways, to successfully engage in work-based learning experiences, and to prepare for high-skill, high-wage employment in those fields.

**Supports for Workplace Learning** provide students with tools to engage in successful work-based learning experiences by advancing their knowledge of career opportunities, workplace etiquette, and job site expectations. Both the National Academy Foundation (NAF) and the Linked Learning Alliance promote a “work-based learning continuum,” which recognizes that workplace learning is a continuum of educational strategies that require scaffolding of student supports well before a student may be ready for engagement in a workplace (National Academy Foundation, 2012).

**Supports to Advance College and Career Knowledge** help students and their families to develop realistic expectations and an understanding of the college application process, financial aid opportunities, the long-term benefits associated with college completion, and the demands of a specific career. The approach recognizes the interplay between college and career. Students’ decisions about postsecondary education are shaped at least in part by their interests and goals for the future. As Carnevale and colleagues suggest, “[a] student’s choice of career is the primary motivation for going to college. Helping students connect their college studies with their future careers captures this motivation and increases graduation rates” (Carnevale, Hanson, & Gulish, 2013, p. 48). Beyond that, Elisabeth Barnett cites research suggesting that “... students who enter college with a clear career goal in mind are likely to experience a more positive adjustment” to postsecondary education (Barnett, 2016, p. 10).

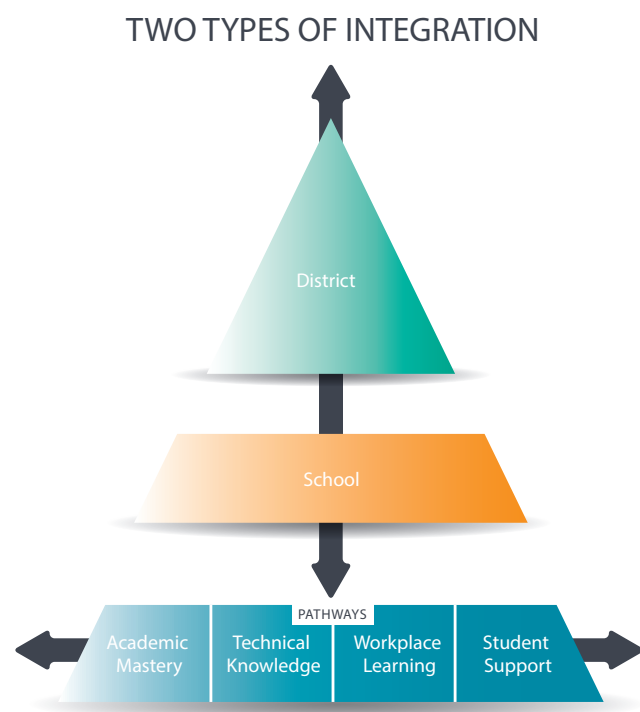
**Supports for Social and Emotional Learning** foster the development of mindsets, social and emotional skills, and adaptive behaviors. These encompass intrapersonal qualities, such as self-management and growth mindset, as well as interpersonal qualities such as conscientiousness, or social awareness. Extensive research evidence shows that social

and emotional competencies predict positive adult outcomes and that they can be shaped in response to educational interventions and life experiences (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Farrington et al., 2012).

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INTEGRATED SUPPORTS?

While “comprehensive” implies responsiveness to the whole child and to the arc of full youth development, the concept of integration suggests that adults must take collaborative actions to weave all the interventions and supports available in a school into a coherent educational experience for all youth. A central goal of every Linked Learning or career-themed pathway is to create a *coherent* educational experience that fully integrates the academic, technical, workplace learning, and student support enterprises of a school. There are two important aspects of integration that appear, both in the relevant literature and from practitioner experience, to be associated with positive student learning outcomes.

The first type of integration involves the extent to which student supports are conceived, designed, and implemented to support effective student engagement with the other three pathway components: academic mastery, technical knowledge, and workplace learning. Conceptually, this type of integration can be thought of as *horizontal integration* insofar as it draws attention to the way that student supports are coherently related to each component of the Linked Learning pathway.





A second important type of integration involves the vertical alignment of student services offered within a curricular pathway with other school and district (or regional) strategies for achieving college, career, and civic readiness among all students. At the school organizational level, this might relate to the integration of student supports to school-wide efforts to connect with community-based resources, as for example through community school approaches or expanded learning partnerships (e.g., tutoring, or dual enrollment arrangements with postsecondary institutions). At the district level, this could relate to the integration of student supports with district-wide strategies for the implementation of the Common Core curriculum, California’s A-G postsecondary requirements, blended learning initiatives, or interventions for supporting social and emotional learning among students across schools in a district.

### **WHO IS INVOLVED IN INTEGRATED SUPPORTS?**

The case examples and profiles in the following chapters make clear that the integration of student supports is an all-hands enterprise with implications for every adult who works directly with youth. Making sure that all students have equitable access to learning opportunity requires that classroom teachers, technical instructors, and employers work and plan collaboratively on shared learning objectives. Community-based partners, counselors, and other staff who support student success must also collaborate closely with teachers and with each other to understand the academic standards and school expectations that students are expected to meet. Likewise, district and school administrators must work closely to cohere school-level efforts with districtwide goals. Finally, school practitioners remind us that parents and families also play important roles in college and career preparation. Mutual understanding among families and schools can help to leverage resources and assure a coherent learning experience across the day and year as students navigate school, community, and family environments.

## **Cross-Cutting Themes**

Our review of how sites across California implement comprehensive and integrated student supports has surfaced three cross-cutting themes that merit close attention in the profiles that follow.

### **PUTTING EQUITY AT THE CENTER**

Equitable access to learning opportunities that prepare all students for college and careers is an explicit system goal of school leaders in the profiled examples. The chapters that follow illustrate how educators have cultivated an equity-centered outlook as a collectively shared commitment in their schools and pathways. This commitment is most evident in the routine practice of disaggregating all student performance data by race, ethnicity, English learner, and poverty status and including these disaggregated reports in self-evaluation systems.

### **TAKING A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO PERSONALIZATION AND DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS**

Put most simply, the adults in our illustrative profiles teach students, not academic subjects. This represents a genuine revolution in how teachers identify as professionals. Traditionally, secondary school teachers obtain a subject credential and are cued to see themselves professionally as “math” teachers, “science” teachers or “language arts” teachers. The teachers, school partners, and other educators in our profiles see themselves as youth development professionals who address the education of the whole person. The chapters that follow provide fine-grained descriptions of how educators are differentiating their instructional programs and the delivery of services in response to the characteristics of the communities they serve. Their student-centered approach also characterizes the way that they respond to the needs of specific demographic sub-groups, including English learners, recent immigrants, foster youth, students with disabilities, and vulnerable youth coping with the effects of trauma, bereavement, or abuse.

### **ADOPTING A CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT APPROACH TO LINKED LEARNING AND TO SCHOOL REFORM BROADLY**

The chapters that follow illustrate how educators and their community-based partners are taking a continuous learning and improvement approach to tackle specific problems of practice as they implement reforms over time. Two patterns are evident in this regard. First is the common practice of using locally generated performance evidence and data to support adult collaboration. This includes the practice of setting up structures, processes, and procedures to promote effective interactions among participants and to clarify the goals for student performance and success.

Common structural features include: systematized needs assessment protocols; routine practices for the identification and placement (or recruitment) of students into services; routine data collection and tracking of student progress; protocols and dedicated time for school staff, partners, and others to engage in inquiry focused on student performance and supports; and systems or protocols for devoting resources (time and human capital) to the effective coordination of services.

A second common practice across the profiles is in how educators and their partners use data for professional learning. The chapters provide illustrations of how effective schools and districts are gathering data from within their organizations, from across their partners, and from participating agencies, and using it to better understand the needs and strengths of their students and to improve their teaching and systems of supports. Leaders in these schools embrace performance data for the critical role it plays in informing cycles of inquiry and continuous improvement among all adults that work with youth at the school.

## Integrated Student Supports and Problems of Practice

Each chapter that follows demonstrates how educators and their partners have tackled the integration of student supports within a specific problem of practice in the implementation of Linked Learning or college and career pathways. By contextualizing the work within specific problems of practice, we are able to illustrate *how* educators approach integrated student supports. We are also able to draw attention to *who* is involved at different stages, focusing on the roles of teachers, school staff, families, employers, and community leaders.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on teachers, employers and community-based partners working together to integrate the core elements of Linked Learning: academic, technical, and workplace learning. In Chapters 4 and 5, we look beyond the technical core and to the important role that school counselors, parents, and families play in supporting college and career readiness and success. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the district role in providing comprehensive and integrated student supports, across schools, and for groups of students who are vulnerable to school disconnection and dropping out. Finally, in Chapter 8 we profile an effort in Monterey County to promote intersegmental collaboration and integrated student supports for success in mathematics

pathways across high schools and postsecondary institutions. We conclude in Chapter 9 with a synthesis of lessons learned from our understanding of practitioner experiences across the seven profiles.

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## Chapter Two

fostering career  
competencies,  
youth  
development, and  
academic mastery  
via workplace  
learning  
experiences

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.*  
*Talma Shultz Ph.D., contributor*



# fostering career competencies, youth development, and academic mastery via workplace learning experiences

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.,  
Talma Shultz, Ph.D., contributor*

## Problem of Practice

How to provide high-quality, pathway-integrated workplace learning experiences for all students?

## Abstract

In this chapter, we learn how one school in Los Angeles has worked with its employer partners to improve the workplace learning experience for students. By carefully integrating work-based experience with the academic and Career Technical Education (CTE) learning goals of the school-based pathway program, the Community Health Advocates School aims to prepare students in its South Central Los Angeles community to excel in higher education. The school also aims to help students to become transformative leaders through a career pathway in contextually competent social work, behavioral health, and/or other community health professions.

## Introduction

A central feature of Linked Learning and career-themed academies is a commitment to providing pathway-relevant work-based learning experiences. Ideally, such experiences can help students better understand future options and give them expanded opportunities to demonstrate social competencies, technical skills, and academic mastery. Pathway leaders often report two major organizational challenges in providing work-based learning opportunities. The first invariably relates to issues of scale. How can schools develop and nurture enough business and community partners who can make long-term commitments to bringing students into their workplaces to have meaningful experiences?

A second frequently mentioned and more complex challenge relates to the quality of the workplace experience from the student’s perspective. High-quality workplace learning experiences must explicitly integrate into the student’s current academic and technical curriculum so that the two elements can deepen and reinforce each other (ConnectEd California, 2012). Addressing this challenge requires close collaboration between school-based educators and workplace internship providers. Pathway teachers report that they must understand what employers can offer so that they can determine how their curriculum and instructional practices will help students to have successful workplace learning experiences. Likewise, potential employer partners report that they need to understand the specific learning objectives that students bring with them so that they can be intentional about helping students achieve those objectives.



## Background

The Community Health Advocates School (CHAS) opened its doors in the 2012-13 school year. It was one of three pilot schools established on the site of the newly constructed Augustus Hawkins High School campus. Teachers initiate the proposal process to establish pilot schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). They invite district administrators, community parents, students, and school partners to collaborate and consult on the process. Modeled after semi-autonomous pilot schools in Boston, LAUSD's pilot schools have charter-like autonomy (e.g., over budget, schedule, governance, and thematic focus of the curriculum) while teachers and school staff remain district employees. The organizational vision for CHAS is to prepare students in its South Central LA community to excel in higher education and to become transformative leaders through a "career pathway in contextually competent social work, behavioral health, and/or other community health professions" (LAUSD, n.d., p.4).

According to the LA County Department of Public Health, there are approximately 1.05 million residents living in South Central Los Angeles, over one-third of whom (33.6%) live at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. This neighborhood also has the county's highest rate of adults with less than a high school education (41.4%) and highest rate of adults (30.6%) who report that their health is only fair or poor (LA County Department of Public Health, 2016). In explaining why they chose to focus on a health advocacy pathway, CHAS's founding teachers and community leaders cited a severe shortage of physical and mental health services. Concurrently, there is a high incidence of mental and other chronic health illnesses and trauma-induced social problems that affect parents and students in the immediate neighborhood of the school. A health advocacy pathway would "nurture, empower, and inspire the future social workers and community health advocates of South Central" (LAUSD, n.d., p.4).

## Elements of Early Pathway Design and Implementation

CHAS's founding teachers and community leaders modeled their health advocacy pathway on the Linked Learning concept from its very inception. They combined academic and career technical curricula, comprehensive student supports, advisory, and workplace learning experiences.

## ACADEMIC AND CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION INTEGRATION

Grade-level teacher teams lead instruction at CHAS. They deliver an interdisciplinary curriculum based on California's Common Core State Standards as well as on the state's career technical education (CTE) model curriculum standards for behavioral health pathways. Teachers weave together the academic content and CTE standards through project-based learning. Some projects, for example, integrate the themes and skills of social work or mental health into one content area, such as a community resources expository research project in an English class. In other examples, projects might integrate multiple subject areas through a shared social work lens in a collaborative world history, math, and English project that examines global trends in mental health. CHAS teachers also collaborate in cross-grade, subject-based teams to ensure that students build on previously learned skills and are challenged by increasingly rigorous expectations as they move up in grade level. The pathway content also incorporates key industry-specific competencies derived from the Master of Social Work Program at University of Southern California. The object is to equip students with the most current and relevant industry-based capacities and necessary skills to enter college and/or pursue a career in social work.

## COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS AND ADVISORY

Pathway leaders have partnered with a number of community-based organizations to provide students with expanded learning and leadership opportunities aligned to pathway goals. These include homework assistance and tutoring, as well as structured fitness classes and performing and fine arts activities. School leaders have emphasized the importance of seeking out community partners who commit to providing opportunities for social and emotional learning (SEL) that are relevant to the pathway, and to college and career readiness more broadly. One partner organization, for example, focuses on student engagement approaches and activities designed to build student confidence and positive decision-making (e.g., agency and self-efficacy); intra-personal skills (e.g., personal responsibility and accountability); inter-personal skills (e.g., effective communication, conflict resolution, team work); and emotional intelligence (e.g., managing anger, fear, and peer pressure). But the centerpiece of student support and personalization, according to school Principal Claudia Rojas, is Advisory.

Every student at CHAS has a 35-minute Advisory class and an advisor, who is also a teacher for one of their pathway classes. The Advisory class focuses on personal and academic support, and the advisor is the primary advocate for the student within the school. The design of Advisory at CHAS was inspired by Linda Darling-Hammond's research, which has affirmed the importance and positive impact of deep, meaningful relationships between students, teachers, and parents/caregivers on student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2006-2007).

## WORKPLACE LEARNING

The pathway design also includes a workplace learning component. CHAS collaborates with local community clinics and health providers to provide students with hands-on experience in a variety of settings employing pathway skills, including internships, job shadowing, and other regular opportunities. Through these experiences, students engage with health-field practitioners to practice and reflect on their roles as community advocates.

## Early Implementation Challenges

By the late summer and fall of 2015, CHAS had advanced its first two cohorts of graduates, and school leaders were proud of the number of those graduates who were enrolling in postsecondary education. But they were not satisfied. Dr. Talma Shultz, Director of Strategic Innovation and Programs at the Center for Powerful Public Schools (CPPS), is a school redesign advisor and Linked Learning coach for CHAS. Dr. Shultz notes that staff were concerned that, in final assessments, graduating seniors were not consistently able to identify and discuss specific skills and competencies they had acquired in workplace learning experiences. Dr. Shultz says:

*“For example, students might report that they had learned a lot about ‘organizing good meetings’ or ‘gathering information’ rather than reporting that they learned how to ‘develop an agenda’ or ‘develop an asset map’ of services available in a geographic area.”*

Consequently, teachers worried that students would have trouble generalizing from their high school experiences and applying what they had learned to new work and college settings.



Perhaps more troubling was news that two of the school's stronger early graduates had dropped out of college after completing only one semester. Although these students reported that they were academically prepared, they explained that they had dropped out because they were overwhelmed by the less collaborative culture and climate in college and felt that they “did not belong there.” These signals pushed CHAS leadership to accelerate a period of self-study and design-based inquiry that was initiated in 2014-15, moving into high gear as the 2015-16 school year began.

## A PERIOD OF SCHOOL SELF-STUDY

As the teachers and pathway leaders studied their students' outcomes, three things became evident. First, teachers felt they needed to be more explicit about the pathway's SLOs and how students might apply them in college or workplace settings. Developing more specific and transparent SLOs would help students to become meta-aware (i.e., meta-cognitive) of what they were learning and its generalizability. Second, to bolster the student experience at CHAS, teachers believed that the pathway needed internship opportunities that provided students with both the depth and length of experience sufficient for them to develop and demonstrate specific knowledge, skills, and mindsets. Dr. Shultz said,

*“It was not clear how students were prepared for internships, and there was no system or structure to focus on the content of the internship that would ensure that students were accountable. In short, the internships were not integrated.”*

**Figure 1.**  
**Elements of Redesign of Senior-Year Experience**

FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER
Clarify Pathway Learning Goals	
Prepare for External Internship	Receive Support for External Internship
Mentor Peers	Participate in External Internship
Take Capstone Course	

As well, that internship experience needed to build student agency and self-efficacy so that students would be more sure-footed as they sought to translate what they learned at CHAS in new and unfamiliar work and postsecondary settings. These multiple opportunities to demonstrate key competencies would help minimize transition gaps from one educational institution to another and more effectively transition students to the workforce. Finally, teachers recognized that they would need to bring their employer partners into closer collaboration so that workplace experiences would naturally build and extend the school’s learning objectives for students.

## Towards an Integrated Workplace Learning Experience at CHAS

Informed by the results of the self-study, during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, CHAS pathway leaders developed a plan focused on redesigning the senior year experience with a fully integrated workplace learning component (see Figure 1). That redesign would eventually include the following elements:

- 1. Clarified Learning Goals.** Staff and students would take on a clarified set of learning goals, narrowing in on more specific objectives.
- 2. A Two-Part, Year-Long Internship for All Seniors.**
  - a. Peer Mentorship.** The first semester of the internship would be an in-house program focused on Pathway CTE skill development for peer mentors. CHAS students would begin the senior year in an internal health advocacy internship rotation by taking on the duties of a peer mentor and case manager for two or three freshman or newcomer immigrant students at CHAS.

- b. Employer-Based External Internship.** In the second semester of the senior year, students would rotate to an on-site placement with a health careers workforce partner that would build on the Peer Mentorship experience.

- 3. A University of California-Approved Capstone Course.** A year-long Capstone Course would serve as a bridge between the Peer Mentorship and the workplace learning experience. Its curriculum would focus on the learning sciences frameworks relevant to the health advocacy pathway. These frameworks would support Peer Mentorship skill-building and competencies valued by health care professionals (e.g., knowledge of how to build continuous learning and improvement systems for quality health care). This course would also provide opportunities for students to reflect, document, and be assessed on the competencies they were modeling and practicing in their internships.

### CLARIFYING PATHWAY LEARNING GOALS

CHAS pathway leaders recognized that in order for students, teachers, and employers to learn together and use their time effectively, each needed to be clear about what career-relevant skills and knowledge would be assessed at the end of the senior year. Encouraged by a WASC accreditation review, a process that helps schools identify and implement school improvement plans and supports federal and state school accountability, pathway leaders partnered with the Center for Powerful Public Schools to redesign the schools’ CTE curriculum following the CPPS Competency-Based Approach to Professional Education (CAPE) framework ([See http://powerful.org/programs/competencies-approach-to-professional-education-cape/](http://powerful.org/programs/competencies-approach-to-professional-education-cape/)).

The CHAS pathway’s student learning objectives (SLO) are outlined in Figure 2. These specific and actionable SLOs are designed to help students become more aware of the CTE skills and behaviors they need to master in order to advance and sustain progress in their academic and professional careers.

**Figure 2.**  
**Pathway-Specific Learning Objectives:**  
**Key Competencies for Health Advocates & Health Professionals**

<b>PROFESSIONAL/CAREER COMPETENCIES</b>	<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>
<b>HEALTH ADVOCATES</b>	(1) Identify the various types of health (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental); (2) Create and organize a campaign to improve health; (3) Connect client to appropriate health services; (4) Apply concepts of oppression and marginalization to advocate for human rights and social and economic justice; (5) Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication; (6) Demonstrate empathy.
<b>CRITICAL THINKERS</b>	(1) Explain the disparities amongst communities as they relate to health issues; (2) Gain self-awareness of personal bias; (3) Analyze and investigate situations to come to ethical decisions; (4) Recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.
<b>COLLABORATORS</b>	(1) Create and deliver group presentations with peers and professionals; (2) Manage a peer mentorship caseload; (3) Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues; (4) Consult with peers and professionals to draw conclusions; (5) Formulate policies for social wellbeing.
<b>RESEARCHERS</b>	(1) Conduct community asset mapping; (2) Distinguish and integrate multiple sources of knowledge; (3) Investigate multiple sources and points of view, and cite evidence; (4) Use researched evidence to inform practice.

Dr. Shultz explains,

*“The industry-relevant nature of the curriculum design will help students to become familiar with ‘industry language’ that will enable them to communicate effectively with health care professionals and open doors for professional learning beyond the school.”*

Employer partners report that greater awareness of the SLOs helped them to identify opportunities within their organizations for youth to practice the relevant skills and to develop personal agency by discovering the logic of the academic and CTE content taught in the classroom setting. As well, CHAS pathway leaders report that the SLOs sent clear signals to the entire teaching staff, as well as to employers and students, about the social and emotional learning skills that would support professional development and academic learning. This includes building the capacity for empathy, social and cultural awareness, conscientiousness, self-discipline, self-efficacy, and growth

mindset (Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015). Clarifying the new SLOs and integrating the CAPE framework also informed school-wide teacher practice and employer engagement. As one employer commented:

*“We noted that students didn’t always remember the content. With this framework (CAPE) and better alignment to school outcomes, we can tighten our internship work. We are also interested in learning more about instructional strategies that can help us define our metrics of success for our work with youth.”*

**ESTABLISHING A TWO-PART, YEAR-LONG INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR SENIORS**

Once they established clear and specific CTE learning objectives, CHAS pathway leaders conducted an assessment of the then-current internship program. They realized that students would have more effective and meaningful workplace experiences if they had prior



opportunities to practice the expected behaviors and to develop key competencies valued in health advocacy, like active listening or motivational interviewing. After some study, CHAS leaders decided to adapt a form of peer mentorship as a vehicle for providing an internal workplace experience for all seniors in their first semester. Dr. Shultz remarks:

*“We took the idea of peer mentoring, and considered the skills that students could begin to develop and practice, including skills related to case management or community asset mapping. Such an experience would help students to be better prepared to go out into the workplace.”*

As mentors, students would have the opportunity to develop transferable, applied workplace skills while also applying basic and higher-order social and emotional learning applicable to a broad range of postsecondary options.

### **Peer Mentorship (Both Semesters of the Senior Year)**

As noted, the Peer Mentorship program at CHAS was set up as a school-based internship, integrating job responsibilities, skills development, and relationship building. The program would afford mentors the opportunity to apply and model what they learn in their Behavioral Health Advocacy/Social Work CTE courses. At the same time, the experience would build SEL competencies that would serve them well as they prepared to transition to college and/or career broadly. The experience would prepare students for an external workplace internship with industry partners.

**The Structure.** Students begin the Peer Mentorship program in the first semester of their senior year. Mentorship provides students an opportunity to build pathway-relevant interpersonal skills, including active listening, developing empathy for the needs of mentees, and coaching. It allows time for team building and introspection about the mindsets that may hold them back. This content is reinforced and deepened during the year-long Capstone Course (described below), which begins with a two-day workshop. During Advisory classes, mentors spend time observing their mentees to gain insights about their behaviors and needs. Mentors then develop a plan for their mentees to offer support, guidance, and connection to school resources. Mentors often reach out to teachers to investigate tutoring opportunities or other resources for their mentees. They connect mentees to school activities, take time over lunch break to talk about

mentees’ challenges and successes in school, and organize team building or other activities.

**SEL Competencies for Mentors.** The range of experiences encompassed in the Peer Mentorship program supports mentors to develop several SEL competencies, forming a stronger sense of identity and agency, including self-efficacy and growth mindset (Nagaoka et al., 2015). For example, peer mentors are encouraged to build a belief in their own ability to change their outcomes by the choices they make, and to support their mentees to do the same. This belief, self-efficacy, is understood to play a critical role in academic outcomes (Transforming Education & CORE, 2014). CHAS teachers willingly listen and learn from students’ perspectives, which supports youth in developing self-efficacy and improves the Peer Mentorship program by extension. As an example, a teacher describes the recent introduction of a new activity into the Peer Mentorship curriculum:

*“Just this week, we introduced an activity [into the Peer Mentorship program] that came from a student’s reflection. He talked about being a freshman and not even knowing what a transcript was. This week, mentors shared their transcripts with their mentees, and let them know, ‘this is what I did well, and this is what I didn’t do so well.’”*

Related, the Peer Mentorship program seeks to build students’ growth mindset, underscoring the connection between effort and improvement. The curriculum places a high value on working diligently toward goals with the expectation that doing so will result in attaining those goals.

CHAS teachers observe that the mentoring experience helps students to feel positively about themselves, knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of others. They report that they see students gaining self-awareness about their identities as well as about their professional potential. In turn, students feel prepared and confident to engage in an internship outside of school.

**Practicing CTE Skills.** The Peer Mentorship program also offers valuable practice for seniors to develop industry-relevant competencies. Motivational interviewing, for example, is a technique learned and practiced by peer mentors during conversations with their mentees, coupled with structured observations that take place during mentees’ Advisory classes. As well, peer mentoring provides an

opportunity for students to practice personal and community asset mapping as mentors and mentees explore positive qualities and celebrate personal strengths through their interactions, and as mentors identify and share resources that could prove useful to meet their mentees' needs. Opportunities to acquire and model these skills in a teacher-supervised environment ultimately form critical pieces of CHAS's integrated set of experiences, carefully designed to support students to arrive to their second semester internship prepared to contribute and ready to learn.

### **Workplace Rotation (Second Semester Internship at Partner Site)**

In response to the identified need for meaningful internship experiences, CHAS leaders joined forces with local employers. Together, they carefully crafted workplace learning opportunities that would build on the school-based Capstone Course and Peer Mentorship program. An important goal for the redesigned internship experience was to address the concern that graduating students were unable to articulate the competencies they were developing both at school and in the workplace. To that end, CHAS leaders and employer partners reconceived the internship to clarify how students would be able to use what they learned to better understand their postsecondary options and to be better prepared for college and career. To build metacognitive awareness into the external internship experience, employers must carefully articulate professional competencies and how they align with the SLOs. However, this does not come naturally for many employers. As Dr. Shultz elaborates:

*“Employers may think of the way they work as more organic. I appreciate that, but students need to understand the value of what they are learning.”*

This step required significant participation and buy-in from employer partners. As such, two key partners agreed to pilot a closer collaboration with teachers to strengthen the learning experience in the workplace settings.

**Pilot Planning/Commitments from Participating Employers.** With CPPS support, CHAS leaders began to test their ideas with an intensive pilot project involving employer partners at two nearby clinics, University Muslim Medical Association Clinic (UMMA; [www.ummaclinic.org](http://www.ummaclinic.org)) and St. John's Well Child and Family Center (St. John's; [www.wellchild.org](http://www.wellchild.org)). CHAS leadership was instrumental in identifying their students' needs and contributing their

**Motivational interviewing** is “a counseling method that helps people resolve ambivalent feelings and insecurities to find the internal motivation they need to change their behavior. It is a practical, empathetic, and short-term process that takes into consideration how difficult it is to make life changes.” <http://www.psychologytoday.com/therapy-types/motivational-interviewing>.

**Behavioral observation** is “watching and recording the behavior of a person in typical environments. The assumption is that data collected are more objective than are perceptions. Most methods of behavioral observation provide quantitative and objective data that can be used to determine current levels of behavior, to set goals for behavioral improvement, and to measure change following intervention plans.” <https://psychology.iresearchnet.com/papers/behavioral-observation-methods/>

**Asset mapping** is a way to “provide information about the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions. Once community strengths and resources are inventoried and depicted in a map, you can more easily think about how to build on these assets to address community needs and improve health. Finally, asset mapping promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment.” [http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/Documents/tw\\_cba20.pdf](http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/Documents/tw_cba20.pdf)

expertise in instruction and student support. But the employer partners' expertise and commitment to support the professional growth of students was essential. They were willing to revise their offerings and integrate student learning outcomes and professional competencies over the course of a 12-week internship. CPPS' role was to design curriculum components and instructional resources based on the learning objectives that teachers identified as school priorities. CPPS also provided the employer partners with a blueprint for worksite-based curriculum aligned with professional competencies and student learning outcomes.

CHAS leaders anticipated that this collaborative and intentional planning process would result in defined responsibilities and commitments among the external internship providers, CHAS teachers and administrators, and students and their families. These responsibilities and commitments were linked to professional competencies required by the clinics and learned and practiced at CHAS. Gaining understanding of these competencies, articulating them as "skill sets" or "competency maps," and establishing opportunities for workplace and school-based learning to support one another together framed the early internship planning. This thinking aligned with professional education and training practices, making it an effective framework for these discussions (Neiworth, Allen, Ambrosio, & Copen-Abrahamson, 2014). By clearly aligning CHAS's learning goals with competencies valued and expected by behavioral health professionals, CHAS leadership was able to do two things: 1) Make a clear ask of the employers to explicitly support student learning outcomes; and 2) Make a clear offer to the employers of the value students could bring to the workplace. Simultaneously, CHAS was able to provide students with an opportunity to "try out" the experiences of a professional.

**Mapping the Student Learning Objectives to Employer-Desired Competencies.** As noted earlier, establishing CHAS's pathway learning goals was a critical early step. Applying Center for Powerful Public Schools' Competencies Approach to Professional Education (CAPE), Dr. Shultz now worked with CHAS's teachers and the employers to translate the student learning outcomes into competency maps—or "buckets of integrated learning"—that aligned with the skills and knowledge needed in the field of behavioral health.

At St. John's, the relevant professional competencies identified by the internship supervisors (e.g., process facilitation, collaborative development, and communication for change) were mapped to the pathway goals for health

advocacy, strategic thinking, and collaboration. Articulating these competencies helped to introduce employer partners to the school's learning goals and provided clarity and mutual understanding of expectations related to the internship. The process also helped both the employer partners and CHAS teachers articulate how they would work in tandem to take a metacognitive approach designed to make the goals, outcomes, and purpose of each internship activity specific and more visible to students.

At UMMA, early discussions centered on the work of the clinics, what students could contribute to that work, and what they could learn at each site. Two opportunities surfaced: 1) participating in the development of youth-centered programming, and 2) engaging in case management. Ultimately, case management became the focus of the internship at UMMA, in large part reflecting the students' interests. Together, CPPS, CHAS leaders, and the UMMA internship supervisor developed an internship curriculum that would encompass employer-led professional education, training, and work activities that could best support the students' learning goals. UMMA adapted relevant staff training modules for use with the students, including professional development modules in case management, motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed care. They asked students to develop a community resource guide, including outreach by phone to local service providers. This on-the-job training experience allowed students to build more SEL competencies, as it required them to engage professionally in sometimes challenging situations, to stay calm when people were rude, and to have an appropriate demeanor.

The structure and support have proven effective. As one supervisor reports:

*"We identified a specific structure, and identified what we want students to learn. There are stronger expectations put on paper. Students should be able to describe, comprehend, define, communicate, and apply."*

**Revising the Internship Handbook.** Key to establishing shared expectations among students, teachers, and employers, was the revision of the CHAS Internship Handbook (see <https://www.hawkinshs.org/apps/pages/CHAS>). The 24-page, comprehensive handbook describes the competencies that students are learning in school, including training in pathway-related academics,

communication, and work readiness. Fourteen objectives for internships are provided, along with program responsibilities for student, internship supervisor, and CHAS teacher alike. In addition, the CHAS student learning outcomes and pathway outcomes (i.e., competencies for Mental & Behavioral Health, Public Health, and Social Work) are included. Employer partners are expected to select three to five of the competencies that interns will practice. These competencies are then incorporated into an Individualized Training Plan to which the supervisor, instructor, and student must all commit, making the learning explicit and relevant, connected to both school and the profession. Beyond signing the Individualized Training Plan, a Parent Contract (provided in both English and Spanish) requires signatures from the student, parent, internship supervisor, and CHAS principal. An Intern Standards of Conduct form requires signatures of the intern and supervisor. In addition, the handbook includes: a grading rubric, with weights for assignments, attendance, and behavior; internship contact and calendar form; intern orientation checklist; time sheet; worksite experience evaluation; supervisor reference letter example format; final internship presentation outline; and supervisor feedback form.

### **Introducing a Re-Designed Capstone Course**

A highlight of the school's efforts to integrate the academic, social and emotional, technical, and workplace learning components of the pathway is the Senior-Year Capstone Course for Future Mental and Behavioral Health Professionals. This yearlong course runs in parallel to the Peer Mentorship and External Internship experiences and serves as a structural opportunity for teacher-guided, curriculum-grounded inquiry into both. In this course, students explore the conceptual frameworks, terminology, professional capacities, social skills, mindsets, and ethical standards that are specific to the behavioral health professions. Each of the course's four units acts as a through line that helps students to connect their academic and CTE coursework to their Peer Mentorship practicum and to prepare them for effective workplace internships and postsecondary transitions to college and careers.

The introductory unit of the Capstone Course begins with a focus on the skills and conceptual frameworks applied by mental and behavioral health professionals in social work practice. As students learn these skills and behaviors in the classroom, they are encouraged to practice and model what they are learning with their ninth grade or newcomer mentees. These skills include, for example, the practice

of motivational interviewing to support mentees in their growth as learners and as they adapt to new routines and expectations. Other examples are lessons on empathetic listening, case study analysis, evidence-based practice and decision-making, youth development frameworks, restorative practices, and text analysis. Students might also use sample case studies to learn how to conduct assessments, develop evidence-based interventions, and to explore legal and ethical concerns that bear on roles that mental and behavioral health practitioners play. According to CHAS Lead Teacher Erica Ramirez:

*“This coursework relates in concrete ways to the student’s practicum in mentorship, but provides deeper learning opportunities that will be generalizable to learning experiences over the course of a lifetime.”*

As noted, the Capstone Course curriculum is closely aligned with the Peer Mentorship program. Once seniors in the pathway are assigned their mentees, they must write weekly mentor/mentee meeting journals to reflect on the effectiveness of these meetings. Teachers guide students to include detailed examples of strategies used to facilitate motivational conversations, such as posing questions, reflecting on feelings, or responding to situational characterizations with alternative interpretations. The journaling allows student mentors to learn how to document and assess how effectively they are applying strategies, frameworks, techniques, and social and emotional learning in their mentorship practicum. Dr. Shultz says:

*“Students who have gone through this approach report that in addition to gaining important skills and knowledge, they are gaining self-confidence and agency as they are becoming more explicitly aware of what they are learning, and of their ability to improve their mastery in academic and career relevant areas.”*

In the second unit of the course, students are introduced to improvement science frameworks and methods of organizational analysis routinely employed in clinics, hospitals, and laboratories. These frameworks and methods are generalizable to all aspects of organizational and systems improvement. They are drawn from the Institute for Health Improvement, which aims to help healthcare professionals to learn about how to enhance the function and organizational effectiveness of a system by identifying

what needs to be improved, by how much, by when, for whom, and to what end (Nolan, 2007). Lessons may tie directly to the Peer Mentorship program, or be more loosely aligned. For example, in one lesson, students draft an AIM (i.e., goal statement) with their assigned mentees to address a need they have identified through empathetic interviewing and observations. These could be academic or social and emotional growth AIM statements, answering the question: “What are we trying to accomplish through this process?” They set goals for improvement, identifying what needs to be improved, by whom, and by when. Students summarize in writing their rationale for focusing on a particular AIM given what they learned about their mentees through interviews and observations conducted. To learn the methodology, in another example, students might engage in a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle of inquiry, focused on a broader topic, such as improving the nutritional quality of food and operational improvement of food service in the high school cafeteria. Teams propose an AIM, generate change ideas for improvement, propose measures, and analyze data produced by the teacher in conversation with students. Lead Teacher Erica Ramirez explains:

*“At the end of this process, we usually assign students to individually write an analysis or reflection paper documenting their findings and to draw on available evidence to assess the effectiveness of the intervention they originally proposed.”*

Next, students work on the AIMs developed for their mentees, identify measures and change ideas for each AIM, and collect data to determine if they attained their AIM and their mentees improved. The performance assessment is a detailed plan for implementing the whole improvement cycle, including reflections on what they have learned about the process and about themselves.

In the second semester, as previously noted, students are matched and placed as interns at various sites including community-based clinics, nonprofit organizations, and other mental and behavioral health locations. During this semester, work in the Capstone Course turns to tasks and inquiry relevant to workplace learning. In the Capstone Course, student interns identify their professional goals in relation to their internship placement, and they define and commit in writing to the school-wide SLOs that they agree to pursue during their internships. The last two units of the Capstone Course thus focus on preparing and supporting students for



success in these workplace experiences and on documenting what they are learning. Early in the second semester, prior to the beginning of their internships, students review and revise work-readiness tools: goal-setting, work ethics, resumé, cover letter, and employment application. Students also review workplace conduct and rights, specifically digital citizenship and sexual harassment. They learn about the importance of time management, code switching, interviewing other professionals at the site, identifying their needs, and reaching out for support so that they may fully benefit from their internship.

Once the internship begins, the final unit of the Capstone Course focuses on maintaining a weekly blog that engages interning students in constant reflection on the educational growth necessary to gain employment and succeed professionally. Along with their weekly time-card, students document tasks accomplished, and goals for the following week. As a culminating task, students present their employers with recommendations for quality improvement, including suggested goals and actions for improvement. Once the 12-week internship concludes, students create a PowerPoint presentation to share their learning with other students and professionals. “In this way,” says Dr. Shultz, “students communicate their learning and expose others to diverse opportunities in the field.”

# Reflections on the First Two Years

CHAS leaders were pursuing an ambitious vision when they set out to redesign the senior year experience with a fully integrated workplace learning component. Ensuring that students are building SEL competencies and CTE skills, while recognizing that the activities must also benefit the employer, is a complex undertaking. After the first year, it was important for CHAS leaders to recognize that collaborating with employer partners had led to significant growth for students and as well as strong community partnerships. Beyond that, the school had embraced the metacognitive approach, established a process to align professional competencies, and embedded the importance of integrating education, practice, training, and social and emotional learning into school and workplace learning.

To move ahead, CHAS leaders understood that they needed to listen carefully, not just to the reflections of students and teachers, but to the employer partners as well. This would enable them to plan effectively for the evolution, expansion, and sustainability of the program. Thus, after the first full year of off-site internships, CHAS leaders conferred with UMMA and St. John's to take stock and reflect on the successes and challenges, to acknowledge the intensity of effort expended by the intermediary and employers, and to consider next steps.

Looking to the future includes considerations of new directions in content or emphasis for the pilot internship providers. For example, UMMA is embarking on an effort to improve the client experience. Working with CHAS, the internship supervisor is considering ways to develop a strand focused on improving the quality of the patient experience from the time they enter until the time they participate in an exit protocol. Opportunities to build competencies around teamwork and to support growth in professionalism are among the areas being studied. In addition, the UMMA supervisor plans to expand interns' experiences in clinics, including shadowing case managers. Talking about plans for next year, the supervisor's sense of opportunity resonates:

*"I want to have students spend more time in the clinics. It will take more coordination, but I want to increase the students' interaction and communication with case managers if that's what the students are interested in... This (next) year I also want to focus on writing in the workplace."*

In addition, CHAS is planning to expand the collaboration and employer induction process to additional employer partners. To this end, they are working to establish effective ways to engage and strengthen the capacity of additional employer partners, perhaps through a learning community comprised of current and new CHAS internship providers.

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## Chapter Three

# reconceiving the roles of teachers, counselors, and community- based partners as coaches for student success

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# reconceiving the roles of teachers, counselors, and community-based partners as coaches for student success

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D. and Laurel Sipes  
Paola Zuniga, contributor*

## Problem of Practice

How to promote student-centered learning in college and career pathway schools by integrating and reconceiving the role of teachers, counselors, and community-based partners as “student success coaches?”

## Abstract

In this chapter, we focus on how one school’s ambition to create a student-centered learning environment led its leaders to reconceive the work and time of teachers, counselors, and partners. These individuals went from being opportunity providers to becoming student success coaches and embedded college and career readiness partners. As the community school coordinator explained, the ultimate aim was to “*maximize adult collaboration among teachers and partners in the classroom for the benefit of creating authentic relationships with students and to allow for effective, on-demand support which creates mutual trust and responsibility.*” Pathway leaders envisioned providing every student with a coherent experience of support where at least one adult bonded with them, advocated for their academic success, and served as a bridge to further learning and work beyond high school. This strategy is distinguished from “push-in” approaches—where out-of-school time partners may also spend time in classrooms—because embedded partners are set up with structures and conditions designed to build professional capacity and to maximize coherence and alignment. Pathway leaders reported being motivated to make these changes by their shared belief that if all adults modeled norms and habits of collaboration, they would be more likely to see students adopt those same practices with peers in the classroom and in work-based learning experiences.

## Introduction

John O’Connell High School in San Francisco’s Mission neighborhood has a long history of engaging community-based partners to provide expanded opportunities for student learning and youth development, and for helping students to make successful postsecondary transitions. Community-based partners at O’Connell, for example, offer services to promote student health and wellness; support academic engagement; and provide tutoring, arts enrichment, college counseling, and workplace learning experiences. However, as educators at O’Connell designed and implemented their college and career pathways, they came to share two related concerns about the supports they were providing to students. The first was that student supports—especially those that pre-existed the pathway reforms—were not always well aligned to the student learning objectives (SLOs) of the emerging pathways. The second was that the “opt-in” approach to student service—





provided before school, after school, and during breaks in the school day—often had the unintended effect of reproducing patterns of social and racial stratification. Some students engaged in multiple opportunities, while others—often the neediest students—remained disconnected from services. School staff report that the initial thinking about this dilemma at O’Connell focused on intensifying student identification, referral, and outreach efforts. But these solutions still placed the onus of engagement on struggling students themselves and so tended to favor those with strong help-seeking dispositions. Ultimately, pathway team leaders at O’Connell concluded that to make dramatic improvements toward their equity goals, they needed to make more fundamental changes to the way that staff and partners organized their work and time with students.

## Background

### DEMOGRAPHICS

John O’Connell High School sits in one of San Francisco Unified School District’s (SFUSD) most densely populated and racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. According to data from the American Community Survey, over one-third (35%) of residents in the Mission neighborhood are foreign-born, 34% of households include Spanish-speakers, and another 23% of households include residents who speak an Asian language. About two-thirds of residents in the Mission neighborhood are renters, and 15% percent of families have incomes below the federal poverty line (San Francisco Planning Department, 2017). In 2016-17, 54% of O’Connell’s 375 students were Latino, 17% were African-American, 14% were Asian/Filipino, and about 8% were non-Hispanic white students.

### EARLY REFORM HISTORY AT O’CONNELL

One reason we are drawn to O’Connell’s reform experience is that it is distinct from many other case studies of career-themed pathway implementation in the available literature. Existing case studies often focus on schools that were either conceived as pathway schools at their inception (like the CHAS example in Chapter 2) or that implemented a comprehensive and rapid transition to pathways using a specific reform model. O’Connell, by contrast, represents the more typical experience of comprehensive high schools across the country, with a history of engaging in numerous, often competing, reforms and transformations. This profile is an example of a self-directed school turnaround in which

a core group of dedicated school leaders, teachers, and community-based partners had the autonomy needed to reform instructional practices, change the school schedule, and move to more student-centered approaches using an incremental, multi-year, bottom-up approach.

### Additional Case Studies of Career-Themed Pathways

- [The Stanford Center for Opportunity Research in Education’s District Leadership Series](#)

These case studies highlight lessons learned from nine districts across California that once received implementation grants from the James Irvine Foundation as part of the California Linked Learning District Initiative.

- [Linked Learning: A Guide to Making High School Work](#)

Prepared by The Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access at UCLA and made possible by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, this guide is designed to answer questions about how high schools are practicing Linked Learning, shedding light on the ways they address practical challenges, set high expectations, and adapt to changing circumstances.

In 2000, O’Connell opened its doors as a “Middle College High School” with vocational and technical course strands linked to San Francisco’s community college where eleventh and twelfth graders took their courses. By the end of its first decade, the school had moved away from the Middle College approach and focused on developing O’Connell as an “alternative vocational high school.”

The current approach to college and career pathways at O’Connell began roughly in 2010, with efforts to integrate more rigorous academic instruction into the curriculum of the then-existing vocational and technical programs. As school principal Susan Ryan explained, the approach at O’Connell “*has been about making drastic reform [ . . . ] without signaling a drastic change that would overwhelm teachers and students.*” Instead, Ryan continued, the approach was to begin with staff “*agreement on some structures and goals and then to iterate on the implementation. So, we started there and are refining.*”

Identified as a chronically low-performing school in the three years prior to the 2010-11 school year, O’Connell was the recipient of a three-year federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) beginning in 2010. Subsequently, the school also participated in a five-year federal Promise Neighborhood grant that has enabled school- and community-based leaders at O’Connell to enact a set of reforms over an eight-year period from fall of 2010 through the spring of 2018. Slowly, across a decade of change, staff and partners at O’Connell drew inspiration from a number of models and reform frameworks and collaborated to design the unique approach to pathways that we find at O’Connell today. This history is important because in considering integrated student supports, school leaders could not begin with fully aligned community partners who were already bought-in to the Linked Learning model from day one. Some of O’Connell’s community-based student support partners pre-existed the transformation to college and career pathways. As such, school leaders and community-based partners had to engage in a multi-year dialogue about goal-setting and how all adults at O’Connell would need to adjust their approach to work, youth engagement, and the use of time across a reconceived school day.

### **WHOLE-SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION UNDER A FEDERAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT: 2010-13**

For more on the federal SIG program in San Francisco, see Resource- and Approach-Driven Multidimensional Change: Three-Year Effects of School Improvement Grants. *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol 54, Issue 4, pp. 607 – 643.

As noted earlier, the transformation of O’Connell High School that began in 2010 was animated by the SIG reform initiative and was initially guided by SFUSD’s adoption of the Chicago Consortium for School Reform’s “essential supports” for effective school organization (Bryk et al., 2010). Chief among these supports are:

- cultivating a cohesive instructional guidance that promotes ambitious academic achievement for all youth;
- nurturing a student-centered learning climate; and
- fostering stronger parent and community partnerships to expand learning opportunities.

School staff familiar with the early days of school turnaround efforts at O’Connell recall that their initial focus was on building capacity to implement the first of the goals outlined above. These efforts concentrated on introducing student-centered approaches to teaching the academic content of the Common Core State Standards adopted in California in math and English language arts. Nevertheless, the Federal SIG reform introduced a number of structural changes at O’Connell during the 2010-13 period that have become critical elements of the subsequent transformation to college and career pathways. The first reform element was the introduction of a community school approach with a coordinator dedicated to connecting students to expanded learning opportunities with local businesses and community-based organizations. The community school approach was a centerpiece of the schools’ effort to become more student-centered, by ensuring that locally-generated SLOs were informed and supported by input from families, community-based partners, and employers. The second reform element was the school-wide adoption of Response to Intervention (RTI) as a process for ensuring that all students have access to student-centered practices, differentiated instruction, and interventions where appropriate. RTI was also focused on reducing the number of students inappropriately identified for Special Education. The incorporation of these elements into the pathway reforms is discussed in greater detail below.

## Transitioning to a Career-Themed Pathway Model

Prior to the SIG reforms, O’Connell had a history of building instructional capacity for elective course offerings in vocational and technical training. Indeed, the unique architectural design of the school was intended to accommodate teaching in technical fields and trades, with dedicated space for studios and workshops. As the three-year SIG process came to a close, school leaders and teachers wanted to focus the next stage of reform on leveraging O’Connell’s capacities and partnerships with employers in the technical trades and to encourage more collaboration among its technical and academic teaching staff. Inspired by the laboratory approach at the Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) in Clovis, California, school leaders focused on planning and developing integrated academic and career-themed pathways for youth. Ultimately, pathway leaders settled on a two-tiered design for the school that began in earnest in the 2013-14 school year and that continues to be refined.

## LOWER-DIVISION HOUSES

In grades 9 and 10, students are organized into two small learning communities called “houses” that offer opportunities to prepare for college and career. Teachers in each of the lower-division houses team up to integrate academic content focused on the house theme.

- *Humanities and Social Justice House.* The thematic focus in these classes allows students to meet the Common Core State Standards through sustained inquiry into the systems of culture, power, oppression, uprisings, and movements that shaped our modern economic and social structures.
- *Science, Community, and Sustainability House.* Students in this house meet the Common Core State Standards through sustained inquiry into the connections between physics, biology, human culture, their own personal development.

The small learning community structure within the lower-division houses facilitates relationship and community building among teachers, students, and the community-based partners who work with ninth and tenth grade students. As it has evolved over a four-year period, an important objective of the house structure is to deliver the California Common



Core State Standards in a way that activates a student-centered culture of academic inquiry and collaborative learning, and that integrates career exploration and service-learning opportunities.

## UPPER-DIVISION LABS

In grades 11 and 12, students at O’Connell graduate into integrated, project-based “lab” pathways with courses taught by teams of academic and technical skills educators. In these upper-division labs, students continue to work on academic learning through the lens and skills required by specified careers. They complete A-G coursework for admission to college, including dual enrolment and theme-aligned workplace learning opportunities.

The integrated labs are:

- Construction and Environmental Technologies
- Entrepreneurship and Culinary Arts
- Health and Behavioral Sciences

A fourth pathway lab was launched in the 2018-19 school year:

- Public Service

Promise Neighborhoods are designated by the U.S. Department of Education and receive grants to build a continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with public schools at the organizational center. Grants are to be used to increase the capacity of public agencies and community-based nonprofits to focus on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood.

Concurrent with the transition to pathways, O’Connell High School was included as a community partner with the Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN) initiative in 2013-14. Participation in the MPN initiative brought funding that allowed O’Connell to stay the course with its curricular reforms, and to make a successful transition to pathways with integrated student supports. MPN initiative participation enable the school to expand the role of the community school coordinator who worked to strengthen the school’s ties to community-based partners, the local community college, families, and nearby elementary and middle schools. Their new partnership with the MPN initiative helped school leaders to focus on a key remaining challenge: creating a student-centered learning climate and a college-going culture. Indeed, the new focus on student supports ultimately brought the school to the concept of

providing each student in the lower-division houses with a classroom-embedded student success coach, and later in the upper-division labs, to fully incorporate their out-of-school time support providers as classroom-embedded college and career success partners. This singular decision was based on the staffs' analysis that for O'Connell to meet its ambitious student achievement goals, all the adults, including its community-based partners, needed to shift away from building siloed support programs that ran in parallel to the classroom experience, and toward collaborative arrangements that felt aligned and coherent from the student perspective.

## **WORKING WITH TEACHERS ON INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS**

### **Curriculum Reform and Teaching**

The move to integrated students supports at O'Connell began with teachers. The principal and lead teachers at O'Connell describe a concentric evolution of reforms in adult practices that began with the instructional core, then the counselors, and finally moved to a focus on the student support partners in more recent years. *"In the very first year of the shift,"* explained Principal Ryan, the focus was on teachers and *"the ask of teachers was very gentle—we asked the CTE (Career and Technical Education) and academic teachers to pair up and co-plan and do some projects together. We had a construction and math teacher pair, then electronics teacher with English teacher."* As teachers moved to embrace this collaborative, student-centered model, they found that they needed more planning time to work together. *"So then,"* continued Principal Ryan, *"we had to think about changing our master schedule and planning structures for integrated projects."* In the second and third year of the transition to pathways, the focus turned to student engagement and productivity within these evolving project-based, collaborative learning structures. But the focus was still on building the capacity of instructional staff to work together and use time in new ways. So, to fully develop a student-centered culture, the first step was for the instructional heart of the school—its teachers—to model student-centered practices through collaborating and establishing norms of inquiry and continuous learning and improvement among the staff.

Consonant with prior studies of equity-focused pathway models, the staff and leadership at O'Connell conceived of a relevant and rigorous curriculum as an integrated student support (Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007). Teachers encouraged students to engage in projects that were

meaningful to them and that reflected their communities and cultures. The student-centered approach was intentionally designed to provide students with authentic learning experiences and teaching that was adapted to individual learning and youth development needs. School leaders and classroom teachers describe the design of common teacher planning time as focused both on refining disciplinary practice and supporting colleagues to cultivate the skills needed for adaptive, student-centered, and culturally responsive teaching.

Special Education teachers and paraprofessionals have been integrated with the pathway teams and participate with content teachers in co-planning curriculum. They work in classrooms, not only to provide support for students, but also to help the content teachers identify broader opportunities for instructional differentiation.

### **Advisory**

Another way that teachers at O'Connell take the lead in creating a more student-centered culture is through instituting a teacher-led advisory class for every student. Although O'Connell continues to experiment with the frequency in which advisory classes are convened, the program is designed to connect every student with at least one caring staff person on campus. Teachers say that the advisory program aims to create personal relationships between advisors and their advisees. Collaborative planning among the teachers helps to clarify their role as an adult advocate for advisees. In addition to opportunities for one-on-one conversations with students about their academic and personal goals, teachers have also developed a curriculum and series of guided group conversations in Advisory. These provide a space for students to share their experiences, successes, and fears as part of their social and emotional learning. In the 2017-18 school year, for example, students identified the issue of sexual harassment and its damaging effects as an object of inquiry. This spurred the teachers in Advisory to hold guided discussion and reflection sessions to explore the challenges students face and how they can address them effectively. Teachers report that Advisory creates opportunities for them to learn about their students as individuals while monitoring student pathway progress through academic check ins. As teachers track student grades, they are able to make informed recommendations, like referring students to the afterschool tutoring program or helping students devise work plans to improve their grades. While teachers are the primary advisors to youth, over time, the counselors and some of the community-based partners

have been integrated into the advisory period (especially in the lower-division houses) and take on advisor roles for individual students.

### **BUILDING STRONGER BRIDGES TO STUDENT SUPPORTS OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM**

The experience in Advisory helped to solidify the teacher and leadership team’s convictions: to address students’ social, emotional, and youth development needs, they had to better connect their students to opportunities beyond the classroom and the school. In *You Can’t Be What You Can’t See: The Power of Opportunity to Change Young Lives*, Stanford researcher Milbrey McLaughlin underscores the importance of “bridging” structures, resources, and opportunities that form a critical subset of the social capital that young people need to navigate institutions like high schools. Youth in “high-poverty, culturally and socially isolated communities.... generally lack the resources and networks needed to create productive connections, or bridges, to [people and opportunities in] the broader community” (McLaughlin, 2018, p. 176). Teachers, counselors, and school leaders at O’Connell indicated that they understood well the importance of bridging capital for their students and sought to re-shape or strengthen the structures and conditions that would help build these connections for their students.

Since its very inception, O’Connell has had a deep bench of community-based partners and employers who provide expanded learning opportunities to students. Given this set of resources, the first iteration of bridge-building for students was to strengthen the systems they had in place to identify youth who needed help, and to better connect them to expanded learning opportunities. The integration of a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach within the pathway model was the next step in that direction.

#### **Implementing Response to Intervention Protocols**

One early mechanism that O’Connell staff put in place to build stronger bridges between its students and its partners is the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) protocols. RTI is a set of procedures for identifying students’ learning and behavioral challenges early so that educators can intervene with appropriate tiered supports (<https://www.rti4success.org/>). At O’Connell, RTI has focused on elaborating a Student Assistance Program where teams of school faculty, counselors, and other student services staff meet regularly to identify and have in-depth discussions



about individual struggling students. This includes discussion about how to engage community-based partners, employers, and parents to share information and design a student support plan. Within the RTI model, the school also established a Culture Leadership Team composed of teachers and support services staff and charged with developing school-wide actions for positive school climate, including restorative behavior practices, discipline policy and procedures, Advisory curriculum development, student leadership opportunities, and other strategies for promoting a supportive learning environment for all students. The community school coordinator remarked:

*“RTI helped cement an equity lens in our strategies for student support at O’Connell, and the multi-tiered system of supports helped us to clarify the roles of the Student Assistance Program teams and the Culture Leadership Team.”*

#### **Rethinking How Counselors Connect with Students**

Once RTI was adapted to the pathway model, O’Connell school leaders began to fully recognize how counselors could play new and important bridging roles for students in pathways and small learning communities. They were not

just a direct support for students but were well positioned to connect students to the wide array of available people and organizations at O’Connell and in the community. Yet, large student-to-counselor ratios in the typical public high school most often result in a counseling function that is essentially an “opt-in” service—one that favors students who are already motivated to seek help and have formed clear goals. Consequently, while there are some tasks that put counselors in contact with most students (e.g., scheduling classes, or working with college-bound seniors) the bulk of a counselor’s time would be spent with two types of students: those who opted-in for guidance, and those who had been identified as needing additional supports or targeted behavioral intervention (i.e., in RTI language, Tier 2 students). Staff leaders at O’Connell wanted the counseling department to develop a more robust set of Tier 1 strategies. In RTI language, Tier 1 strategies are those universal counseling interventions that are routinely provided to all students. Over time, O’Connell counselors developed two strategies for all students as integrated bridges to college and career readiness.

- *Universal Transcript Evaluations and Academic Planning.* Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, counselors at O’Connell began implementing a transcript evaluation every semester for all students. This process aims to systematically monitor student progress toward graduation and to engage each student in a twice-yearly conversation about developing and persisting with an academic plan. Counselors explain that one of their priorities is to evaluate transcripts as part of individual conferences. This assures that every student has an academic plan and enables counselors to identify those students who are not meeting graduation requirements and connect them with credit recovery and/or afterschool supports. They also use the transcript reviews as an opportunity to systematize communications with families of all juniors and seniors about graduation progress status and about the availability of timely interventions.

- *Integrating the Counseling Function into Classrooms.* In addition to conducting routine transcript reviews and academic planning during office hours, counselors at O’Connell now also connect with students in their weekly advisory class sessions. By conducting one-on-one sessions with students in the advisory class, counselors are able to signal that academic planning and counselor check-ins are an expectation for all students. More recently, principal Ryan has encouraged the entire counseling team to get out of the office and into regular classrooms. With the cooperation of academic and pathway teachers, some counselors have begun to work in classrooms with students individually and

in small groups in collaboration with regular teachers. One counselor remarked about all of the additional counseling services he could provide in the classroom setting:

*“Typically, I spend about 6 hours per week in classrooms with other teachers. I’ll check in with a few tables and check in with the students who don’t seem engaged. I’ll model how to de-escalate a [behavioral] situation with a student or have a hallway conversation. You’re so much more efficient with your time in meeting students’ needs where they are, in the classroom, rather than having them request time with you in your office. I think being in the classroom and seeing how kids are actually learning really helps you do your job as a counselor. You are another person who can take the time to engage with them, understand what’s going on with them.”*

Other staff remarked that this routine “push into classrooms” helps counselors to extend their reach, both by engaging the teachers in the process of academic planning and by offering the counselor an opportunity to observe teacher-student interactions in real time.

## **GOING DEEPER: RE-EXAMINING HOW LONG-TERM CBO PARTNERS & EMPLOYERS WORK WITH STUDENTS**

### **Taking a Community School Approach**

As noted earlier, during the 2013-14 school year, O’Connell joined in a collective impact collaboration with the Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN) Initiative, which was a “cradle to career” set of youth services, and includes two elementary schools and a feeder middle school in the Mission neighborhood. School leaders and Paola Zuniga, the MPN Community School Coordinator, saw this new initiative as an opportunity for O’Connell to re-examine how each of its longstanding community-based and employer partners worked with students. In the first year of the MPN initiative, students were surveyed about their experiences at O’Connell. Despite the work that teachers, counselors, and staff were doing to connect with all students, less than 61% of O’Connell students indicated that there was “at least one adult at my school that I can really count on who can help me with my problems.” Only about one-third of students surveyed indicated that there was “at least one adult at my school that I can really count on who believes in me” or “who makes sure I am doing well.”

These results were both disappointing and puzzling given the stellar array of community-based partners who were working with students on any given day. Some sample community-based partners include:

- Bayview Association for Youth
- Compass Education Group
- CUESA Schoolyard to Market
- FACES for the Future Coalition
- Generation Citizen
- JCYC Upward Bound
- Jewish Vocational Services
- Mission Graduates
- Tech 21
- School Health Mentoring for Success
- University of California, San Francisco: Early Academic Outreach Program
- Urban Services YMCA
- Youth Arts Exchange
- Youth Speaks

About 19 different community-based organizations and their staff were routinely on the campus—six providing college and career guidance and support, another six offering enrichment classes on Wednesdays, an additional seven providing a range of other services. But like the typical counseling service in high schools, partner organizations also generally worked with students by referral, on an “opt-in” basis after school, or in drop-in spaces like the school library or counseling center.

And so, O’Connell’s first response was to look for ways to use the school’s RTI structures to build better bridges to partners and to help them recruit more students into services. This approach resulted in some students opting into multiple services, while others—often those most in need—did not connect with partners at all. The 2013 student survey underscored this pattern. Could the community-based partners, like the counselors and special education staff, be encouraged to break out of their stove-pipe routines, and integrate their services into the classroom? This idea for “universalizing” access to more caring adults and their services was intriguing to the school leaders and to the community school coordinator who had weaved into the reform process the school district’s guiding principles for community schools: Shared Vision and Planning, Matching Needs and Assets, Continuous Improvement, and Coherence and Integration.

In the summer of 2014, the MPN initiative team, school leaders, and staff held a retreat to plan for the next year. Here

the idea of considering all community-based partner staff as potential “student success coaches” was born. Over the course of the 2014-15 school year the community school coordinator took on the task of organizing quarterly partnership meetings as a way for partners and school administrators to collectively assess their progress toward universal engagement of all students in integrated supports. In these meetings, the community school coordinator introduced CBO partners to the idea of “embedding” their services and outreach in regular classrooms with teachers or with the counselors in the counseling center for at least some set of hours each week. In addition, each CBO partner was asked to commit to a work plan that described the responsibilities of each organization and the specific O’Connell student learning objectives that would be achieved through its work.

During the 2015-16 school year, the community school coordinator began to systematize the process of negotiating memoranda of understandings with CBOs aimed at better aligning their work to O’Connell’s vision of universal access to services. The following year, 2016-17, five organizations—Jewish Vocational Services, Mission Graduates, Bayview Association for Youth, Urban Services YMCA, and School Health Mentoring for Success—agreed to formally embed their staff in the school’s counseling center. These staff would also spend two to eight hours a week in content classrooms



as “student success coaches” under the supervision of one of the school’s counselors. Gradually, over the course of the next two years, the participating partner organizations committed to increase the hours of classroom integration and expand their participation in common planning time with teachers.

## Student Success Coaches and College and Career Success Partners in the Classroom

In the lower division grades, student success coaches from the community-based partners have collaborated with teachers to develop social and emotional learning (SEL) goals for students and to co-design and support delivery of a SEL curriculum. They also spend time in English classrooms meeting with students on a one-to-one basis as mentors or tutors. Over time, these student success coaches have formed a professional learning community (PLC) that was initially facilitated by a clinical psychologist specializing in trauma, inclusion, and diversity. The purpose of the PLC was to share dilemmas and best practices in student support. In 2016-17, student success coaches expanded their role by leading social and emotional lessons and, in the 2017-18 school year, student success coaches began working with the English teachers to apply effective strategies to support individualized writing and reading skills development, as well as group work.

In the upper-division lab pathways, participating community-based partners called classroom-embedded College and Career Success Partners have been drawn from CBO programs that focus on improving college and career access. Jewish Vocational Services and FACES for the Future, which organize work-based learning internships for students, have gradually embedded their services into the day-to-day operations of pathway classes and the school's Counseling and Career Center. College and Career Success Partners from these organizations provide students with support for college applications, resume writing, and financial aid applications in classroom settings where they can reach *all* students. Some of the coaches also attend common planning time meetings with the classroom and CTE teachers to assist in co-teaching units on career readiness skills (e.g., time management, presentation and communications skills, or conflict resolution) and planning the work-based internships for individual students that are central to the O'Connell educational experience. Ultimately, explained the community school coordinator:

*“Our principal is in the classroom constantly, as are the academic counselors and afterschool tutoring staff (partners). Everyone does classroom support and/or teacher collaboration except the Wellness Center staff because that needs to be a confidential space.”*

Many of the school's community-based partners were, as one counselor explained:

*“always trying to get access to kids. But when you're able to ... embed those staff into the classroom, they don't have the same challenges around recruitment. At traditionally structured schools, counselors are often negotiating giving space and time to CBO partners to attract kids to their programs. So, it has been a huge help to embed partners in classrooms, to give them access and then to expect them to really be with us in the classroom for six to eight hours per week. It helps us eliminate so many programs that would only attract the most motivated students and families. I think that's a really positive structure. Kids will work with you if they know you. I think it's great to have partners embedded more like staff, you have much more leverage with students.”*

## Wednesdays at O'Connell

One other way that leaders at O'Connell have created opportunities for their CBO partners to integrate their services into classrooms and into venues where they are universally accessible to all students has been through collaborative and flexible use of an early release schedule once a week. On Wednesdays, O'Connell has an abbreviated schedule. On that day, the lower division students are offered Math and English support classes, health education, and enrichment classes that are credit-bearing and co-taught by a community-based partner and a teacher. In the upper division, eleventh and twelfth graders are in their labs working with classroom-embedded College and Career Success Partners from the CBO groups who lead weekly college and career workshops. In other cases, they are participating in off-campus work-based learning assignments. The last two periods of Wednesday afternoon also provide regularly scheduled time for community-based partners to co-teach courses in their domain of expertise. These might include, for example, courses or seminars focused on social and emotional learning, study skills, resumé writing, how to prepare for a workplace internship, college application strategies and financial aid procedures. The flexible nature of the last two periods of the Wednesday schedule allows for staff and community-based partners to engage in common professional development, or to plan together in role-alike teams, as needed. One staff from a community-based partner





commented that, at first, she was not totally comfortable moving from a mentor or advisor role to a role where she found herself in front of a class as a co-teacher. But over time, she found that the teachers embraced her presence in the class. As well, she reported that the new classroom-embedded role allowed her to convey and model important career readiness skills and college knowledge to more students equitably.

## Conclusion

The work of elaborating, modifying, and deepening the unique role of the Student Success Coach and classroom-embedded College and Career Success Partners continues at O’Connell via regular partner convenings and iterative inquiry among staff, students, community-based partners, and engaged families. So far, staff at O’Connell have been heartened by the results they are getting. Over the course of the last three years, they have seen a steady decline in the percentage of lower division students who fall “off-track” for on-time graduation. And in the upper division, graduation and college matriculation rates have steadily grown to exceed the district-wide performance of their peer demographic cohorts. On a more immediate term, the response of students to integrated student supports has convinced staff and school leaders that they are on the right track. In 2015-16, only 61% of O’Connell students responded favorably to a survey question regarding whether

“At least one adult makes sure I am doing well.” In 2017, 74% responded favorably to that statement.

O’Connell embarked on a journey of student-centered learning, focusing on those students furthest from opportunity, as a central tenant for achieving more equitable outcomes for all. The community school coordinator said:

*“This equity lens drove administration, teachers and staff to structure space and time to support deeper learning, adult collaboration, and the integration of partners as coaches in the classroom.”*

The approach to integrated student supports at O’Connell derives from an understanding among school leaders and teachers that providing “bridges” from the school to the community and postsecondary opportunities through support programs is often not enough for youth who live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. As McLaughlin points out, connections to the broader community, by themselves, are insufficient to set youth on a positive and productive path. They also need access to “bonding capital”—that is, opportunities to bond with at least one caring adult—concrete real-life examples of people just like them who [can] provide the advice about how to get there and the reassurance that they [can] be successful. She concludes, “bonding capital—secure connections with caring adults and supportive peers—galvanizes bridging capital” (McLaughlin, 2018, pp.177-78.).

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Chapter Four

preparing high  
school counselors  
to support  
college and career  
readiness for all

*Jacob Olsen, Ph.D. and  
Caroline Lopez-Perry, Ph.D.*



# preparing high school counselors to support college and career readiness for all

*Jacob Olsen, Ph.D. and Caroline Lopez-Perry, Ph.D.*

## Problem of Practice

How can school leaders support the integration of school counseling programs with career pathways and the Linked Learning approach?

## Abstract

In this chapter Jacob Olsen and Caroline Lopez-Perry, faculty members in the School Counseling program at California State University at Long Beach, provide a first-person account of their work to conceive of the school counseling role as part of a team charged with developing *comprehensive support services* in high schools. Drawing on their experience with pre-service and in-service counselor training, they outline a framework they have adapted to support the integration of school counseling programs with career pathways and the Linked Learning approach.

## Introduction

School counselors are specially trained to support students' academic, social, emotional, and career development and can play a pivotal role in helping young people to make successful postsecondary transitions. Yet, school counselors often operate in organizational silos within the typical high school. Their activities and services might not be coherently integrated with other student supports provided by school partners and employers and often they have not been included in designing and implementing pathway programs within their schools. This organizational isolation can result in disjointed support services that do not meet the needs of all students.

In our previous roles as practicing school counselors, we worked in elementary, middle, and high school settings. At each of these levels, we implemented individual, small group, classroom, and school-wide supports to prepare all students to be career and college ready after high school. As university faculty, our focus has shifted to preparing pre-service school counselors to address the career and college readiness needs of K-12 students. In addition, we collaborate with local school districts that are at different stages of implementing career pathways using the Linked Learning approach to provide in-service training for their high school counselors. In our experience, school counselors have typically not been an integral part of the pathway design and implementation process. However, given that school counselors are trained to provide academic, social, emotional, and career supports,



many districts are beginning to realize the key role school counselors can play in supporting students' career and college readiness. As a result, our collaboration with school districts has focused on better integrating school counseling programs and the role of school counselors with career pathway and Linked Learning implementation.

## BACKGROUND

According to student outcome data, current efforts to help all students meet career and college readiness goals are falling short. This is particularly so for student populations who are historically underserved. Despite a narrowing gap, Black and Latino students, students categorized as economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities continue to graduate from high school, enroll in postsecondary education, and obtain postsecondary degrees at lower rates than their peers (Kena et al., 2015; McFarland et al., 2017; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In addition, these student populations are disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers which impacts attendance, academic achievement, and graduation (Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). One strategy to address these outcomes and increase all students' career and college readiness, particularly in the context of the *comprehensive support services* component of career pathways and the Linked Learning approach, is to fully realize and more effectively use the unique skills of school counselors. However, what we've learned is that school counselor involvement in career pathway design

and implementation varies. In cases where school counselors are less involved, it is typically because (a) their time is not optimally allocated, (b) their roles have been organizationally siloed away from the academic and expanded learning enterprises of the school, or (c) they need professional development to better connect school counseling services with student learning and youth development goals of the career-themed pathway programs at their schools.

First, too often we see school counselors' time allocated for non-counseling duties (see sidebar). These duties can distract school counselors from providing the individual, small group, classroom, and school-wide career and college supports students need and that school counselors can uniquely provide. When their time is better allocated, school counselors find that they can better respond to students' career and college readiness needs and their students report that assigned schedules and courses are more relevant to their postsecondary plans (Lapan, Wells, Petersen, & McCann, 2014). When school counselors lead career and college readiness supports, it also contributes to improved attendance, higher graduation rates, higher enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, more certainty about plans after high school (Lapan & Harrington, 2010); lower disciplinary rates, higher financial aid completion rates, increased scores on achievement tests (Carey & Harrington, 2010a; Carey & Harrington, 2010b); increased postsecondary education applications (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011); and increased postsecondary enrollment (Belasco, 2013).

### APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE SCHOOL COUNSELING ACTIVITIES

#### Appropriate Activities for School Counselors

Helping principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems

Analyzing disaggregated data

Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons

Providing individual and small-group counseling services to students

Individual student academic program planning

#### Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors

Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences

Coordinating testing

Coordinating paperwork and data entry

Teaching classes when teachers are absent

Supervising classrooms or common areas

(Adapted from the American School Counselor Association, 2012)

In addition, for a variety of reasons, school counselors and other key personnel may not have a seat at the table when career pathways are being developed and implemented. In this case, administrators or pathway teams may not have a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills that school counselors and other key personnel have related to supporting students. As such, their collective knowledge and skills to contribute to successful student outcomes are underutilized.

Finally, in some cases, school counselors need professional development opportunities that focus on helping them to implement a comprehensive school counseling program in concert with other support providers on the campus. They may also need support to better integrate their work with the expectations and learning demands of the career pathways and the Linked Learning approach.

## Maximizing Supports through School Counselor Training

The number of school districts that are implementing career pathways in middle and high schools is growing (Almond & Miller, 2014; Carnevale, Garcia, & Gulish, 2017; LaFors & McGlawn, 2013; Warner et al., 2016). As a result, district and school leaders are increasingly interested in providing school counselors with the training and support they need to align their school counseling program with career pathways. This enables districts and schools to maximize career and college readiness supports for all students. Based on district goals, local needs, and collaborative planning, our role has been to provide training for school counselors focused on:

- a. establishing foundational knowledge of career pathways and the Linked Learning approach,
- b. aligning career pathways and the Linked Learning approach with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) for school counseling,
- c. assessing current career and college readiness supports and barriers to providing supports, and
- d. establishing strategies to address barriers and increase career and college readiness support implementation.

As we collaborate with school districts to plan and provide training, we are intentionally cognizant of initiative fatigue. According to Reeves (2012), “the Law of Initiative Fatigue states that when the number of initiatives increases while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant, then each new initiative—no matter how well conceived or well



intentioned—will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and ounces of emotional energy that its predecessors” (p. 27). Therefore, the approach to supporting school counselors outlined below is very much focused on what school counselors already do to support students career and college readiness. Further, we highlight how aligning current practices with career pathways and the Linked Learning approach expands school counselors’ reach and enhances existing efforts rather than adding something new to an already full plate.

### FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CAREER PATHWAYS AND LINKED LEARNING

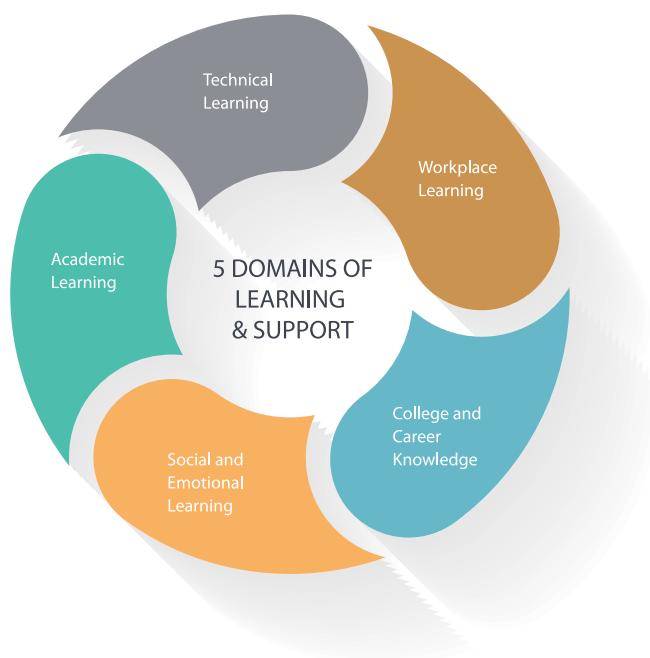
School counselors need a foundational knowledge base about career pathways and the Linked Learning approach to effectively integrate their school counseling program with the academic, technical, and workplace learning components of this new way of organizing the high school. In our experience, this is especially so where school counselors were not invited to participate in the initial development and implementation of career pathways. To meet this need, we start our training process with content, activities, and discussion focused on the core concepts of Linked Learning. The goal is for school counselors to have a clear and consistent understanding of what career pathways and the Linked Learning approach are intended to accomplish, the core components of the Linked Learning approach, the history and growing adoption of career pathways and Linked Learning reforms, and the student outcome research that supports the growing embrace of this reform by educators.

## LINKED LEARNING AND ASCA NATIONAL MODEL ALIGNMENT

After establishing a foundational knowledge of career pathways and the Linked Learning approach, the next phase of our training focuses on Linked Learning and ASCA National Model alignment. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) for school counseling is an implementation framework that articulates the professional standards and essential components of a comprehensive school counseling program (For more information see: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/asca-national-model>). During this part of the training, we emphasize that integrating Linked Learning with a comprehensive school counseling program ensures equitable access to pathways and to fully realizing *comprehensive support services* for students. In addition, we demonstrate how school counselors can seamlessly incorporate Linked Learning into their everyday roles and responsibilities within a comprehensive school counseling program. For this reason, school counselors need not perceive Linked Learning as yet another initiative added to their considerable list of responsibilities.

More specifically, *comprehensive support services*, the fourth core component in the Linked Learning approach, consists of five Domains of Learning and Support. These include: 1) support for academic learning, 2) support for technical learning, 3) support for workplace learning, 4) support to advance career and college knowledge, and 5) support for social and emotional learning (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2016; see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



We help practicing school counselors to better understand how they can implement these five Domains of Learning and Support within the service delivery framework of the ASCA National Model for school counseling programs: 1) Foundation, 2) Management, 3) Delivery, and 4) Accountability (see Figure 2). The strategies for alignment we outline in our training are described below.

Figure 2.  
ASCA National Model



### Foundation

Within the Foundation component, school counselors are asked to create a vision and mission statement defining what the future will look like in terms of student outcomes at their school. When school counselors are part of the Linked Learning leadership and design teams, they are able to collaboratively define their counseling program goals in accordance with student learning outcomes articulated by the Linked Learning or pathway team. This collaboration ensures that the school counselors' services will work in conjunction with Linked Learning pathway goals. By aligning the program goals to the school's goals, administrators can guide school counselors in prioritizing student supports and service delivery. For example, if the school's goal is to increase the number of students applying to the University of California and California State University systems, the school counseling program's goal might focus on increasing the number of students enrolling in A-G courses or on interventions to ensure that students understand the standards and application processes of their target postsecondary schools.

## Management

School counselors incorporate assessments and tools that help them organize their work and identify student needs. At the beginning of the school year, school counselors and administrators co-develop annual agreements that address how they will organize the school counseling program and what goals they will accomplish. Furthermore, school counselors work with advisory councils made up of students, parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators, and community members who can review and provide recommendations about Linked Learning *comprehensive support services*. By using counseling curriculum and small group action plans, school counselors begin to incorporate the Linked Learning supports into their activities. Lastly, counselors and administrators can learn how to identify and use appropriate data to measure progress toward their school counseling and Linked Learning goals, as well as to engage in cycles of inquiry and organizational improvement.

## Delivery

To fully realize the type of *comprehensive support services* envisioned in the Linked Learning approach, ASCA guidelines recommend that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time on:

- direct services (e.g., delivering school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning and advising, school-wide career and college events), and
- goal-aligned indirect services that support the coherent integration of school counseling with other aspects of the student high school experience (e.g., collaboration and consultation with teachers, career pathway teams, and



community stakeholders; ASCA, 2012). ASCA further recommends that the remaining 20% of counselor time be spent on program management, professional development, and data-informed performance analysis (ASCA, 2012).

The “**school counseling core curriculum**” refers to one of the direct student services recommended by the ASCA National Model. This direct interaction between school counselor and students consists of structured lessons on key student success competencies (e.g., mindsets, persistence behaviors, career and social and emotional development) delivered in collaboration with classroom teachers as part of the school’s overall curriculum. School counselors deliver content in classrooms and small groups activities.

In the following section, we describe how these services are incorporated to address the five Domains of Learning and Support.

**Support for academic learning.** According to ASCA (2017a) school counseling programs work to ensure that students “develop academic goals at all grade levels reflecting their abilities and academic interests and can access appropriate rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences” (p.1). Programs may accomplish this by implementing the ASCA National Model’s school counseling core curriculum, which outlines the supports that all students should receive through the school counseling program (Lopez & Mason, 2017). For example, in collaboration with pathway teachers, school counselors should teach students study skills, time management, and organizational skills. For students who are having academic difficulties, school counselors should provide academic and behavior interventions via group counseling and individual counseling and give referrals for tutoring, outside counseling, and other interventions. Furthermore, school counselors should ideally consult with academic instructors, technical instructors, and support staff on academic and behavior interventions. School counselors should also engage in academic advising to ensure that students are taking rigorous and relevant coursework in order to meet their postsecondary and career goals. Lastly, as members of the Linked Learning leadership team, school counselors can make valuable contributions in discussions



on topics related to pathway mapping, A-G course descriptions, and the development of academic supports.

**Support for technical learning.** School counselors can collaborate with career and technical education (CTE) faculty and participating industry professionals in the planning and delivery of lessons focused on technical skills, thus allowing students to practice and master skills within a given industry. School counselors can also help students to explore the connection between academic learning and technical learning by referring students to service learning or mentorship opportunities that directly relate to career-specific research, or by encouraging them to lead projects. Finally, school counselors can work with teachers and administrators to coordinate off-campus field trips that allow students to develop job skills or to master necessary technology (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2016).

**Support for workplace learning.** To support student workplace learning, school counselors can participate in the development of programs to promote career awareness (e.g., workplace tours, career fairs, guest speakers). The school counseling program can utilize the ASCA National Model counseling curriculum and small group workshops to teach workplace skills such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, professionalism, interviewing, and resume writing. Finally, school counseling programs that are effectively integrated with their school's career-themed pathways will be in a better position to make appropriate referrals to career exploration experiences, including informational interviews, job shadows, extracurricular activities, and mentorships.

**Support to advance career and college knowledge.** The school counseling program plays an important role in developing students' career and college knowledge. Through the ASCA National Model counseling curriculum, group counseling, workshops, and academic advising, school counselors help students develop the knowledge and skills related to postsecondary options, college requirements, the admission process, college match, technical/trade school enrollment, financial aid, and transitioning to college. School counselors also administer and interpret assessments to assist students to analyze and evaluate their own abilities, interests, skills, and achievement. For example, school counselors might meet with a student to evaluate PSAT/SAT scores or examine the results of career interest inventories. Finally, as part of the pathway leadership team, school counselors help integrate career and college knowledge into teachers'



curriculum. This includes teaching about college admission and scholarship through the use of persuasive essays in Language Arts or how to calculate one's GPA in math courses.

**Support for social and emotional learning.** School counselors are often the first line of defense in supporting the social and emotional needs of students. Research shows that at-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, depression, anxiety, and attempted suicide can negatively impact academic performance (DeSocio & Hootman, 2004). Difficulties with academic work, adjustment to school, behavioral regulation, attention, and concentration are all potential signs of emerging or existing mental health problems in students (Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2000; DeSocio & Hootman, 2004; Masi et al., 2001). Ideally, school counselors can facilitate prevention and early intervention services to at-risk students such as recognizing early warning signs, providing school-based prevention and universal interventions and targeted interventions for students with mental health concerns (ASCA, 2017b). This includes individual and group counseling and referrals to outside mental health agencies. School counselors also play a role in developing students' soft skills. A survey of hiring managers indicated that soft skills are just as important as hard skills when evaluating job candidates (Harkins, 2015). School counselors, in

collaboration with teachers, can teach students the skills to be successful in postsecondary education, careers, and in life via the ASCA National Model counseling curriculum, group counseling, and small group workshops. Lessons can include topics such as professionalism, teamwork, communication, managing emotions, and goal setting.

### **Accountability**

School counselors use data to examine the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance, and behavior. The school counseling program should regularly set aside time to analyze program assessment results and school data. Results from needs assessments, pre-post surveys, achievement data, A-G completion rates, college admission data, and pathway enrollment and completion data can guide future actions and improvement of support service delivery.

### **USING DATA-DRIVEN INQUIRY TO INCREASE CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS**

To recap, after determining district goals, assessing local needs, and collaboratively planning how best to support school counselors through training, we begin our work with school districts by establishing a foundational knowledge base among school counselors about career pathways and the Linked Learning approach. Second, we focus on aligning career pathways and the Linked Learning approach with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) for school counseling programs. The next phase in supporting school counselors through the training process is using data to assess current career and college readiness supports and barriers to providing those supports. Lastly, we develop strategies to address barriers and support continuous improvement and implementation.

### **Equity and Access to Pathways**

We believe school counselors can support equitable access to Linked Learning pathways, determine student career and college readiness, and identify student needs by collecting and analyzing data. When working with school counselors, we ask them to reflect on what type of data they are currently collecting and what type of data they need to begin collecting. Process data answers the question, *What did you do for whom?*, and includes the number of students who participated in a support and what the support was (ASCA, 2012). Perception data answers the question, *What do people think they know, believe, or can*

*do?*, and includes pre-post survey data, needs assessments, and program evaluation results (ASCA, 2012). Outcome data answers the question, *So what?*, and includes pathway enrollment and completion, dropout rates, state test scores, college entrance exams, college-going rates, attendance rates, and office discipline referrals. We recommend that school counselors begin to disaggregate such data and examine student populations by race/ethnicity, ability, foster youth status, and English language learner status. By asking the question, *What does data say about all students' access to pathways?*, the school counseling program can begin to examine what *comprehensive support services* are needed to ensure equitable access for students. Moreover, by asking the questions, *What do all students need?* and *What do some students need?*, school counselors can use this data to determine both school-wide and targeted student needs.

Given large caseloads and the many responsibilities of a school counselor, determining school-wide and targeted needs can help ensure that all students are receiving appropriate supports. At one district that we worked with, school counselors collaborated across school sites and levels to determine what knowledge and skills all students should gain via the school counseling core curriculum in order to be career and college ready. They determined that all students needed information on pathway options prior to entering high school. In order to best support students entering ninth grade, the middle school counselors decided to incorporate career interest inventories and information on pathway options into their lessons for sixth through eighth grade, thus allowing students to make informed decisions about pathway selection for high school. They then decided what supports they should provide to targeted students through individual advising.

### **Prioritizing Career and College Readiness Supports**

An important aspect of prioritizing career and college readiness supports is allocating time to plan, develop, and implement *comprehensive support services*. For the districts and school sites we have worked with, this meant examining how counselors were currently using their time. We encourage school counselors to complete a use-of-time assessment. District and school administrators can use data from this assessment to better prioritize school counselors' time and needed supports. At one district, these important conversations led district leaders to recognize that school counselors spent the bulk of their time on student schedules. As a result, they removed this non-counseling duty from the school counselors'

responsibilities so that they could spend their time and efforts providing career and college readiness supports in the classroom and through individual academic advising.

As school counseling programs use data to determine and prioritize services within the five Domains of Learning and Support, we recommend a five-step method for program management. The first step is to review and collect school data. Once data are disaggregated, school counselors identify student needs and prioritize services within the five Domains of Learning and Support. The second step is to set goals based on the data. We teach school counselors how to build SMART goals into their comprehensive school counseling program. A SMART goal is one that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time bound. For instance, school counselors focused on student attendance may consider the following SMART goal: By the end of the second semester, the attendance rate for freshman will increase by 15%. Next, school counselors begin to implement interventions within the five Domains of Learning and Support that will help them reach their new SMART goals. They then collect and analyze data to determine the effectiveness of interventions. Based on the findings, they continue, adjust, or stop the interventions.

## Implications and Further Inquiry

Career pathways and Linked Learning are promising approaches to supporting the career and college readiness of all students (Warner et al., 2016). However, the literature and our experiences indicate that in order for all students to be career and college ready, schools need to put integrated and *comprehensive support services* in place to meet student needs (Castellano, 2016; LaFors

& McGlawn, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2016). Given their training, knowledge, and skills, school counselors are well positioned to significantly contribute to this work. The development of *comprehensive support services* and the integration of the role of school counselors has implications for Linked Learning sites, the field of education, and future inquiry.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR LINKED LEARNING SITES

At the district level, *comprehensive support services* and the integrated role of school counselors can be prioritized through key supports for counselors: (1) the optimal allocation of professional development, (2) meeting and collaboration time, (3) resources focused on developing counselor knowledge of career pathways and Linked Learning, (4) leadership supports to align school counseling programs with career pathways, and (5) the collaborative use of data to inform the development of effective career and college readiness strategies. To connect this work to the school site level, pathway teams should include school counselors to coordinate efforts and roles to meet student needs. For district and school administrators, this includes a discussion about how school counselors spend their time, and how they will integrate the school counseling program with career pathways to deliver *comprehensive support services* alongside pathway teachers, pathway teams, and other support personnel. In our experience, engaging school counselors as an integral part of career pathway and Linked Learning implementation at the district and school site level is an important component of enhancing and sustaining career pathways and Linked Learning. When district leaders and school administrators listen to the expertise, ideas, and needs of school counselors, transformative conversations take place and school counselor buy-in increases.

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION

- What supports do students need?
- Who is involved or who needs to be involved in providing supports?
- What do those who provide supports need to be effective?
- What structures/processes are in place or need to be in place to identify student needs and personnel to provide supports?

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

To continue to build capacity, scale up implementation, and increase successful outcomes for all students, the *comprehensive support services* component of career pathways and Linked Learning needs to be developed and integrated across systems that include individual schools, districts, community organizations, industry partners, and postsecondary institutions. To reduce the siloing effect we have experienced, a better understanding of the roles of school personnel involved in career pathway and Linked Learning implementation is needed. With an increased understanding of who has the training and skills to support students' career and college readiness, state and district leaders can improve how personnel time is spent, coordinate efforts more efficiently, and address student needs in a comprehensive way.

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- Collaborative for the Advancement of Linked Learning (CSU CALL) Website
- Dr. Jacob Olsen, California State University Long Beach, jacob.olsen@csulb.edu
- Dr. Caroline Lopez-Perry, California State University Long Beach, caroline.lopez@csulb.edu

## FURTHER INQUIRY

Future research should establish a foundational understanding of *comprehensive support services* using the Guiding Questions for Comprehensive Support Services Implementation (see sidebar). Because the *comprehensive support services* component of Linked Learning has not been widely examined, exploratory research methodologies such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and district and school level data analysis could answer many of the Guiding Questions for Comprehensive Support Services Implementation. However, it is critical that future inquiry goes beyond exploratory research methodologies, and includes research focused on interventions that impact career and college readiness in the context of career pathways and Linked Learning. Perhaps the most crucial area of future research within the *comprehensive support services* component of Linked Learning is equity and access to pathways and postsecondary opportunities. Research exploring the impact of interventions focused on equity and access are also needed.

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Chapter Five

engaging  
family, youth,  
and community  
members as  
champions  
for equity and  
college and career  
readiness

*Kendra Fehrer, Ph.D.*



# engaging family, youth, and community members as champions for equity and college and career readiness

*Kendra Fehrer, Ph.D.*

## Problem of Practice

How to engage families, community members, and youth as champions for equitable access to college and career readiness opportunities in the high school context, and in pathway programs specifically?

## Abstract

A focal point of study at Stanford’s John W. Gardner Center is the implementation of community school models and family engagement strategies in public schools. This chapter explores the intersection between Linked Learning and the community schools movement, and discusses how schools in two California districts have undertaken concerted efforts to engage families and community partners, and to harness youth voice as a substantive strategy to facilitate equitable access to rigorous college and career ready learning for all students. While each school’s approach differs, they have both transformed their campuses into student-centered community schools—places where school staff, families, and community partners work together to offer a range of supports and opportunities to help students thrive. Additionally, each of these schools is a Linked Learning pathway site where leaders and teachers engage families as assets and partners in their students’ learning success. The chapter illustrates how these sites managed to disrupt entrenched modalities of schooling and create new mechanisms of greater collaboration, coherence, and commitment to support student learning in the high school context.

## Introduction

Linked Learning is premised on the notion that students are more likely to be successful when they are engaged

in meaningful learning experiences. Yet, students often struggle with barriers to learning related to poverty, racism, immigrant status, and other challenges that emanate from within and beyond the school, and serve to perpetuate inequalities. Consequently, schools implementing rigorous quality pathways may still struggle with barriers to students’ participation and college success (Warner et al., 2016). While family involvement has been linked to positive outcomes for youth—especially for first generation college students—many schools struggle with engaging families in meaningful ways to support their children’s success. Supporting equitable outcomes for students—including equitable access to the benefits of quality pathway participation and future college and career success—requires a complex ecosystem of students, families, and the community.





## Background

Family involvement in children’s learning has long been associated with increased academic achievement. In a child’s early years, parent involvement can be connected with increased literacy, communication, and school attendance (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). In a child’s middle and high school years, family involvement can influence student achievement, behavior, and social and emotional health, school persistence and drop-out, college readiness, and college success (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Jeynes, 2007; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006; Stormshak et al., 2009). Further, high schools’ outreach to parents can have significant and positive effects on parents’ involvement in their children’s education (Simon, 2004). Yet despite the known associations between parent involvement and student academic success, many schools struggle with finding appropriate mechanisms to engage with parents in the high school years. This difficulty can be compounded by differences in culture, language, and socio-economic status across families and school staff, resulting in school staff sometimes perceiving families as a barrier to students’ success, rather than an asset. For example, some parents may struggle with understanding their role in their child’s college application process, misunderstanding the importance of school attendance, or balancing urgent family needs with future opportunities for their children. Additionally, schools often struggle to understand the types of involvement that are meaningful to student success (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Hill, 2014). At the middle and high school levels, parents may be less likely to be involved in the classroom and/or school site volunteering; however, parents can continue to play important roles in supporting students’ academic success, maintaining high expectations for their students, and supporting college knowledge and readiness.

So how can a high school or program for adolescents and young adults engage families and young people in key pathway supports? And how can a school leverage community resources to mitigate the effects of poverty, racism, and entrenched inequalities on students’ life and school success? The pages that follow describe promising strategies currently underway in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). While each district and site differ in their approach to community schools and meaningful student and family engagement, they each offer compelling evidence of powerful supports for learning.

## School Profiles

### THE ACADEMY, OAKLAND

The Academy<sup>1</sup>, opened in 2006, is a small public school in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) serving 475 students in grades 6 through 12. The Academy is located in a neighborhood characterized as having among the highest “community stressor” levels in Oakland in terms of incidents of violent crime, poverty, health outcomes, rates of incarceration, and truancy/suspension rates (School Profile, 2014-15). Almost all (97%) of the school’s student body qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and over 90% of students will be the first in their family to graduate from a four-year college. Approximately 85% of Academy students identify as Latinx, and 12% as African-American. In its short history, Academy has garnered attention in the district for its high rate of A-G (college prep) course completion, significant growth in AP class participation, and a consistently high level of parent participation.

The Academy was also one of the first schools in OUSD to implement Linked Learning pathways, as well as one of the district’s early adopting community schools. Two pathways, Business and Social Justice, are currently available to students in grades 10 through 12, and the Academy has established formal partnerships with programs such as BUILD, College Track, and Upward Bound that support pathway development and college prep. As a community school, the Academy strives to serve the whole child by coupling their academic program with support services, such as a school-based health clinic, legal and mental health services, and the Family and College Resource Center (FCRC). Additionally, they are constantly leveraging less formal community partnerships to support student success. Alumni also play a strong role in the school as peer mentors, club advisors and, the principal hopes, even future instructional staff.

Community schools are known for their innovative and systematic practices engaging families in their children’s learning, and the Academy is no exception. The Academy’s FCRC not only provides supports for families—for example, ESL classes, legal aid, food assistance, and computer access—but also involves families in their students’ college preparation as well, which is unique for a family resource center. The FCRC supports families through the college

<sup>1</sup> To respect the school and staff’s anonymity, this name is a pseudonym and the practices described may reflect composite characteristics, drawn from the author’s experience with other schools in Oakland.



application and admission process—for example, completing FAFSA forms, keeping on track with the application process, identifying and applying for scholarships and loans, communicating effectively with their child’s teachers, and ensuring they understand (and can access) what their child needs to be “college ready.” Additionally, the FCRC works to ensure all students are enrolled in meaningful summer learning opportunities and internships that match student interests, skill level, and aspirations. The staff are frequently building relationships with new partner organizations that are reflective of student interests and, correspondingly, support families in overcoming the barriers that might exist to access. For example, FCRC staff described helping families translate acceptance letters, recognize important deadlines, and navigate the public transportation system. As one FCRC staff member described:

*“I’m continually seeing the barriers that get in the way of students accessing opportunities. And usually there are all these little misunderstandings. For example, a parent will say, ‘Oh, I thought I wasn’t supposed to call [the organization] until the 11th, but actually, they need to call before the 11th. Or maybe the letter arrives and the students’ name is misspelled, so the family doesn’t think it’s legit. It sounds so simple, but at the same time, that little detail makes the difference between the student getting the opportunity or not. And so from the outside, you might be like, ‘Oh, like the kids don’t care, the families don’t care. They don’t have any follow-through.’ But then from the inside, you see all these little things that can become big things or can make the difference between a student accessing something amazing or not.”*

This work underscores the importance of including families in efforts to expand learning opportunities and pathway connections for students. By engaging with families, as well as the partner organizations, the FCRC works to minimize barriers and maximize access to opportunities for students.

Engaging with families can also support more systematic program change and improvement on behalf of students. At the Academy, for the last several years students with a GPA of less than 3.0 have been required to participate in afterschool enrichment and academic support. Initially, parents resisted this practice. However, school administrators worked with families to help them understand the value and importance of the extra time and, eventually, parents came to support and champion the practice. As the principal describes it:

*“We have a relationship with the students and their families that, well, we can really [be blunt] with the kids and the parents and say, ‘We need this’ and they will respond.”*

As one teacher reported:

*“I don’t think the kids even know that they’re in afterschool, because it’s so seamlessly integrated.”*

Staff actively strive to make campus a place that students want to be. As one teacher stated:

*“For the majority [of students], this is where they want to spend their time. You can hold kids accountable because [the school] is something they want to be part of.”*

At the Academy, engagement with families runs deep. In the words of the FCRC coordinator:

*“You can’t think about family engagement or the FCRC without the history of how the Academy was established. When the district decided that small schools were the way to go, a group of teachers and parents sat together and dreamed up this school. Parents were at the table from day one, and not as window dressing. They gave input. They were stakeholders. Everything that the Academy is becoming has been and will be rooted in that history, and that practice continues.”*

Parents have also been responsible for increasing school funding through advocacy efforts on local ballot measures, as well as advocacy with district staff that resulted in upgraded science classrooms. Whereas in many wealthy schools, parents play a role in fundraising for the school through the PTA, this can be more of a challenge in lower-income communities. As the FCRC coordinator stated:

*“Our principal has such a deep understanding of kids, of learning, of instruction, of the community, and of politics. One thing she’s really big on right now is the political power of this parent community. In our community, over the course of the last year, the parents fundraised about \$2,000. That’s fantastic, but it doesn’t go very far in a school budget. But the parents in our school, by mobilizing around two big ballot measures, also brought in three quarters of a million dollars into our school budget! Our principal is really very clear about the political power of our families to bring real money and real resources, not just to our school but to the district.”*

Lastly, engagement with families and youth can support some of the deeper, subtler work of supporting marginalized youth to access pathways and college success. Youth development research underscores the importance of cultivating positive social identities, school connectedness, and a sense of belonging as protective factors for young people (Lerner, 2009). Recent research highlights that youth need more than links to programs, opportunities, and institutions outside their neighborhoods; they also need strong supports *within* their community (McLaughlin, 2018). The Academy’s family and student engagement practices can create social connections and enduring bonds that youth need to sustain their success.

### **ESTEBAN E. TORRES HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS, LOS ANGELES**

The Torres High School campus, located in an unincorporated part of East Los Angeles County, is a cluster of five autonomous pilot schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Inaugurated in 2010, Torres was built as an entirely new campus—the first constructed in East Los Angeles in over 80 years. The Torres pilot schools were designed in collaboration with Los Angeles Education Partnership (LEAP) and community organizers such as Inner City Struggle (ICS), which have

shaped the schools’ development from the start. The Humanitas Academy of Arts and Technology (HAAT) is one of five separately run pilot schools that share the Torres campus. HAAT is a Title One school that serves 415 students in grades 9 through 12. The student body is 98% Latinx. HAAT uses an arts-based instructional model that offers students the opportunity to participate in challenging, interdisciplinary learning experiences organized around relevant themes. The model empowers students through project-based learning that encourages critical thinking, develops writing and verbal skills, and uses art media as an inspiration and focus. HAAT has active pathway linkages with the arts, including a strong partnership with East Los Angeles College, which has developed its outreach and student and family supports in collaboration with the HAAT community. HAAT is also a community school, providing a range of integrated student supports and emphasizing engagement with families.

The school actively supports students and families in exploring postsecondary school options. Students receive ongoing guidance and support relative to internship and pathway opportunities throughout their school career. According to a school staff member:

*“It’s important for youth to know that there are opportunities for them, and to not leave it at that. So it’s the difference between saying, ‘Here are these opportunities, good luck!’ versus really walking with you every step of the way. If you’re not ready now, then come back later. We think all kids do best with this approach, not just the kids at our school.”*

Including family engagement and youth voice as an integrated strategy has been beneficial at HAAT. Over time, HAAT staff and internship providers have learned that their ideas of opportunities may not always match up with the reality of students’ lives. For example, participating in an exciting internship that ends late in the evening requires that student interns have cars, or that parents are available to pick them up, and neither may be the case. So, the school works with students and families around all details of the internship to ensure that students can access opportunities. Transportation can be a challenge for families in the community, so HAAT also intentionally and systematically educates its students to utilize public transportation. About a quarter of HAAT fieldtrips involve public transportation to get to the class’s destination.



Additionally, students receive particular support engaging with their parents around college decisions. Early on in the school's history, staff realized that many students struggled with communicating with their parents about paying for college or considering colleges far from home. The school developed mechanisms to support students with these conversations in ways that balanced respecting their families' experience with articulating their own dreams and aspirations. As one student described:

*“It helped give me language to talk to my parents about why I wanted to attend a private school more than an hour’s drive away. I told my parents about how much I appreciated all they had done to give me opportunities, and that now it was my turn to pay back their sacrifice.”*

Another noteworthy feature of HAAT is its innovative peer mentoring program. Initiated with support from LEAP, the program provides a structure for youth voice, leadership, and peer support. The 15-20 peer mentors at HAAT handle many of the schools' discipline issues through restorative justice practices, which the principal credits for the decreasing demands on her time for disciplinary issues. According to the principal, she now spends 10% of her time or less on discipline.

Another strand of the school's work is supporting students in how to talk to their parents about a career in the arts. The school provides short, readable documents with FAQs and key facts about the economic viability of the field as either a generalizable learning opportunity or a career pathway, and they organize visits to college arts programs for parents with, and without, their students. HAAT also provides practical information about the local arts industry, and shares labor-market research outlining demand and salary in the arts.

The staff also work to leverage community resources to provide students informal but exemplary access to an arts and culture experience. By the end of high school, all students will have attended professional performances and shows in major areas (e.g., opera, theater, etc.). The staff make it possible for parents to attend performances, as well. According to the principal:

*“By the time students graduate, they’ve seen theatre, concerts, dance/ballet, television studies. [These opportunities communicate] the message: this is your community, you belong. Art is not a privilege, it’s a right. We take parents and students to the LA opera on dress rehearsal night. They do a workshop and tour with students. We’ve had Placido Domingo come to the school. The LA Opera pays for the internship themselves, as part of their diversity pipeline. Students have had lunch with agents at House of Blues.”*

Through strategic partnerships and intentional strategies to engage parents in the pathway, college, and career process, HAAT has expanded the way students are supported in their learning experiences and future success. The youth and family engagement additionally serve to bolster social bonds, supporting students' ability to leverage and sustain the “bridging” opportunities that pathways provide.

## Stand-Out Engagement Strategies

This section highlights key strategies that span the two schools. The examples of particular practices associated with these strategies are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they provide examples of an approach to engaging family, youth, and community in Linked Learning pathways.

## INVOLVING STUDENTS IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Within the Linked Learning approach, students are not just passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants in the learning process (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2016). As students construct their own meanings, goals, and strategies, and actively monitor their progress, they become more aware of what they know, what they still need to learn, where they need help, and what resources they can leverage to overcome obstacles to learning. Both of the pathway schools profiled here have extended that “learning self-regulation” to their work with families. This is evident in the HAAT practice of student-led teacher-parent conferences, bolstered with support from one of the school’s community partners, the Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP). Ellen Pais, President of LAEP, describes the following:

*“We’ve been trying to build student-led conferences into our work across multiple schools. It allows students to talk about the curriculum, their vision for themselves, what they see themselves doing well, what supports they need. We want to change the relationship between students and their parents and their education. In this way, the parents and students are actually forced to talk about what does it mean to be in ninth grade at this school. What excites you about this? What doesn’t excite you? We provide supports to the teachers on how to support their students to be ready. The parent participation is really high because they don’t usually talk to their student about this kind of thing.”*

Structuring opportunities for students to articulate their goals, interests, challenges, and progress has many benefits to their own learning journey and development. Including their families in their journey connects parents to the core academic work of the school, engaging them as partners and allies in students’ learning success. As students navigate the world of internships, high school course selection, and college preparation, parents travel with them in a student-led process. As Pais noted above, parents are excited to talk with their students about their goals, dreams, and progress. Students have the opportunity to “bridge their worlds” by including parents in their academic and career journey. Parent-teacher conferences become sites of engagement for the whole family, and a strong illustration of involving students in family engagement. Similar approaches can be adopted and applied to other areas involving parents—for

example, pathway orientations, college preparation events, or internship-related activities.

## MOVING FROM RANDOM ACTS TO SYSTEMATIC, INTEGRATED, AND RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Recent research has highlighted the disjuncture between school staff’s views of what constitutes parental involvement in education with families’ own views (Zarate, 2007; Westrich & Strobel, 2012). Family engagement efforts in schools often focus on increasing parents’ on-campus participation in school events or, more recently in California, meeting state LCAP requirements for parent involvement. These efforts are often random or piecemeal, rather than coordinated and ongoing. Meaningful family engagement is *systematic*: a core component of system-wide endeavors and strategies (for example, college readiness activities). It is *integrated*: embedded into the goals, structures and processes of the organization, not just the job of one person such as a “family liaison” or “outreach coordinator.” It is *culturally responsive and strength-based*: honoring families’ assets and responding to their unique contexts. And, it is *linked to learning*: efforts to engage families should be tightly linked to supporting and enhancing their students’ educational journeys.

Both of the pathway schools highlighted in this chapter engender systematic, integrated, and culturally responsive forms of engagement tightly linked to learning. The principals at each site have developed thoughtful strategies to engage with families across all domains of the school’s work. Family engagement is integrated into pathway goals, structures, and processes—for example, internship placements, teacher-parent conferences, and college readiness coaching. Staff at both sites have been explicit and steadfast in their commitment to “meet families where they are,” leverage families’ strengths, and, as much as they can, serve as “translators” as students and families interact with systems that may be unfamiliar or unfriendly based on families’ own educational experiences. Lastly, family engagement efforts across the schools are explicitly linked to specific student learning goals. In this way, these two schools have moved beyond “random acts of engagement” to authentic and meaningful family engagement.

## LEVERAGING COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS AS PARTNERS

The experience of the schools profiled in this chapter illustrates a powerful potential partner to bolster meaningful and authentic family engagement: community organizers.

While many schools have become accustomed to engaging community partnerships to provide afterschool programs, internships, and integrated student supports on campus, community organizers can be unique, unexpected partners in schools' efforts to catalyze their work with families. In both schools, community organizers played key roles in helping school leadership think strategically about family outreach, systems change, and political power. At the Academy, an Oakland community organizing entity helped to mobilize parents in the school's design, build staff capacity to forge relationships with parents, and create the structures, systems, and practices to sustain meaningful family engagement over time. At HAAT, Inner City Struggle provided similar critical strategy and sustained support.

Community organizers are grounded in the local community. Their staff often reflect the demographics of the neighborhood. They are closely attuned to families needs, strengths, and experiences and can translate those for school staff. They are often more nimble than schools and districts—for example, they may be able to adjust programming or reallocate resources as needs shift. Community organizers can be particularly effective in helping schools work with families to develop shared vision and goals. For example, at the Academy, community organizers created a space for parents to articulate their vision of a first-rate college preparatory school.



Additionally, community organizers can bolster families' confidence and leadership abilities to advocate for school and district change. As the principals of both schools profiled here noted, families can be critical catalysts for change, especially when it is untenable or impolitic for school staff to play that role—for example, lobbying the district for greater school resources or challenging a district-driven decision. Further, a community organizer's work with families typically is grounded in a leadership and empowerment model. As families engage as change agents, their leadership abilities are enhanced, they become stronger contributors to their children, their children's schools, and their community, ultimately generating broader connections and strengthening the social fabric of their children's environment.

## Community Schools: A Framework for Student Supports and Meaningful Family Engagement

Both the Academy and HAAT are community schools, which are built on the premise that school resources alone may not be sufficient to ensure students' equitable access to learning and pathway success. As such, community schools engage with community partners to provide integrated student supports that can remove barriers to learning and enhance the quality of learning time. Linked Learning pathways already engage partner organizations in students' academic, technical, and workplace learning (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2016). The community school approach provides a framework for incorporating integrated student supports and families engagement as part of the students' experience in Linked Learning pathway development. The schools described in this chapter showcase several cross-cutting features of community schools that, taken together, foster a coherent and supportive experience for students engaged in Linked Learning pathways.

### COMPREHENSIVENESS

A guiding tenet of both schools profiled here is that, as community schools, they offer some degree of comprehensive supports and opportunities to students and their families. These supports ranging from health clinics and mental health supports, to expanded learning and enrichment opportunities, to family support services and leadership development. Across both schools in this case study, partner organizations provided critical resources to

help meet comprehensive student needs—including shifting entrenched school practices to engage families in their children’s educational decision-making and success.

## COLLABORATION

For schools to be more than a collection of services co-located on a school site, there must be extensive collaboration across stakeholders. Each of the sites profiled here provided multiple examples of ongoing and structured collaboration, including involving stakeholders through outreach, relationship-building, and shared leadership. As one principal stated:

*“(Our partners) are behind every single initiative that we do that I would say falls under community schools.... It’s not there’s (partner organization) and (name of school), it’s (partner organization) at (school). We’re just one team. So, I never think of [so and so], any of that team as an outside agency coming in. They’re the core of our school.”*

A strong principal setting the tone that partners belonged at the table and a dedicated community school manager helped ensure both the spirit and structures required to facilitate ongoing, meaningful collaboration among teachers, partners, and families. This cross-sector collaboration ensures that students are receiving needed services (for example, it decreases the likelihood of service gaps or duplication). Additionally, the trusting relationships required for collaboration are a prerequisite for alignment and coherence-building, as discussed below.

## COHERENCE

Coherence refers to the extent to which all facets of a student’s education experience (e.g., school staff, expanded learning time, family, support services, etc.) are aligned towards a shared vision and goals. In the pathway schools we examined, partner resources were aligned with specific school and student learning goals. Health partners are leveraged to meet concrete student health needs—for example, providing glasses so students can better see their lessons or reduce student absence for doctor’s appointments. Pathway partners can provide students with enrichment experiences targeted to specific opportunities and needs—for example, exposure to arts and cultural events they wouldn’t previously have had, aligned with the opportunity to develop rich civic identities. Engaging with families can help align

arguably two of the most important spheres in the students’ life—their home life and their school experience—and in the meantime, cultivate important assets to support students’ future college and career success.

In both OUSD and LAUSD schools, a dedicated community school manager, as well as principal leadership and support were essential to building coherence across school, partner, and family domains. This collaboration enhanced the principal’s ability to cultivate a clear vision and communicate effectively about school goals with partner stakeholders. The community school manager worked with partners to ensure that efforts are aligned with school goals and that all parties regularly assess the partnerships. For example, at one of the schools, the community school manager worked with afterschool program and instructional staff to align afterschool and school-day instruction. She did this by involving the principal in beginning of the year “kick-off” meetings with program partners, regularly updating the partners on the school’s academic goals and student progress, and facilitating weekly check-ins between program staff and teachers to coordinate instruction.

Aligning partner and school activities often requires bridging organizational cultures and disrupting historical siloes. Once again, the principal plays an important role in shifting old habits and culture. In the words of one community school manager:

*“I think our partners do really hard work just because they know it’s important, without always knowing the bigger “why” behind it. But I do believe it’s time for them to start knowing the bigger why.”*

The school can play an important role in creating a more coherent experience for students by engaging with partners and families around shared goals.

## COMMITMENT

Together, these family, youth, and community engagement strategies build a robust ecosystem of individuals and organizations dedicated to sustaining the relationships, practices, and structures required to support student success. The long-term partnerships observed in both OUSD and LAUSD sites span far beyond particular funding cycles or grant years. Rather, they represent an enduring commitment to engage in the difficult work of relationship-building. It also often required shifting entrenched cultures, structures,

and siloes to help students succeed. This type of commitment does not grow overnight; rather, it was the result of many years of trust-building, collaboration, and shared struggle.

## Benefits

The family engagement and community school work described here offers a unique opportunity to enhance student supports and reinforce key functions of Linked Learning pathways. It strengthens the schools' teaching and learning mission. It fosters a coherent student experience. And ultimately, it can facilitate a successful transitions to postsecondary, career, and community life. Teachers, in particular, have expressed great appreciation for the community schools approach. In the words of one teacher:

*"[At a community school], you don't have to be social workers or coaches. You don't have to worry that you don't have those resources because we have partners."*

In community schools, teachers are able to reduce the number of hats they wear, dedicate more time for instruction, and enjoy better classroom environments due to classroom supports. While Linked Learning pathways can present a powerful mechanism for supporting student access to quality learning, they may not be sufficient to address the challenges engendered by poverty, racism, and entrenched inequalities. But, by leveraging community resources and engaging



parents as assets in their students' success, the schools described here present a set of innovative strategies to deepen the work for educational equity.

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Chapter Six

aligning school-  
level student  
supports with  
district-wide  
strategies and  
standards for  
student learning

*Marisa Saunders, Ed.D.*

# aligning school-level student supports with district-wide strategies and standards for student learning

*Marisa Saunders, Ed.D.*

## Problem of Practice

How can school district administrators collaborate with school and pathway leaders to ensure that teaching and learning in pathways is coherently aligned to district-wide learning goals and standards?

## Abstract

This chapter explores how vertical integration of school-level student supports with district-wide strategies for college, career, and civic readiness has been instrumental in building instructional capacity within the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) Linked Learning pathways. It begins with a description of the context that gave rise to Linked Learning, and discusses how Linked Learning aligns with and supports current efforts to ready all students for graduation and postsecondary success. The chapter then examines how effective vertical integration enables high quality implementation by helping pathways and partners to work together across a complex system to collectively own the principles, norms, practices, and beliefs that undergird Linked Learning and support all students' success.

## Introduction

Vertical integration of supports has created coherent learning environments for teachers and other adults who work with students. As the strategies that will be discussed here demonstrate, vertical integration has assisted in fostering the conditions necessary for adult collaboration, teamwork, and professional capacity building that are critical to the implementation of the Linked Learning approach. By providing coherently designed guidance, support,

expectations, and professional learning opportunities to school leaders, teachers, and pathway partners, vertical integration contributes to organizational efficiency, as well as the equitable outcomes LAUSD and its district partners aim to achieve.

## Background

### **A DISTRICT-WIDE POLICY TO PROMOTE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS FOR ALL**

The A-G course sequence is comprised of 15 yearlong (or 30 semester) courses that students must pass with a grade of “C” or better to be eligible for University of California/California State University admission. Beginning with the graduating class of 2016, students must complete the college preparatory course sequence in order to earn a high school diploma. Students must earn a grade of “D” or better in A-G courses, and meet California Department of Education Requirements as well as satisfying additional LAUSD requirements for graduation.

In 2005, the LAUSD Board of Education approved the *Resolution to Create Educational Equity through the Implementation of the A-G Course Sequence*. The “A-G for All” resolution responded to the hundreds of students, families, and community members who demanded a remedy to long-standing inequalities in access to college

preparatory courses across Los Angeles high schools. It would mark the beginning of a shift in LAUSD's commitment to ready all students for college and career. The resolution called for LAUSD to implement a rigorous and relevant college preparatory curriculum (A-G) for all students entering the ninth grade, and to provide the necessary learning supports, across all grades, to ensure that students are prepared to enter and master the A-G course sequence. At a point in time when less than half of all students who entered as ninth graders graduated four years later (with even lower rates for low-income students and students of color), and when approximately one-fifth graduated having successfully completed the A-G course sequence (with a grade of 'C' or better), the district had a great deal of work ahead.

Effective implementation of the resolution not only required LAUSD to increase access to A-G courses across the district, but to focus on the delivery of the curriculum. In the first years that followed, the district, community-based organizations, and research partners monitored implementation, and the data made clear that while access to college preparatory courses largely increased across the district, successful course completion lagged woefully. As Linked Learning (known as Multiple Pathways at the time) was gaining traction across the state, community and research partners lifted the approach as a possible strategy for preparing LAUSD students for college, career, and civic life.

In 2008, LAUSD's Board of Education recognized and endorsed Linked Learning as a means to provide equitable and high quality learning opportunities to all of its students to raise grade level proficiency and A-G completion rates, and to improve college and career readiness. According to the 2008 resolution, "providing students access to Multiple Pathway programs, would not supplant previous reform policies, but rather act as an implementation strategy that could effectively improve A-G completion rates and graduation rates, bring relevance to the learning process, prepare students for lifelong success, and provide the necessary skills that will enable students to nimbly move through school and work as the 21st century workforce requires" (For more information see: <http://laschoolboard.org/sites/default/files/10-28-08regbdAgenda.pdf>). Indeed, when LAUSD joined the California Linked Learning District Initiative in 2010, the natural alignment between Linked Learning, district goals, and state expectations, as defined by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), was evident.

## A MOVEMENT FOR SCHOOL CHOICE, AUTONOMY AND SMALL COMMUNITY-ANCHORED SCHOOLS

Along with the policy shift to universal college and career readiness, a concurrent social movement in Los Angeles aligned with and accelerated the eventual embrace of Linked Learning strategies. With a long history of reform, LAUSD was grappling with a range of educational challenges and was working to develop and implement strategies that could address demographic shifts, widening achievement gaps, and persistent inequalities (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, & Clayton, 2008). Linked Learning emerged from these efforts. Many previous improvement efforts had created an environment that aligned with and buttressed Linked Learning implementation and the call for vertical integration of student supports. The experience in Los Angeles' Pico Union Community serves as an illustration.

### The Belmont Zone of Choice

In 2004, Belmont High School, located in the densely populated Pico Union Community of Los Angeles, was identified as one of the country's "dropout factories" where only 35% of its 5,400 students graduated (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). When plans to open a learning complex near the original Belmont site fell through, community members persisted in pressuring the school board to tackle overcrowding as well as to establish a new instructional program that could address students' learning needs. Instead of duplicating the large, comprehensive high school that had been failing students, the idea to create smaller, more personalized learning environments was proposed—the Belmont Zone of Choice<sup>1</sup>. A grassroots coalition of



<sup>1</sup> For a historical account of Belmont Zone of Choice read, Martinez, R. A., & Quartz, K. H. (2012). Zoned for Change: A Historical Case Study of the Belmont Zone of Choice. *Teachers College Record*, 114(10).

community-based organizations that had come together to work on the passage of the “A-G for All” resolution felt strongly that smaller schools and small learning communities (SLCs) could provide an opportunity for more personalized education and a closer link between students and teachers—something that was sorely lacking in the area’s overcrowded high schools.

LAUSD has struggled to manage and support change centrally, while allowing for local innovation and autonomy. In 2000, for example, LAUSD began trying to divide governance into smaller “local districts”: 11 local districts in 2000, 8 in 2004, and ultimately 6 in 2015. Currently, Pilot Schools (which include some, but not all the Linked Learning high schools), receive operational support from a Local Options Oversight Committee, within LAUSD’s Office of School Design Options.

Consequently, one challenge that the District’s Linked Learning Office has taken on is the job of coordinating leadership, operational and instructional supports from numerous central and local district offices. This important vertical alignment task is one that is familiar to pathway leaders in large districts and assures that school and pathway-level initiatives are coherently integrated with district goals and expectations.

In addition to endorsing a choice structure, advocates of the Belmont Zone of Choice also came to embrace the notion of a governance structure that would grant schools greater autonomy. Based on the Boston Pilot Schools, local leaders aimed to create and implement autonomous schools within Local District 4 (LD4)—a sub-district encompassing the Pico Union area—with a specific focus on creating new, innovative schools. The novel approach was rooted in the assumption that by removing barriers to innovation, school leaders and teachers could create schools that could best meet the needs of their students and successfully prepare all students for college and career. The concept was viewed by community members and local leaders as a means to advance effective teaching and

learning. With autonomies in five significant areas—staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance, and scheduling—Pilot Schools were seen as a critical constituent for change. A few months following the establishment of the Belmont Zone of Choice, LAUSD adopted the Pilot School model through a formal Memo of Understanding with the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA). The demand for student-centered, teacher-driven, and community-based change is currently represented by 48 Pilot Schools and 17 Zones of Choice within LAUSD. Many of these schools are implementing a Linked Learning approach to high school education.

## Linked Learning in LAUSD

LAUSD’s proposal to participate in California’s Linked Learning District Initiative emerged from community demands for universal access to college and career readiness, and from efforts to establish choice and autonomous governance structures. Indeed, the proposal to participate in the Linked Learning District Initiative was originally submitted by and only involved Local District 4 (LD4)—the home of the Belmont Zone of Choice. Local district leaders and community members felt that the approach not only aligned with the concept of choice and autonomy as established by the Zone of Choice, but that these concepts were required for successful implementation of Linked Learning. With greater flexibility, schools within LD4 were poised to provide innovative programs of instruction that sought to match students’ interest to course offerings, and increase engagement, graduation rates, and students’ readiness for college, career, and civic life. In addition, many of the same community members and organizations that were instrumental in bringing about these major changes saw Linked Learning as having the potential of bringing relevance to the rigor demanded by the “A-G for All” resolution, providing students with meaningful choices, and providing the skills and confidence students need to succeed in college and career. For example, the Center for Powerful Public Schools (known as the Los Angeles Small School Center at the time) provided critical support to both the Pilot School effort and to LD4’s proposal to participate in California’s Linked Learning District Initiative. And, the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), an organization that was instrumental in the “A-G for All” resolution and the Belmont Zone of Choice, identified the potential of Linked Learning. According to ABC, “‘A-G’ plus ‘SLC’ = Linked Learning.”

## VERTICAL INTEGRATION WITHIN LAUSD

The reorganization of the district into geographic regions and an ISIC moved Linked Learning implementation from a localized to a district-wide effort in 2012-13. In 2012, LAUSD established the Linked Learning office. Esther Soliman, a former principal of the first LAUSD high school to achieve Linked Learning certification (a school that was originally established as an SLC on the campus of Belmont High School), was chosen to lead the office and oversee implementation of the Linked Learning District Initiative. The establishment of the Linked Learning Office reflected LAUSD's desire to bring Linked Learning to scale across the district, and signaled the recognition that scale could only be made possible through careful management and district involvement to ensure high-quality implementation. Unlike a purely technical or structural fix, Linked Learning was seen as a process that would demand specificity during its implementation. It would look and feel different based on the theme of the pathway, students' existing and developing needs for learning and growth, the community, and teachers' unique interests, strengths, and experiences. Teachers would require the opportunity to engage in a learning process, develop new skills, and acquire new insights and beliefs to successfully implement the approach. As such, a key role of the Linked Learning Office was to create coherency across schools—to ensure that the distinctive features of each pathway continued to meet the goals and expectations of the larger district. To accomplish this goal, the district established a pathway onboarding process and introduced the delivery of a wide range of implementation supports to participating schools. In addition, and in part as a result of these integrative efforts, the district also repositioned the work of the Linked Learning Office as central to ongoing curriculum and instruction improvement efforts.

## PATHWAY ONBOARDING

### Securing Teacher Voice and School Asset Mapping

There is increasing acknowledgment, among researchers and practitioners, that teachers must have an active role in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of educational improvement efforts (Rust, 2009). In a climate where one school improvement idea, program, or innovation is often quickly replaced with another, *how* a teacher embraces and understands a particular improvement effort is critical in its establishment and sustainability. From the outset, the Linked Learning Office took up the concern of

how teachers—the individuals most closely engaged with and influencing students' learning—understood and implemented the approach. According to the district's Linked Learning Administrator, finding the teachers who would choose to undertake this transformation effort and then support the many components of its implementation was primary. In a 2012-13 onboarding memo she states:

*“These teachers will be motivated because we are giving them support, some decision-making power, an opportunity to create something innovative, and a chance to make a difference in these kids' lives. They are exhausted and have been inundated with ‘fixes.’ We are asking teachers to come to the table and work with us to create a successful school for the kids in their neighborhood... I think 80% of the success of this work can only happen with the right faculty and leadership staff.”*

An onboarding process would facilitate finding the “right” faculty and leadership staff. It would also facilitate an asset mapping exercise that would help district and school staff to identify key strengths and resources already at play in participating schools and those that would need to be cultivated.

Some schools and small learning communities across the district already possessed some elements of Linked Learning, including, for example, California Partnership Academies (CPAs) and theme-based SLCs (many located within LD4). However, it was not assumed that these schools/SLCs would share the vision to grow their program into a full Linked Learning pathway committed to the core components of the approach. As such, the district moved away from a strategy of identifying and selecting potential pathways for full implementation to creating an opportunity for pathways to identify themselves, with the hope that many CPAs and SLCs would choose to fully implement the approach. With growing interest in the supports and resources that Linked Learning implementation could provide, the Linked Learning Office established a process, open to any school or SLC, for determining readiness for Linked Learning implementation and district support. The onboarding process aimed to assist the district in determining which schools were interested in implementing the approach, what processes and structures were in place at the school level, and how much support full implementation would require. Established in 2012-13, the onboarding process consists of a school application, half-day visits to potential pathways, and structured conversations

with school-level teachers and administrators. The process has undergone revisions over the course of the last five years, but its main components remain intact.

Importantly, the Linked Learning Office has developed criteria to becoming a pathway with the goal of providing those who will be responsible for change a voice in imagining and directing that change. According to the Office Administrator:

*“... Too often programs are painstakingly developed over an extended period of time and then washed away in a flood of new ‘fixes.’ Teachers and leadership need to know that the work they do will be respected and cultivated. They need to have the ability to make decisions for their school and students.”*

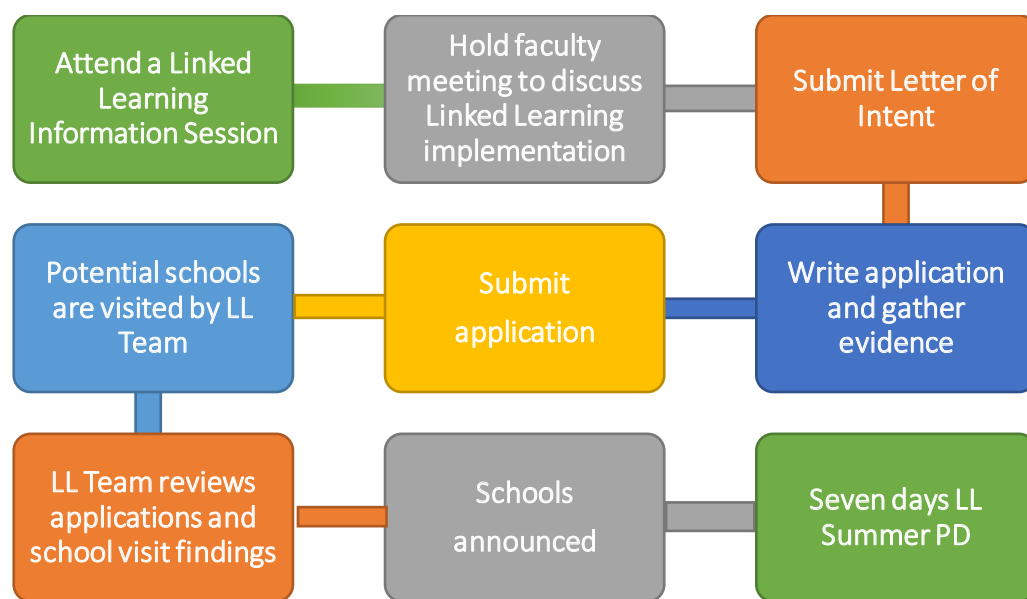
To ensure practitioners’ voices are heard, all potential pathways must demonstrate teacher support for and commitment to developing a pathway that best meets the needs of the school and students. This is accomplished through the following processes:

- School/SLC representatives attend a Linked Learning information session
- School/SLC holds a mandatory faculty meeting to discuss Linked Learning implementation
- Three-fourths of the school team must attend four onboarding orientation meetings

### Collaborative Design Development and Planning

In addition to demonstrating teacher support for the approach, each potential site must complete an application and provide supporting evidence of readiness to implement the approach. Evidence includes a school matrix for the current and upcoming school year that shows plans for all students to enter cohorts and enroll in Advisory, and common planning time for teachers. The potential pathway must also submit a professional development schedule for the current year. After submitting an application, the district team schedules a school visit to conduct classroom observations, focus groups with students and teachers, and to meet with school leadership. The district team also reviews student and teacher survey data. Using a readiness rubric (see Appendix A), the district team assesses the potential pathways’ commitment to Linked Learning and readiness for implementation. Figure 1, below, outlines the onboarding process for interested schools or SLCs. Importantly, to be identified as ready to join the district’s Linked Learning approach, teachers must demonstrate a comprehensive understanding that they are entering a process that will require ongoing collective learning and shared commitment. For those schools and/or SLCs that the district deems as not ready, the district provides recommendations for future readiness and encourages them to re-apply the subsequent year. In 2015-16, thirty-nine school teams applied to create a Linked Learning pathway; 11 were identified as ready.

FIGURE 1: LAUSD LINKED LEARNING APPLICATION PROCESS



Source: Los Angeles Unified School District, Linked Learning Office

## SUPPORTS

The LAUSD Linked Learning Office is responsible for developing supports and creating a system to assist in cohering district and pathway learning goals for students. Pathway support is focused on the core components of Linked Learning that signal a shift from traditional practices towards integrative and collaborative practices. These supports include: Linked Learning coaching, a work-based learning coordinator, and professional development opportunities that emphasize key elements of the approach (e.g., industry panels, senior portfolio defense, project-based learning, work readiness skill and competency development).

### Linked Learning Coaching

Linked Learning relies heavily on pathway teachers' abilities to collectively implement projects that effectively integrate academic and technical learning with real-world learning opportunities. As such, teachers and partners need the skills and resources (e.g., partnerships, common planning time) to plan, execute, reflect on, and adjust pathway curriculum. This is a particularly tall order for new pathways and pathway teachers who must simultaneously learn about the approach, develop new skills, and establish new relationships and connections with teachers and other adults within and beyond the school. To better support new pathways and teachers, the Linked Learning Office provides resources and guidance through a Linked Learning coach.

The district currently provides a half-time coach for each of the district's 44 pathways. Coaches are focused on providing guidance that is tailored to pathway needs. The coach helps guide high-quality implementation through classroom observations and feedback. Importantly, the coach plays a key role in connecting Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Next Generation Science Standards to the specific learning objectives of each pathway. Coaches relied on the *Behaviors of Learning and Teaching (BLTs) Framework* developed by ConnectEd (Available at: [https://casn.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/resource\\_files/behaviors\\_of\\_learning\\_and\\_teaching\\_continuum\\_v6\\_0611201414-08-13-01-00-34..pdf](https://casn.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/resource_files/behaviors_of_learning_and_teaching_continuum_v6_0611201414-08-13-01-00-34..pdf)). They identify and address professional development needs, demonstrate instructional practices aligned to CCSS, develop instructional lessons aligned to the standards, and model the integration of content literacy and technology across all subject areas as outlined in the CCSS. The BLTs, for example, identify English Language Arts and Mathematics standards that align with learning that is collaborative, student-directed,

outcome-focused, relevant, rigorous, and integrated. In their work with pathway leadership, the coach also assists in identifying and utilizing school-level autonomies that support the implementation of core components (e.g., scheduling, curriculum, and assessment).

Assessment is a key area in which the district provides support through coaching. District coaches work with pathways to develop authentic, pathway specific assessments of students' readiness for college, career, and civic life. Coaches assist pathways in moving towards a performance-based instructional model that can more accurately reflect the complex thinking and performance that are necessary in the real world. With support from district coaches, teachers develop performance tasks and senior projects, establish implementation standards for high-quality, performance-based assessment through the development and refinement of common rubrics for scoring performance tasks, and backward-map the integrated curriculum to expected learning outcomes.

Because assessments may be operationalized differently across pathways, coaches work with each site to ensure that students' learning and growth expectations are reflected in locally designed assessments. The Senior Portfolio Defense—a rigorous and demanding demonstration of students' growth and development learning throughout their four years in the pathway—has become a key element of this local and authentic system of assessment. Similarly, coaches guide teachers in the broad use of the District Student Graduate Profile—developed by the Linked Learning Office in collaboration with all stakeholders—to influence day-to-day classroom instruction. The Profile outlines what every LAUSD student should know and be able to do upon graduation, and complements exam-driven state and federal accountability systems (as defined by the CCSS), while also identifying knowledge, skills, and attributes that each pathway aims to develop (e.g., how to develop individual professional growth plans, learn how to collaborate, think critically and creatively, participate in civics, and to communicate persuasively). With the assistance of Linked Learning coaches, teachers and administrators come to understand how the Profile is consonant with the pathway and Linked Learning outcomes, aligns with A-G, demonstrates students' social and emotional learning, and complements all district and state mandates.

Coaches also assist pathways in preparing for Linked Learning certification—a goal that the district anticipates will happen by Year Three of implementation for each pathway.

Coaches meet with pathway lead teachers and administrators on a regular basis to discuss and monitor the pathway's progress toward certification and continual growth.

### Work-Based Learning Coordinators

Coordinators play an important role in furthering expected learning goals for students attending pathways. Coordinators work with school leaders and teachers to assist in brokering real-world learning experiences including field trips, guest speakers, practice interviews, job shadows for lower classmen, and paid internships, service learning, apprenticeships, and professional training programs for juniors and seniors. Coordinators also work with school staff to identify industry partners and community members to serve as panelists for portfolio defenses. Work-based learning coordinators are not only focused on aligning these opportunities with the theme of the pathway, and the particular needs of students and the community in which the pathway is situated, but work to coordinate work-based learning efforts districtwide and to ensure the equitable distribution of opportunities across and within pathways.

### Professional Learning

In addition to providing coaching and work-based learning coordination, the Linked Learning Office also provides professional learning opportunities that further teachers' knowledge of the approach, and enables teachers to learn from others' experiences. Professional development has focused on key elements including instruction, project-based learning, portfolio and defense, mastery learning and grading, theme integration, dual enrollment, work-based learning, and the creation of advisory boards. While these learning opportunities focus on Linked Learning elements, the aim is to guide teachers understanding that Linked Learning is not only a process that supports an engaging and collaborative learning environment but also meets other district, state, and federal requirements. Professional development activities enable pathway teachers and leaders to connect Linked Learning to these other priorities. Teachers learn from their colleagues, the district team, and from other pathways how Linked Learning, for example, can ensure that consistent, coherent services are provided to all English Learners as outlined in the district's *English Learner Master Plan*. Similarly, professional learning clarifies the expectations for effective teaching that are described in the district's Teaching and Learning framework and how Linked Learning meets these goals.



Professional development opportunities also provide a space to remind pathway teachers and leaders that the needs of students, families, and the community may change over time and modifications must be made to accommodate these changes. Professional learning opportunities, coordinated by the district, contribute to building a community of practice within each pathway where teachers and leaders can establish norms and protocols and create shared learning and understanding. The district plays a key role in assisting each pathway in establishing these spaces and in helping each pathway to reflect on their practices in an ongoing process of continuous program evaluation and improvement.

There is awareness within the LAUSD Linked Learning Office that integrative efforts must remain nimble and adaptable. The supports and the relationships between district coaches/coordinators and school-level leads and teachers, for example, must remain fluid in order to provide the guidance and knowledge that best assist pathway leads and staff in increasing their knowledge of and commitment to the approach while meeting the needs of their particular students and the community. Despite the effectiveness of this model to date, the goal, according to the Linked Learning Administrator, is to eventually support a new model wherein the work of teachers and leaders within pathways has a greater influence across pathways and the district as a whole. Structures, for example, could be established across



pathways that would enable lead teachers to remain in the classroom with a limited course load and serve as Linked Learning coaches at their particular site. A teacher with this hybrid role might receive intensive training by the District Office to serve as a coach at their site and as a mentor to other sites/coaches. This model would build off of the trusting and collaborative relationships that have already been established among pathway teachers and work to build and strengthen a cohesive network of pathways. The idea is to further integrate the work of pathways into the work of the district, and for the district to continue to identify new and effective ways to support the work of pathways.

### **REPOSITIONING THE LINKED LEARNING OFFICE WITHIN LAUSD**

In addition to the integrative efforts described above, the LAUSD has moved the Linked Learning Office within its organizational hierarchy to a more central position. In 2014-15, the LAUSD moved the Linked Learning Office from the Office of Intensive Support and Intervention to the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and School Support and Assessment—signaling a drive to create better alignment between the approach and overall curricular and instructional reform strategies. Subsequent restructuring of the district (as a result of superintendent transitions) now situates Linked Learning within the Division of Instruction, and central to districtwide strategies for readying all students for college, career, and civic life.

Another signal of integration occurred in 2014-15. Since 2014-15, the district has fully funded the Linked Learning Administrator position out of its own budget—a position that was originally grant-funded. These shifts demonstrated district leadership’s commitment to the approach as a core strategy, and opened up opportunities to embed specific needs of Linked Learning pathways into the services offered through the Division of Instruction. As noted in an evaluation report of the statewide initiative, Linked Learning was soon “emphasized in major communications and fundraising efforts” and the Linked Learning Administrator was provided with “better access to key decision-makers” (Guha et al., 2014). Further, the Linked Learning Administrator, as part of the District’s Instructional Leadership team, effectively led efforts to integrate the approach within ongoing, district-wide instruction and curriculum improvement strategies. This repositioning has been critical in assisting in the alignment of evaluation rubrics and processes, such as the Pilot School Quality Review, Public School Choice Review, Linking Learning Pathway Quality Review, and WASC. It has also led

to the incorporation of the approach in the district’s Local Control Accountability Plan.

## **The Impact of Vertical Integration**

The notion of teachers taking ownership of an improvement effort is often mentioned by researchers as a key factor in the success of the effort. Efforts succeed when teachers feel it belongs to them and is not simply imposed on them (Ogborn, 2002). Vertical integration assists in capturing teachers’ position with regard to the effort and can establish the progressive processes that enable teachers in gaining a sense of clarity, skill, and commitment with respect to the improvement effort. The onboarding processes established by the Linked Learning Office, for example, are working to establish a shared understanding of and commitment to Linked Learning among all pathway teachers. Further, the range of supports provided by the Linked Learning Office—coaching, coordinating, and professional learning—work to integrate Linked Learning goals and expectations to the overall mission and goals of the district. This integrative approach focuses on establishing relationships and moving ideas and practices that support Linked Learning implementation across the system. These efforts provide greater organizational coherence as the many layers of vertical oversight that exist within LAUSD’s large bureaucracy form greater connections between district policies, practices, and procedures that support the approach.

Efforts made by the Linked Learning Office to produce greater coherency through integrative processes have been effective. Strategically, the Office has integrated the approach by aligning Linked Learning outcomes and the district’s expected learning outcomes for all LAUSD students. In collaboration with regional partners and key stakeholders, the development of the Graduate Profile, for example, has embedded the Linked Learning approach into LAUSD priorities. This alignment has also deepened understanding of the approach both within and beyond pathways. Showcasing Linked Learning pathways that are using senior portfolio defenses or other performance assessments also works to align Linked Learning with districtwide curriculum improvement efforts, instruction, and assessment. Similarly, the Linked Learning team has worked to align the district’s Teaching and Learning Framework with a Linked Learning self-assessment process. Indeed, the Linked Learning district team created a new process and instrument that aligns the LAUSD framework with the expected progress of students,

teachers, and industry and community partners in developing the learning and teaching behaviors that improve student motivation, understanding, and achievement (relying on the Behaviors of Learning and Teaching Continuum developed by ConnectEd).

Perhaps one of the most evident outcomes of vertical integration has been increased teacher understanding and interest in Linked Learning as a response to long-standing inequalities within the district. The Linked Learning Office's systemic strategy to develop teacher investment in the approach has influenced the relational changes the approach requires through teacher collaboration, shared understanding, and collective learning. As a shared endeavor, teachers are working to improve practice and learning outcomes, and create meaningful change. A recent study of approximately 200 LAUSD high school teachers and administrators implementing innovative approaches to high school education, including Linked Learning, found that almost four-fifths of Linked Learning teachers indicated that they felt they had influence in designing or establishing curricula and instructional programs at their school site. In addition, four-fifths of Linked Learning teachers reported that the approach was helpful or extremely helpful in supporting the schools' priorities (Saunders et al., 2017). Providing teachers with the opportunity to develop a clear and shared vision of desired outcomes and the time to



assess their progress toward the full impact of the approach contributes to these positive outcomes.

The activism and collaboration that marked the beginning of a shift in LAUSD's commitment to ready all students for college and career resides in the district's approach to Linked Learning implementation. The district's response to ready all students for college, career, and civic life through Linked Learning aims to provide all students with access to a rigorous, relevant, and engaging curriculum, and effective, motivating, student-centered instruction. The district's response also recognizes that teachers are more inclined to feel invested in their school, in the community, and in students' learning when they feel greater ownership, when they can influence collective practices and strategies to meet the needs of students and the community, and when they have greater degrees of autonomy within their school settings. Finally, the district's response to ready all students for college, career, and civic life recognizes that its leadership, commitment, and belief in all students are pivotal—this was made evident in 2015, ten years after the passage of the “A-G for All” resolution. At that time LAUSD re-committed to providing all students equity and access to college and career preparation through A-G, and Linked Learning was identified as a means to achieve this goal.

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# Appendix A: LAUSD Linked Learning New Pathway

## APPLICATION RUBRIC

Pathway Readiness Criteria	Section of the Application	Point Value
The LL information faculty meeting agenda, sign-in and teacher support signatures indicating 75% of the school staff supports bring LL to the school site	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
A copy of the schools current 2015-16 scheduling matrix with course titles, class periods, CTE sequence highlights (if applicable)	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
A copy of the projected Pathway's matrix with course titles, class periods, CTE sequence and potential teachers identified.	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
A list of course offerings with a short description of each elective course in a career pathway and any non-traditional academic classes.	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
A schedule for all PD for the 2015-16 school year (include dates, times and topics)	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
Please describe why you want to implement a LL Pathway at your school.	Application Question 1	_____/6
Why did you choose this industry sector?	Application Question 2	_____/6
What is your potential Pathway's mission, vision, theme and career focus?	Application Question 3	_____/6
What are your school's Student Learning Outcomes	Application Question 4	_____/3
Please describe any strategies you use to prepare students for college and career.	Application Question 5	_____/3
<b>Total:</b> _____/39		

## SITE VISIT:

Pathway Readiness Criteria	Section of the Application	Point Value
Completion of the online student survey	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/6
Completion of the online teacher survey	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/6
School Leadership	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/6
School Culture	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/3
Classroom Visitations	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/3
Faculty Collaboration	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/6
<b>Total:</b> _____/30		

**FOR CONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED PATHWAYS:**

<b>Pathway Readiness Criteria</b>	<b>Section of the Application</b>	<b>Point Value</b>
75% of conditionally accepted Pathway faculty attended all four mandatory LL onboarding information meetings.	2015-16 LL Application Process	_____/6
A copy of the 2016-17 school matrix	Required Evidence Checklist	_____/3
The 2016-17 school matrix includes an Advisory period for each student	Required Evidence Checklist/ 2015-16 LL Criteria for Implementation	_____/6
Common planning time for grade-level Pathway teachers is embedded within the 2016-17 school matrix	Required Evidence Checklist/ 2015-16 LL Criteria for Implementation	_____/6
<b>Total:</b> _____/21		

<b>Overall Score:</b> _____/90
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Chapter Seven

building college  
and career  
knowledge in  
continuation high  
schools

*Elisha Smith Arrillaga, Ph.D.  
and Amal Amanda Issa*



# building college and career knowledge in continuation high schools

*Elisha Smith Arrillaga, Ph.D. and Amal Amanda Issa*

## Problem of Practice

How to design Linked Learning/CTE Pathways in continuation high schools to ensure equitable access to college and career opportunities for youth who are vulnerable to dropping out of high school?

## Abstract

In Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), three continuation high schools successfully integrated key elements of the Linked Learning approach and created college and career pathways with support from district leaders and a capacity-building intermediary. This chapter describes how the schools built on their strengths to design a pathway, found dynamic individuals inside and outside their school to help, and enabled students to gain high school and college credit and career readiness. The chapter also offers lessons for continuation high schools and other types of educational programs serving vulnerable teens that aspire to increase student access to college, better prepare them for career decisions, and improve students' experience and success in high school, college, career, and community.

## Background

### WHAT ARE CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS?

In California, many students who struggle in comprehensive high schools are assigned to continuation high schools. Continuation high schools are alternative credit acceleration programs for students who are sixteen years of age or older and are at risk of not graduating. Most students enter continuation education because they are behind in high

school credits, have had high truancy or expulsion rates, and/or have had behavioral challenges. Some students need a flexible school schedule because they have jobs outside of school, or have family needs or other demands on their time. Students in continuation schools are also more likely to be Hispanic, African American, and English Language Learners (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Markedly different from comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools are funded to offer only 15 hours per week or three hours per day of direct instruction to students. Students take courses that are required for graduation, but that may be offered in more flexible delivery or pacing formats that afford opportunities for credit acceleration not otherwise available in traditional comprehensive schools (California Department of Education, 2018).



Students attend continuation schools in significant numbers. The California Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that almost 104,000 youth enrolled in a continuation high school during the 2013-14 academic school year (Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). In Oakland, continuation school enrollment accounts for nearly 8% of the eleventh and twelfth grade student enrollment in the district; 462 students attended one of three continuation school sites in 2016-17 (EdData, 2017).

Students in Linked Learning pathways are four times more likely to graduate from high school and are more likely to attend college and/or postsecondary training (Warner et al., 2016). Yet the model for Linked Learning presumes several years of student pathway work that progressively builds and grows on its foundations. These are the stories of how continuation high schools teamed up with a capacity-building intermediary—the Career Ladders Project (CLP)—to design Linked Learning pathways that respond to the unique challenges facing students in alternative school settings. CLP aims to improve educational and career outcomes for Californians through research, policy reforms and strategic assistance to community colleges, as well as their K-16 education, workforce, and community partners.

## Three Core Practices for Designing and Building Pathways in Oakland Continuation High Schools

All three of Oakland's continuation high schools, Dewey Academy, Rudsdale High School, and Ralph J. Bunche Academy, have successfully implemented pathways. Throughout the process of design and implementation, three essential core practices emerged: (1) integrating pathway programs with existing school assets; (2) providing students with college exposure, especially by taking a college course; and, (3) providing youth with work-based learning experiences.

### **PRACTICE 1: INTEGRATE THE PATHWAY WITH EXISTING SCHOOL ASSETS**

The challenging process for designing and implementing pathways at a continuation school requires school leaders to think creatively about leveraging their existing assets. The Oakland schools took time to scan the programs

and partners already in place and considered potential collaborations to provide students with authentic experiences that helped them to realize their college and career ambitions. When school leaders incorporate early college credit opportunities and design clearly sequenced pathway courses and experiential learning, it can greatly improve students' college transitions and overall success (see <https://connectednational.org/>). This section is about how three OUSD high schools leveraged their existing partnerships, programs, and youth voice to decide on a single pathway focus while building relationships with colleges and industry partners.

### **Asset Mapping**

In determining the right pathway, high schools built on what they were already offering. As a first step, school leaders and youth collaborated on an asset mapping process, including a review of the master schedule, available field trips, programs, and pre-existing supports from partners. This enabled them to identify elements already present in the schools and upon which they could capitalize to develop a workable pathway. At Dewey, as in other OUSD continuation schools, there is no common school calendar for all students. Each student enrolls and exits at different times during the year, thus experiencing an individualized program of study and high school journey. Dewey Academy took part in this type of self-study, taking a closer look at the school holistically, and found that their greatest assets are the people committed to the school. Dewey's art teacher had a passion for physical training. He would hold afterschool fitness sessions for students interested in training. He soon completed his Career and Technical Education (CTE) credential and offered health-specific courses giving students an opportunity to engage in physical health while learning about careers in the field. Similarly, at Rudsdale, an afterschool provider was managing a program for students to learn about computer hardware repair. The program generated great interest from students and served as a platform to build upon. Meanwhile, at Bunche Academy, administrators had a great interest in exploring a hospitality and tourism pathway. Spreading the word through their networks, Bunche was able to recruit a chef with interest in teaching. The school leaders and chef used energy and passion to connect with a large, well-established network of culinary professionals. They also connected with the staff of a local community college culinary pathway. Next, each school surveyed the staff as part of the asset mapping process to identify teachers who have interest in specific industries and/or meet minimum qualifications to teach dual enrollment courses.

Each school narrowed its focus to one pathway to ensure the quality and breadth of the programs to be developed. District and site administrators took note of the pathway selection process at each continuation school to minimize duplication and to ensure that students would have access to a portfolio of continuation high schools that would offer different pathway options. It was understood that, for students needing to attend continuation schools, choice is significantly limited when compared to the comprehensive schools, which offer 15 industry pathways. These limited options are further exacerbated by the lack of actual choice students have when selecting a continuation school to attend. However, it is important to consider that pathway schools also encompass college exposure and professional skills not limited to any one industry. The value of applied learning benefits all students regardless of the industry (Career Ladders Project, 2018). Building partnerships, creating integrated curriculum, implementing internships, and maintaining college partnerships is challenging work that is made more doable when faculty in a small school can focus on just one pathway.

Dewey Academy, for example, invested time to determine the one pathway that fit their school schedule, student interests, and mission. Multiple pathways were considered in the initial planning phase, including general health and fitness as well as trades and apprenticeship. The school already had a teacher who was passionate about physical training and health who drove the theme forward. Through the ongoing conversations and feedback, the school realized that simplifying their pathway focus would allow for a higher quality program. From this point, the Dewey design team was able to focus and align the school programs, partners, and offerings that resulted in the move from Figure 1 to Figure 2 (below).

**FIGURE 1:**  
**ORIGINAL DEWEY ACADEMY PATHWAY IDEA 2016**



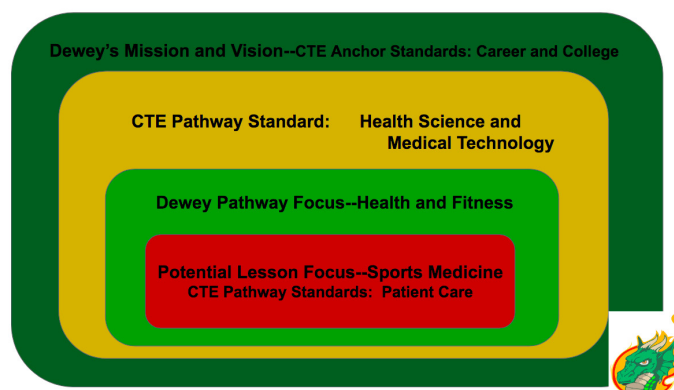
Using this model for the pathway, the school began thinking about ways to bridge their current programs and curriculum with the local community college. Comparing the offerings at Laney College, Dewey realized an opportunity to focus on Kinesiology and Personal Training to align with Laney’s Sports Medicine/Patient Care focus.

**Parent, Student, and Teacher Involvement in Pathway Design**

Across town at Rudsdale High School, staff initially struggled to decide between two different industries: technology and health. With a surge of interest in technology, especially in the Bay Area, Rudsdale went through an extensive assessment of the options available. CLP, in collaboration with local community colleges, created two different program maps for Rudsdale, which included aligned industry career options and areas for embedded supports around workplace learning and dual enrollment (see Appendix). The program maps were then presented by staff and families during a school event. Simultaneously, students were asked to review the options and provide feedback. The findings were all presented to Rudsdale staff who then took part in their own survey. This process of involving the school community of parents, students, teachers, and school staff was essential to pathway design to ensure the pathway reflected what the community was most invested in and what career pathways were aligned locally.

Using the results and feedback, the Rudsdale pathway team recommended to the principal and assistant principal that the school divert from their dual-themed pathway and focus on one pathway only. This redesign resulted in a shift to information technology with an even narrower focus on Games and Simulation. This decision was informed

**FIGURE 2:**  
**CURRENT DEWEY ACADEMY PATHWAY FOCUS 2018**





by student interest, standards correlation with existing curriculum, and the prospect of partnering with startup gaming programs in the East Bay. Given the shift in pathway focus, Rudsdale continues to work on mapping out the new pathway and phase out previous health programming in order to build a quality program of study.

### **Partnerships with Local Colleges**

Closely examining the assets and programs available at local community colleges was another helpful exercise for each high school pathway team to participate in. The teams considered the following questions: what colleges are nearby and/or accessible physically or virtually? What can they offer? Does the high school district have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place with a college?

Based on student interest and proximity to a local college program, Bunche Academy built a culinary pathway. The college they were working with had a clearly mapped sequence towards culinary industry certifications. Bunche Academy also hired a CTE instructor, as mentioned above, with close relationships to the local college. The CTE instructor had over 20 years of experience as a chef and worked with the staff at Bunche Academy to design CTE courses in culinary arts that provided students with the content knowledge needed to access the dual enrollment courses at the local college. Bunche Academy now has a four-course dual enrollment program, two of which are in culinary arts and two other electives of interest. Their strong relationship with Laney College has informed and supported the growth of Bunche's culinary pathway.

### **Industry and Community Partnerships**

It also proved useful for pathway teams to identify an industry partner and collaborate with existing community partners whose staff demonstrated a desire to support youth. For example, CLP collaborated with site leaders at Dewey Academy to build workplace learning opportunities. As a community partner, CLP worked with the county health services agency and the Dewey school-based health center to develop a pilot program for students who were interested in participating in a career exploration visit to the on-site school health center. Students were able to walk to the center and engage in an interactive visit where they learned about health-related careers. Based on the success of these on-site visits, the Dewey staff worked with CLP and executives at a local hospital to plan off-site career exploration field trips. During these events, students were exposed to careers in

health and were able to practice technical skills and build community within their cohort. Building on the success of the career exploration visits, CLP facilitated further conversations between Dewey and the local hospital. The organizations worked together to determine how the hospital's current internship program could be altered to serve the needs and constraints of students in continuation high schools. For example, many students at Dewey needed to attend summer school during the hours of the summer internship, so CLP and the hospital needed to think through what program timing might best accommodate Dewey students. It was important to help the prospective industry partners understand the backgrounds and learning needs of students in alternative schools. In some cases, the sites were not a good fit for the students and the schools knew to look elsewhere for opportunities. Coordinators were steadfast advocates and found industry partners who could support the success of students in continuation high schools.

After several planning sessions, a new cohort of continuation students was introduced to an internship program that was exclusively for them. The process of reaching out to students, encouraging them through the application process, and supporting them through the program, was all coordinated by the work-based learning liaison and supported by CLP. This also included arranging transportation and completing health screenings and enrollment documentation.

Staff from continuation schools and their community stakeholders created organizational structures to facilitate collaboration as well as pathway design and implementation. Initially, some high school staff were skeptical about implementing pathways, with some justification. For example: the primary focus of continuation school sites has always been credit recovery. How might student pathway participation advance or distract from that goal? How would the school, which already struggled to teach core English and math requirements in an abbreviated timeline, layer on even more content? Who on staff would have the expertise to teach new pathway content?

Supported by CLP, the schools used the pathway design process as a forum for educators to ask critical questions, share their concerns, and create a community of practice. In fall 2015, for example, OUSD's Director of Alternative Schools officially launched a planning process called the OUSD Continuation High School Design Lab. The Lab held gatherings comprised of pathway leaders and staff representing each OUSD continuation high school with the

goal of learning from one another, building knowledge about pathways, and determining the student supports necessary for pathways in continuation high schools. In their first year, the group of pathway leaders gathered for a design retreat and then met once a month during the district's Wednesday professional development time. The design retreat was also held in the second year, and the group continued to meet during common planning time once every other month. Topics in the Pathway Design Labs included:

- What is a pathway?
- How do the Four Pillars of Linked Learning (i.e., rigorous academics, technical skills, work-based learning, and personalized support) apply in continuation high schools?
- What are some exemplary models of pathways throughout OUSD?
- How do we develop a vision and mission at our school?
- What is Design Thinking?
- What are Inquiry Cycles; and how can they support effective pilot design and implementation?

### **The Importance of Staff Buy-In**

The Pathway Design Lab process allowed continuation school site staff to come together and share their experiences and learn from each another while building trust and partnership with CLP to do more one-on-one, site-based work. These meetings were designed and facilitated by school district staff with the goal of helping the school leaders to learn about the elements of an effective pathway, clarifying each school's identity, and building a network of trusted supports. Staff used these opportunities to receive guidance and feedback in assessing and designing their pathways. Holding space for teachers, administrators, and support staff to ask questions, learn, and validate their own struggles is important. This staff development can nurture a more trusting and determined group of educators who are willing to take on the work of pathway implementation with eagerness and creativity.

### **PRACTICE 2: EXPOSE STUDENTS TO COLLEGE THROUGH FIELD TRIPS AND DUAL ENROLLMENT**

Dual enrollment enables students to engage in college-level work while receiving the structured supports of the high school setting. In California, state policymakers have passed legislation to promote dual enrollment, and have empowered many continuation schools throughout the state to build deeper relationships with their neighboring community colleges (California Community Colleges

Chancellor's Office, 2016). Dual enrollment is a strategy for providing historically underrepresented high school students with opportunities to earn college credits at California Community Colleges (CCC) while they complete the requirements for their high school diplomas. Students who may have never seen themselves as college-going now have an opportunity to excel and build confidence.

Each OUSD continuation school worked closely with CLP, which has expertise and deep connections to local colleges. Together, they selected pathway-aligned dual enrollment courses within the Peralta Community College District and two of its colleges: Laney and Merritt Colleges.

An existing MOU helped continuation schools connect with the community colleges. The goal was to offer students the opportunity to accumulate college credit through dual enrollment courses that align with each school's pathways. Each school's pathway design team, administration, and teachers collaborated with the district dual enrollment coordinator and college representatives to determine the best fit. In these meetings, the high school's current program of study was examined and courses at community college were suggested. Although the district's agreement with the colleges requires a minimum enrollment of 35 students, the dual enrollment coordinator worked with the colleges to agree to bring the required enrollment down to 25 to better serve and support continuation school students. This change made a huge difference in the high school's ability to offer dual enrollment.

### **The Role of College Instructors**

College instructors were key to successful dual enrollment in continuation schools. Bunche Academy has a strong program of four dual enrollment courses in Culinary, Business, and Ethnic Studies, with a 90% passing rate for continuation high school students. During the 2016-17 school year, Bunche Academy had approximately 100 students enrolled across all four classes. According to the staff at Bunche Academy, a significant consideration in their success rate is school leaders' careful vetting of the participating college instructors.

Dewey Academy opted for an Intro to Personal Training course in the Kinesiology Department as well as a general counseling course. In 2017-18, there were 25 students in the general counseling course and 29 students in Kinesiology. A unique feature of the counseling course is that the college instructor took interest in ensuring that students received full

exposure to college. He took students on frequent field trips to the college campus to introduce them to programs, people, and facilities.

At Rudsdale, as noted earlier, staff initially experimented with a pathway focus in Health Education in partnership with Merritt College. In this first iteration, the instructor and students had a difficult time adjusting to college instruction methods. Approximately 20 students enrolled, with an estimated 50% pass rate in 2017-18. However, rather than experiencing defeat, the instructor was inspired to adjust the instructional model to better support students in subsequent years. All three schools had instructors who were willing to look beyond their traditional instructional approaches; instead, they adapted their methods and curriculum while maintaining high standards to best meet the needs of the students. Finding instructors has been a challenge, which is not unique to these continuation schools; but finding a good match, with instructors who believe in the students' potential, has been even more critical.

### Course Articulation Agreements

Although all three schools have found success in supporting students towards earning college credit, it remains a challenge to secure courses that fit with each school's needs and level of preparedness. These continuation schools have between 150 and 200 students at any given time, with a revolving enrollment throughout their six-week marking period cycle. The Peralta Community Colleges, by contrast,



run on a typical academic calendar. It has been difficult for continuation schools and community colleges to square the differences in their calendars. Rudsdale, in particular, has had difficulty in getting computer classes on the partnering college campus for their students. To solve this logistical problem, the school district and college have turned to course articulation agreements. Unlike dual enrollment, the process of setting up a course articulation agreement is less formal and allows for more flexibility. The high school can adapt one of their current classes to align with a course offered at the college. Given college approval, students who receive a grade of A or B in the course can be eligible for college credit. This model is ideal for the school because it can provide the rigor of college content while providing the needed supports and mode of instruction familiar to high school students. Currently, Rudsdale is working to establish articulation agreements to provide college-level introductory courses in computer science.

### Additional Supports

Additional supports were necessary for student success during the dual enrollment course semester. Dewey school leaders worked with their current afterschool and expanded learning partners to determine how existing supports could be better aligned or integrated with the new pathway approach. The Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) was tasked with supporting students with enrollment and perseverance through the college course. This district support was adapted in different ways depending on the students' availability. Sometimes the TSA provided homework and tutoring help during their regularly scheduled classes. Other times, students received support during their advisory class period. Dewey, determined to strengthen the supports for students around their dual enrollment, connected with a health provider to provide students with a health education-related extracurricular activity that supported their success in the dual enrollment course.

### PRACTICE 3: WORK-BASED LEARNING

Work-based learning programs help students to acquire valuable skills through first-hand experiences alongside industry professionals who can model what having a career is like. Integrating work-based learning experiences into the classroom can also make academic instruction more relevant by providing youth with opportunities to learn how knowledge acquired in the classroom might find life in an applied setting. These opportunities are important because researchers have found that low-income and

minority students who participate in work-based programs enter college at twice the rate of non-participating minority students (Rogers-Chapman & Darling-Hammond, 2013) School leaders frequently used the Work Based Learning Continuum to understand the process and purpose of workplace learning and the outcomes aligned with specific experiences (National Academy Foundation, 2012). At Bunche Academy, students in the culinary pathway have an opportunity to intern at a local restaurant while taking their culinary courses, enabling them to immediately see how their learning applies to the work. Together, these pieces motivate and enrich student learning. At Bunche, they also supported the skill development students needed to earn the ServSafe Certification to work in the industry.

### **Work-Based Learning Liaisons**

Work-based learning liaisons at each site support teachers and students by managing and developing pathway-relevant workplace learning opportunities. When CLP started working with the continuation schools to build pathways, several school leaders mentioned the need to expand opportunities for students to explore various career options. To meet that need, each OUSD continuation school invested in a full-time position focused explicitly on work-based learning and associated student supports. The work-based learning liaisons connect students to industry partners for career exploration visits and internships. They also coordinate recruitment for summer programs, college field trips, and various other offerings. CLP worked closely with the work-based learning liaisons around pathway curriculum integration and helped to develop MOUs with industry partners. Although the liaison role was new, the individuals in these roles were often already part of the school community as prior staff or partners, so they were able to quickly build relationships with staff and students. This underscores the importance of assessing the school's assets to determine staff that could serve different role in supporting pathway development.

Schools were often already engaged in work-based learning without realizing it. Linked Learning practices are not necessarily new aspects of teaching and school structures. Rudsdale, Dewey, and Bunche, for example already had teachers bringing in guest speakers during appropriate times in their curriculum to give real world stories to the content learned in class.

These types of common practices align well to Linked Learning. Creating a strong pathway for students is a matter of identifying the practices and capitalizing on them to build

a cohesive program of study with aligned opportunities and supports. A reasonable early win is to review the practices present at the school and build from there.

### **Appropriate Work-Based Learning Opportunities**

High schools work with their community college and industry partners to identify appropriate work-based learning opportunities. In the case of Dewey, they have been able to leverage their relationship with the school-based health clinic at the comprehensive school across the street to bring opportunities to the health pathways. This relationship further connected them with other community-based health providers who were willing to engage with this school. Given the capacity and success of their culinary program, Bunche now partners with the OUSD Central Kitchen and Services office to provide catering services for various events. With the leadership of the CTE teacher and school staff, students are also provided opportunities to intern at local restaurants to gain first-hand, real-world experiences. In the 2017-18 school year, Bunche had over 40 students complete internships, and many of these internships led to employment. Colleges are also great resources to recruit guest speakers and professionals for mock interviews, and find different opportunities for youth. All three of Oakland's continuation schools have built strong relationships with champions at the various colleges to build bridges between the college and the high school.

### **Credit-Bearing Work-Based Learning Experiences**

Initially, Rudsdale students faced difficulties when asked to participate in work-based learning experiences, because the activities did not result in additional credits. Rudsdale teachers, support staff, and administration worked with CLP to think through how best to enable students to participate. As such, Rudsdale added a work-based learning component to their Senior Portfolio. The Senior Portfolio includes a collection of students' experiences on field trips, career exploration visits, college tours, and the interview feedback from the College and Career Symposium. In the symposium, students have a chance to show their portfolios, including resumes, to prospective employers and college counselors. Making this change helped students get graduation credit for their work-based learning experience and provided another opportunity to bring industry and students together. In just one year, the school had over 500 instances of students participating in work-based learning and college prep activities, including 11 college visits and 24 career explorations visits.

## College and Career Wednesdays and Fitness Fridays

Each school made efforts to intertwine aspects of their pathway with pre-existing structures and routines. At Rudsdale, teachers incorporate pathway supports and common practices during their weekly advisory classes referred to as College and Career Wednesdays. During the advisory classes, teachers allow students to explore work-based learning opportunities by inviting industry partners to visit. At Dewey Academy, the school community participates in Fitness Fridays, a weekly event that allows students to interact in friendly physical activity challenges with peers and staff. Bunche Academy coordinated and hosted a Culinary Pop-Up event for community partners and neighbors. During this event, the students in the culinary pathway prepared meals for their guests and staged a silent auction to fundraise for their program.

Finding ways to weave pathway themes and supports into the daily routines of the school can be a heavy lift for school staff, but Oakland's continuation high schools have found that these efforts provide students with a fully integrated pathway school rather than a school with a pathway.

## Support from the School District is Essential to Student Success

OUSD has embraced college and career pathways in its comprehensive high schools with a goal of having every tenth grade student in a pathway by 2020. Given this districtwide goal, individual schools have worked steadily to put staff and partnerships in place that will build their capacity to provide college and career pathways. OUSD developed a district-level Linked Learning Department, including a Linked Learning coach for every school, curriculum writers, work-based learning professionals, a dual enrollment coordinator, grant managers, and support staff.

For the continuation schools, the district's commitment to pathways has been helpful in providing funding for a work-based learning liaison, and dual enrollment- and additional staff to support pathway implementation. The district, with its public partners at the county and city levels, has sounded the bell for employers to be open and more forthcoming with work-based learning and job shadow opportunities for youth. Strategic, well-targeted, external financial resources have furthered pathways creation in Oakland public schools, including in continuation schools.

OUSD has enjoyed financial investments from numerous public, private, and community partners helping to fuel Linked Learning implementation. Most relevant to the continuation high schools, Oakland voters passed Measure N in 2014, a multi-million dollar parcel tax to help schools reduce the dropout rate, provide work-based learning opportunities, prepare students for four-year colleges, and expand mentoring, tutoring, and other support services (See <https://www.ousd.org/domain/4506>). Atlantic Philanthropies also invested heavily in OUSD and local health employers to create pathways and work-based learning opportunities in health. And, in 2015, OUSD participated in a state grant program aimed specifically at supporting alternative schools and programs that serve Opportunity Youth. These funding sources supported the full-time work-based learning liaisons at each continuation school and the health pathway. The same sources also financed the work of some of OUSD's implementation intermediaries, including the Career Ladders Project, which has been a key support to the continuation high schools over the past four years.

## Conclusion

Developing a pathway in a continuation high school can seem like an overwhelming and sometimes fragile task, but leaders in Oakland have found that it is a worthwhile and desperately needed intervention to support the students who need it most. Students in continuation schools should not be denied opportunities to hone their skills in navigating college and careers. In schools like Dewey Academy, Bunche Academy, and Rudsdale High School, students need support more than ever to connect to the resources and people that can build bridges to the labor market. Though early in implementation, Oakland's experiment with college and career pathways goes a long way to inform other schools about new approaches to bolster connection and success.

As the work in OUSD shows, having a clear vision for pathways can help attract people and organizations eager to support schools with human and capital resources. Yet, as one partner observed, "*it's not all about the money.*" While OUSD enjoyed substantial investments in its broad-scale Linked Learning pathways implementation, the essential energy that fueled successful efforts came from the administrators, teachers, students, and employers who dedicated their time and effort to the task. How they repurposed their normal work every day was the fuel for change. Some of the strongest components of the

continuation school pathways have grown from within the schools themselves. At Dewey, for example, the Sport Medicine Health Pathway training program was pioneered by an art teacher who was passionate about physical training and saw how training benefitted his students both in the here-and-now and as a building block for their future. A ConnectEd pathway coach and a teacher joined forces to teach classes as a way to co-create a pathway and eventually advocate for more support. Much of the investment and support focused on making high school more relevant for students and increasing expectations for what all students can achieve.

In Oakland, the gradual development of an alternative education community of practice also connected schools with industry in a deeper way. Organizations such as Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, New Door Ventures, East Bay Asian Youth Center and Technology, Education And Literacy in Schools (TEALS), are just some of the strong partnerships within the community that have brought pathway experiences to life for students. The growth potential for alternative school sites relies heavily on the contributions of organizations with the desire to serve those who need it the most. In any institutionally integrated task, doing the work together will build stronger connections and achieve more than any one group acting alone.

As pathways in Oakland's continuation high schools progress, continued data-driven reflection to inform growth and decision making are needed. Industry specific pathway alignment is relatively new in continuation school sites. Will college and career going environments improve graduation rates and matriculation to college? It will be important to track pathway graduates' postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and employment outcomes. Moreover, it will be greatly informative to determine the career paths continuation students take after graduating. The district's central office can provide numerous reports on student indicators that can inform the school on the outcomes for their students.

Reflecting on implementation and support structures to ensure that necessary outcomes are being met will be critical. Thinking critically of the school's data will ultimately serve as a medium with which to reassess programs and interventions that appear successful and will engage the staff in refocusing their efforts on structures that allow students to be successful. Indeed, emphasis on connecting school and industry while

motivating students in a college and career experiences aligns with greater outcomes for students while meeting the standards articulated in the 2018 California School Dashboard indicators. Ultimately, there is a need for more experimentation, investment, and reflection on student outcomes to better understand how, and under what circumstance, Linked Learning practices can be effectively implemented in alternative settings. The lessons learned from the OUSD continuation schools are especially applicable to district and county-operated alternative schools, including continuation high schools.

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# Appendix

## PROGRAM OF STUDY: PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Linked Learning Component	Course Offerings	PCH Pathway Classes	Current Classes
		2018-19	2017-18
<b>Rigorous Academics</b>	English	English 1, English 2, English 3, English 4  Health curriculum for ELA—Medical English	English 1, English 2, English 3, English 4
	History	Medical U.S. History, World History, Economics, U.S. Government  Health Records Certificate	U.S. History, World History, Economics, U.S. Government
	Mathematics	Algebra, Geometry	Algebra, Geometry
	Science	Physiology, Medical Chemistry	Biology, Earth Science
	Electives	Physical Education, Art, Culinary, Fly Law, HiFy, Gardening, Mental Health Groups, Youth Speaks	Physical Education, Art, Cooking, Cosmetology, Fly Law, HiFy, Internship Skills, APEX, Young Women’s Group, Music Production, Spoken Word
<b>Career Technical Education</b>	CTE	Public Health I, Health Careers I, Health Careers II  Public and Community Health CTE Courses  Mental and Behavioral Health CTE Courses	
	Dual Enrollment	Health Ed I, Intro to Community Health, Survey of Health Care Interpreting	
	Certifications	CPR Certification, Medical Interpreter Certification, Health Work Advantage Certificate, Health Care Records Certificate	
<b>Work-Based Learning</b>	Work-Based Learning	Highland Hospital, West Oakland Health Council, Bright Young Minds, Career Symposium, Career Panel	Wow Farm!, HEAL at Highland Hospital, On-Site Health Advocates, Ruidale Student Run Enterprises, Ready Set Connect, Genesys Works, On-Site Social and Digital
	College Exploration Visits	SFSU Health Department; College of Alameda - Dental Assistant; Merritt College – Nursing, Radiology, Microscopy, Medical Interpreting; Berkeley Community College – Community Health Worker; East Bay – Kinesiology, Nursing	Peralta Community Colleges: Laney, College of Alameda, Merritt, and Berkeley
<b>Personalized Supports</b>	Advising	Lifelong Medical, West Oakland Health Council, La Clinica, Veterinary Hospitals	Advisory, College and Career Center, East Bay Agency for Children, Restorative Justice Practices, TUPE (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Intervention), Case Managers

**PROGRAM OF STUDY: GAMES AND SIMULATION**

Linked Learning Component	Course Offerings	GST Pathway Classes	
		2018-19	2017-18
<b>Rigorous Academics</b>	English	English 1, English 2, English 3, English 4  Topics: character development, storyboards, ethics of artificial intelligence, Udacity online – capstone class	English 1, English 2, English 3, English 4
	History	U.S. History, World History, Economics, U.S. Government  Topics: innovation throughout history, industrial revolution	U.S. History, World History, Economics, U.S. Government
	Mathematics	Algebra, Geometry  Topics: graphic design, Boot Strap coding	Algebra, Geometry
	Science	Physiology, Anatomy, Physics  Topics: robotics, snap circuits, physics, green technology	Biology, Earth Science
	Electives	Existing offerings plus Graphic Design, Coding, and 3D Printing	Physical Education, Art, Cooking, Cosmetology, Fly Law, HiFy, Internship Skills, APEX, Young Women's Group, Music Production, Spoken Word
<b>Career Technical Education</b>	CTE	Games and Simulation CTE Courses  Captstone Tech Course	
	Dual Enrollment	Chabot College, Laney College, Berkeley City College, Welding and Machinery Program	
	Certifications	Computer Programming with Java  Computer Programming with C++	
<b>Work-Based Learning</b>	Work-Based Learning	OTX, on-campus social media leads, website development internship, UC Berkeley School of Engineering, OUSD IT Department, Bruce Cox Green Building, Chabot Space & Science Center, Genesys Works, YearUp, ScriptEd_, Olimpico	Wow Farm!, HEAL at Highland Hospital, On-Site Health Advocates, Rudsdale Student Run Enterprises, Ready Set Connect, Genesys Works, On-Site Social and Digital
	College Exploration Visits	Chabot College, Peralta Community Colleges: Laney, College of Alameda, Merritt, and Berkeley	Peralta Community Colleges: Laney, College of Alameda, Merritt, and Berkeley
<b>Personalized Supports</b>	Advising	Advisory, College and Career Center, East Bay Agency for Children, Restorative Justice Practices, TUPE (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Intervention), Case Managers	Advisory, College and Career Center, East Bay Agency for Children, Restorative Justice Practices, TUPE (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Intervention), Case Managers





Chapter Eight

uniting K-12 and  
postsecondary  
leaders to help  
students persist  
and succeed

*Elizabeth Newman*



# uniting K-12 and postsecondary leaders to help students persist and succeed

*Elizabeth Newman*

## Problem of Practice

How to improve the successful transition and persistence of pathway graduates into and through postsecondary education?

## Abstract

This profile documents how education leaders in Monterey County, California have collaborated across the K-12 and postsecondary sectors to address three interlocking issues: credit-bearing college math placement, college readiness, and college completion. This focused effort, designed to support students to successfully transition to and through college math, aligns with a broader concern: How to create a twelfth grade experience that prepares all students, including first-generation, low-income students, for successful postsecondary trajectories.

## Introduction

In their multi-year study of Linked Learning implementation, Caspary and Warner (2017) found that student participation in high-quality pathways tends to increase the number of low-income youth of color who are prepared for admission to two- and four-year degree granting colleges and universities. Most notably, this study found that African-American youth in certified pathways are substantially more likely to meet college admission requirements, and to matriculate at four-year degree granting colleges. Yet, despite the power of strong pathway programs to prepare youth to enter college, students in career-themed pathways are not more likely than non-pathway students to *persist* in college.

One key obstacle to college persistence is that significant numbers of low-income youth and youth of color fail to place into credit-bearing coursework as college freshmen (Ganga, Mazzariello, & Edgecombe, 2018). Indeed, despite having successfully passed three years of college-required math in high school, about one-third of all freshman who enrolled into the California State University (CSU) system in 2015 were placed into developmental-level math (Burdman, 2017). Similar patterns emerged for students attending a California Community College (Burdman, 2015). Students placed in developmental math are less likely to complete college (Ganga, Mazzariello, & Edgecombe, 2018). Research finds, for example, that almost two-thirds of students who drop out of California’s community colleges are those who have progressed no further than remedial math (Burdman et al., 2018). Consequently, many analysts have concluded that in order for more low-income minority youth to make successful transitions, persist, and gain the full benefits of



college attendance, K-12 and postsecondary institutions will need to better integrate their curricular approaches and related systems of support for all students (Barnett, Fay, Pheatt, & Trimble, 2016; Burdman, 2015).

An interim indicator of progress toward the goal of attaining a college degree is completion of a credit-bearing course in a gateway subject like math or English in the first year of postsecondary education (Vargas, 2015). Specifically, students who are assessed in eleventh grade as not ready for college-level math would benefit from transitional courses in the twelfth grade. These transitional courses would prepare them for a timely move to credit-bearing courses in college math. The collaborative approach undertaken in Monterey County to impact college math placement and completion aligns with this suggestion and reflects the three-part implementation framework: “Co-Design, Co-Delivery, and Co-Validation” (Vargas & Venezia, 2015).

## Background

### **MONTEREY COUNTY COLLEGE MATH READINESS LANDSCAPE**

Monterey County is home to 24 school districts that, along with the county office of education, serve almost 78,000 students. Ten of these districts, along with the county office, enroll approximately 22,000 high school students. Of those, more than 10,000 attend one of the four comprehensive high schools in Salinas Union High School District (CDE DataQuest, accessed 12.12.2018). The county is home to two community colleges, Hartnell College in Salinas and Monterey Peninsula College, serving approximately 17,000 and 15,000 students respectively (California Community Colleges Student Success Scorecard, accessed 12.12.2018) and one four-year university, California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), which serves more than 6,700 undergraduates (College Results Online, accessed 12.12.2018).

Like other California counties, Monterey County’s educational institutions are grappling with challenges related to equitable college access and completion. In 2012, the Monterey Bay region was ranked among the lowest in California for college going, as well as for the rate of students enrolled in advanced math courses (Moore, Tan, & Shulock, 2014). In 2017, the percentage of Monterey County students completing the course eligibility requirements for University of California (UC) and CSU

entrance was around 42%, compared with 47% for the state. In Salinas Union High School District, the rate was slightly higher than the county average, with individual high schools’ rates varying from 39% to 55% (CDE DataQuest).

At Hartnell College, the number of students who placed into one or more remedial math and/or other remedial courses is more than four times the number who placed into college-level courses. This is particularly significant because completion or transfer rates are almost twice as high for those students whose initial placements are into college-level courses (72% compared with 40%) (California Community Colleges Student Success Scorecard). Hartnell is actively working to address these issues, including efforts underway through its “Bridging the Gap” initiative that aims to ensure smooth transitions from high school to college. Through this initiative, regional education partnerships receive support in addressing the critical transitions from high school to postsecondary education, with particular attention to the needs of low-income, under-represented students.

At CSUMB, the six-year graduation rate is 55% (College Results Online). To improve completion rates, CSUMB’s math department has implemented a range of reforms to its developmental math program. This has resulted in reducing the number of initial placements into remedial math and increasing the rate that students who placed into college-level math pass the initial course and advance to the next level. These improvements have informed CSUMB’s design of new course sequences that meet the CSU system goal of eliminating developmental math altogether. In addition, the math department at CSUMB is collaborating with Hartnell College to strengthen curriculum and transfer pathways, and with K-12 school leaders on teacher professional development issues.

### **ENGAGING PARTNERS TO ENVISION STRONGER K-12 COLLEGE MATH PATHWAYS**

Building on these longstanding education partnerships, and fueled by a commitment to address regional issues related to local students’ success in mathematics, CSUMB responded to an invitation from the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop a new twelfth grade math course designed to ensure college readiness. Led by Dr. Joanne Lieberman, a math professor and teacher educator, CSUMB launched a cross-sector project to develop the new course and associated professional development of math teachers. First, Dr. Lieberman partnered with the math

specialist at the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) to identify and recruit those districts in the county most interested in participating. Together they reached out to district administrators to, as Lieberman describes, “explain the what and why” of the course. Buoyed by broad collective interest, the CSUMB and MCOE partners established an initial leadership team (including other CSUMB faculty and a longtime collaborating faculty member from nearby San Jose State University) and commenced to organize meetings and informal conversations to clarify common goals, and determine the actions required to achieve the goals. The team sought to ensure that the cross-sector project aligned with each partner’s own educational goals and needs. Over time, district administrators were added to the team to reflect the project’s geography and to contribute to course design, teacher professional development, and engagement of principals and parents. The CSUMB Math Readiness Project was launched.

### CONFIRMING COLLECTIVE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The CSUMB Math Readiness Project codified plans to:

**1. Develop and pilot a new twelfth grade math course.** A central goal of the project was to design a course that would engage and motivate students; demonstrate the usefulness of mathematics; deepen understanding of math concepts; and reinforce critical problem solving skills to support success in geometry, algebra, statistics, and higher-level math such as graph theory, informatics, and financial decisionmaking.

**2. Address Teacher Professional Development.** Professional Development (PD) in the partner schools and districts would build capacity for effective implementation of the pilot course and enhance math teaching more broadly. In addition to monthly meetings at school sites and intensive off-site PD for math teachers in all of the participating districts, site-based coaching and online office hours would be offered to teachers of the new pilot course. Principals would also be invited to attend any or all of the PD opportunities.

**3. Build a Cross-Sector Professional Learning Community for the Pilot Schools and Districts.** A professional learning community for pilot teachers and the leadership team would serve as a venue to share knowledge gleaned through course implementation and provide curriculum-specific professional development.

**4. Engage Parents.** Family Math Festivals would take place at school sites in the participating districts, designed to

engage families in math activities facilitated by high school students.

**5. Build a Countywide Network of Math Educators.** The project work group envisioned some countywide strategies, including a math teacher network, that would reach beyond teachers in the pilot program, and provide participants with in-person professional enrichment and support. This countywide math network would include math faculty of local postsecondary institutions, students studying to become math teachers, and secondary school math teachers.

**6. Develop a Leadership Collaborative.** The work group identified a need to formalize a cross-sector collaborative that could institutionalize the college readiness work after the pilot phase for the math project ended. The collaborative would be comprised of leaders from each partner institution. This leadership group would focus on math readiness but might eventually provide a platform for educators to share and discuss strategies and policies related to college readiness more broadly. This structure would become the Math Advisory Collaborative (Collaborative).

## Three-Part Framework of Partner Engagement

In describing how the Math Readiness Project approached collaborating across the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, the deliberate actions taken can be understood by reference to Vargas and Venezia’s implementation framework: “Co-Design, Co-Delivery, and Co-Validation” (Vargas & Venezia, 2015).

### CO-DESIGN

*Deciding on and designing together courses, curricular pathways, and support systems, as well as professional development opportunities and data platforms, that impact what and how students learn (Vargas and Venezia, 2015: p2).*

When secondary and postsecondary educators come together to consider appropriate content and pedagogy, students benefit from the institutions’ shared understanding of the material that is being covered and the ways in which teaching and learning occur. This is especially true in learning pathways where the high school experience is explicitly designed to support student persistence into and through

postsecondary education. For example, some students who excel in Linked Learning in high school struggle to adjust to new expectations and experiences in college. A study of the postsecondary experiences of students who graduated from Linked Learning pathways in San Diego found that many of those interviewed "... hit significant roadblocks that have caused them to question themselves, their academic abilities, and their future potential" (Latimer & Kluver, 2015). Vargas and Venezia suggest that a shared understanding among educators and students about the standards and key skills that students must master will help to smooth student transitions across the education sectors.

### CO-DELIVERY

*Sharing and coordinating faculty and staff, facilities, and other resources to carry out the co-designed learning experiences and supports (Vargas and Venezia, 2015: p2).*

Beyond common agreement on the knowledge, skills, and belief systems that educators need to develop among their students, the framework suggests that students also benefit from cross-sector implementation efforts. While acknowledging that co-delivery is difficult to achieve, Vargas and Venezia suggest that when partnerships extend beyond shared decisionmaking to include jointly undertaking key implementation steps, participants are better able to assess, revise, and continually improve their curricular design decisions. Likewise, experienced technical assistance providers have identified a set of cross-system interventions that K-12 and postsecondary partners can co-deliver to help bridge student transitions from high school to college. These strategies include the collaborative implementation of integrated instruction and student support initiatives or programs (Dadgar, Fischerhall, Collins, & Schaefer, 2018).

### CO-VALIDATION

*Accepting agreed-upon assessments, successful completion of performance tasks and experiences, and other indicators of learning as evidence of proficiency, including for placement in credit-bearing, college-level courses (Vargas and Venezia, 2015: p2).*

For co-design and co-delivery to meaningfully impact students, cross-sector agreements regarding how students will be assessed and the ways in which student success will be measured are important. Fundamentally, co-validation



supports alignment between the last year of high school and the first year of college. It ensures that students understand the relationship between their efforts in twelfth grade and their placement in college level courses. At the same time, this co-validation effort builds the sense of mutual accountability among secondary and postsecondary leaders.

Across all three elements of the framework, past research also highlights the value of student performance and behavior data and research-informed readiness indicators when used collaboratively by colleges and high schools (Grady, 2016). The regular use of such data for planning, inquiry, and continuous organizational improvement can build capacity and commitment for cross-sector collaborations and support students' success as they transition from high school to college.

## Collaborating to Create an Integrated Math Experience

Once Dr. Lieberman and her CSUMB colleagues secured agreement on goals and a commitment to work together from their County, K-12, and Community College partners, she moved to reconvene the math project work group. In addition, Lieberman engaged a team from Stanford's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities to

help develop the format and content for the countywide Math Advisory Collaborative meetings. The work group understood that the next step was to move beyond abstract discussions to a set of concrete actions and projects focused on creating an integrated math bridge for student success in college. They determined the districts' responsibilities and a timeline to ensure that the new course would be offered in the Fall. This required districts to recruit teachers for three related roles: course developer (lead teacher), course teacher (pilot teacher), and professional development participant (any secondary math teacher in a participating district). The work group supported the recruitment effort, and a grant from the CDE supported stipends for each of the three teacher positions.

The work group established two teams, one to develop the course curriculum and one to plan the professional development.

### CO-DESIGNING THE COURSE CURRICULUM

The course development team included representation from both postsecondary and secondary math faculty divided into four sub-teams, each of which developed a particular math unit. Periodically, the full team came together to discuss how the units were evolving and aligning. Together, they considered the ways in which the new math course could support students who were on a path toward college, but were not yet assessed as "college ready" in math. The teams also considered how the curriculum and pedagogy that defined the new math course would support students to think deeply about mathematical concepts, use and articulate reasoning, and instill a growth mindset in math. As well, course planning addressed design features to reflect the partners' deep belief that, as Lieberman articulates:

*"all students can learn math, and that struggling over interesting, challenging problems leads to deeper learning."*

In conjunction with designing the course, the team provided the information necessary for each school to receive A-G certification (meeting the subject matter and course sequence requirements for eligibility for undergraduate admission to the UC or the CSU system), as well as any additional information that schools might need to gain approval from their respective school boards to include the course in their fall schedules. Although the timeline was short and the teachers struggled to find the time necessary to fulfill their responsibilities, the team met all deadlines and the course was certified and ready for the opening of school in the fall of 2017.

### CO-DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In parallel with curriculum design efforts, project leaders convened a team of practitioners from the postsecondary institutions and the county office of education to design professional development activities that would build capacity for high-quality implementation of the new course. The team designed opportunities that would guide teachers to effectively teach the math content, model pedagogical practices associated with the new course, and create classroom conditions to support learning goals. They were charged with developing a plan that would not only instill the philosophy, but provide tools to support growth mindset in math. These competencies would extend to all of the teachers' math courses. In addition, non-pilot math teachers in the participating schools and districts were encouraged to participate, thus broadening the systemwide impact.

While the design team was responsible for content, district administrators took the lead in building agreement on, and commitment to, a calendar for the pacing and timing of professional development activities across the school year.

## Collaborating to Deliver the New Course and Professional Development

In Monterey County, the approach to co-delivery was accomplished by weaving together pilot course instruction with concurrent professional development. Typically, classroom instruction and professional development are conceived as separate, asynchronous activities. Participants in this conventional approach often lament that professional development is unmoored from the experience of teachers, fails to acknowledge and capitalize on their current funds of knowledge, and is delivered by trainers who are not familiar with the context in which an intervention is implemented. The simultaneous and integrated approach taken in Monterey County, by contrast, allowed participants to build instructional capacity while engaging in rapid cycles of design-based inquiry and improvement.

### SITE-BASED COACHING

CSUMB partners engaged their high school pilot course teachers in ongoing course planning, classroom observations, and site based coaching by a master teacher. They also

provided the pilot teachers with weekly virtual office hours to discuss course content, pedagogy, and challenges, and to obtain student and teacher feedback.

### **MONTHLY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS AT IMPLEMENTATION SITES**

Staff from CSUMB or the county office of education facilitated these meetings, with high school teachers participating. These sessions were devoted to collaborative lesson-planning, and analysis of teacher practices at each site.

### **SIX FULL-DAY LEARNING SESSIONS**

These sessions provided extended opportunities for pilot course teachers to interrogate implementation challenges at each site, assess student response to the new course across sites, and deepen their understanding of the math in the course.

### **SPRING-SUMMER MATH INSTITUTES**

These institutes are provided for both pilot course teachers and all secondary school math teachers during one Saturday in the spring and three to five days in the summer focused on math content, strategies for facilitating math discussions, and implementation of complex instruction.

## **On-Going, Design-Based Inquiry: Course and Professional Development**

Project leaders engaged Stanford's Gardner Center to support the design and development of the Math Advisory Collaborative sessions, to ensure that they would be framed by a focus on data and research-informed indicators of college readiness and success. Committed to letting the Collaborative drive the overarching agenda, Lieberman suggested that the first meeting engage partners to consider their interests and concerns. Through input gleaned during this session, the Gardner Center recommended that the process of developing and implementing a new course serve as a starting point for critical inquiry about progress and challenges related to a wide range of college readiness and success indicators. To this end, the pilot project leaders engaged partners to identify and share data related to the course, as well as other information focused more broadly on supports that students need for college readiness and completion.

Reflecting the shared commitment to collecting data that would facilitate learning and improvement, the curriculum design team solicited feedback through a survey of students after the first few months of the course. Written, open ended, anonymous responses provided valuable input into ongoing course planning. Course teachers also shared feedback, and have worked together to address challenges and improve the course's effectiveness, thus fostering a sense of partnership and collaboration. For example, one challenge raised relates to differences in student learning style (e.g., some students are inquirers, others want to be shown how to do it, and some are less inclined to work independently). While tackling these kinds of issues, teachers built on shared successes.

The ongoing Collaborative meetings, classroom observations, and concurrent professional development have facilitated fast cycles of inquiry and modification of the course content and instruction processes. Teachers have shared changes that they have made in response to student needs, including the addition of exercises to support content knowledge or skill development and assessments, and making revisions to the pacing and sequencing of course content. Further, the professional development focuses on equitable teaching practices, and supporting student learning through an emphasis on group work, complex instruction principles, and the scaffolding of tasks (e.g., designing tasks that provide access and challenge to all learners and acknowledging that verbal explanations are math strengths). In complex instruction, "teachers use cooperative group



work to teach at a high academic level in diverse classrooms. They assign open-ended, interdependent group tasks and organize the classroom to maximize student interaction. In their small groups, students serve as academic and linguistic resources for one another” (Cohen, Lotan, Scarloss, & Arellano, 1999, p.80). As described by Dr. Lisa Jilk in an April 2018 presentation to the Math Advisory Collaborative, Complex Instruction builds equitable math classrooms by creating cultures and norms that honor different student learning styles and strengths and that promote peer-to-peer accountability for learning among students.

While this focus was core to the initial design of the course, early inquiry influenced the design team to further emphasize supports for college math readiness by weaving into the course instructional elements focused on developing student academic tenacity and college knowledge.

Lessons drawn from the pilot course implementation have also impacted partners more broadly. For example, educators across sectors shared their interest in addressing math teaching and learning before and after twelfth grade. Part of this conversation focused on the potential for group work and complex instruction to offer an opportunity for consistency in pedagogy across K-12 and postsecondary education. Complex instruction concepts have been, and continue to be, integrated into the PD for secondary partners. Some district leaders are considering opportunities for complex instruction to be incorporated into lower grades and/or different subject areas. In addition, postsecondary partners are exploring opportunities to incorporate these concepts into their new first year courses for college freshmen, potentially smoothing the transition from high school to college.

### **CO-VALIDATING THE NEW COURSE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As they began the work to implement the new course, the project leadership team wanted to validate that the pilot content and design would successfully engage students and that teachers could execute the pedagogical tasks with both fidelity to the student learning goals, and with context-dependent flexibility in the delivery. These implementation outcomes were important to ensure that the design was sustainable and scalable in the long run.

As noted earlier, the leadership team used student surveys and classroom observations both to better understand the implementation process and to interrogate their course

design. Coaches, teachers, administrators, and postsecondary partners also used these activities to assess the student experience and understand the effectiveness of specific aspects of the curriculum and associated pedagogy in real time. Student surveys revealed, for example, that students liked the group work and the varied learning opportunities associated with the course. Similarly, students reported that the course *benefited them* by helping them to learn new ways of problem solving and to engage in critical thinking, as well as helping them to think more deeply, persist, and learn the material. Further, students indicated that they would *recommend the course* to students struggling with math, and to students who are planning to go to college.

Teachers report that students enjoy engaging in the activities and go beyond what is being asked of them, are making math connections and deepening prior knowledge, and are having deep math conversations. They also report that the tasks are accessible and challenging for all levels of students, and that some who had struggled are now blossoming while others, who had always been successful, are now learning from others’ thinking.

Teachers also conducted before and after assessments of student performance related to math skills and growth mindset and used professional development opportunities and common planning time to analyze data from these assessments to understand the short-term impact of the Pilot Course on student mastery of college-required math.

Beyond their perceptions related to successes and challenges in the classroom, teachers were also afforded the opportunity to assess the professional development. Overwhelmingly positive responses have indicated that the PD has significantly impacted teacher practice, with one teacher calling the experience “life changing.” The input has been used to inform the content and format of PD.

In addition to the more tangible outcomes of the pilot project, the creation of a new course and the provision of opportunities for critical professional development for math teachers, there were also other indications of the pilot’s success. As one district administrator and long-time math teacher described:

*“This [math readiness project] has made my dreams come true. I wanted to help the community change their attitudes about math, not just the students. It’s been a catalyst for so many things.”*



## USING A SUMMER MATH ACADEMY AS A LABORATORY FOR THE NEW COURSE

Project leaders also conceived of a unique way to bring the collaborative course design, delivery, and validation functions together in a sort of real-time implementation and professional development laboratory. This came in the form of a two-week summer math academy that was developed for students who would be taking the course in the fall. One objective of the summer academy was to build students' problem solving skills. But of critical importance for the college faculty partners and county administrators, in tandem with offering a multi-faceted student experience, was using this academy as an opportunity to support PD for teachers as well as to assess the efficacy of different course design elements. Originally planned to take place at a high school campus, partner input resulted in moving the summer academy to the CSUMB campus. Once underway, the academy afforded high school teachers and CSUMB faculty the opportunity to observe and/or teach about 20 rising high school seniors. In the mornings, students worked in groups on complex math problems and received guidance about college applications and financial aid. In the afternoons, the high school teachers and college faculty spent time reflecting on the morning sessions (that they had either taught or observed) and planned for the following morning. The math coaches and county curriculum specialists used the opportunity to engage both the high school and college math faculty in reflections about how they could best support implementation, scale-up, and modifications to the professional development activities. Reflecting on the academy, postsecondary and high school partners expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn from one another:

*"If this kind of learning happens in all classrooms, our problems will go away."*

And they were explicit in the learnings they will bring back to their classrooms:

*"I saw brilliance in students. I probably have not given avenues for brilliance to come out. I am so focused on finishing prescribed materials. I have just been surviving in the classroom. Now I have strategies and resources."*

Ultimately, the Collaborative seeks to confirm that the course will indeed prepare students to succeed in college. Dr. Lieberman and her team have prepared for this by engaging

the Math Advisory Collaborative in early conversations about the data they will collect and track to assess how course participation affects the educational trajectories of students into and through college to successful completion.

## Lessons for the Field and Next Steps

The cross-sector development and implementation of the new math course as an integrated student support offered an effective vehicle to rally partners around a collective activity. For secondary and postsecondary institutions, this was a chance to join forces to support their "shared students" in making successful transitions from high school to college. The multi-faceted approach and intentional engagement of cross-sector partners in the course's development and implementation reflected the Monterey County partners' understanding of their educational landscape, as well as the previously established foundation of trust. Development of the course within this place of mutual respect allowed the broader discussion on college readiness and completion to become an authentic search for ways to support all students to be successful on their paths to and through college-level math. Further, the dialogue between postsecondary and K-12 educators improved secondary educators' understanding of the expectations for students entering college-level math. Partners unpacked regional similarities and differences among local high schools. They discovered that while the high schools and districts share some characteristics, they also vary in significant ways, including variations in students' options for a fourth year of math. Similarly, supports for college readiness vary by high school, including tutoring, mentoring, and/or offerings specific to different career



pathways or academies. For example, each of the four high schools in Salinas Union High School District offers students one or two academies, all of which were certified Linked Learning pathways in 2013-14. The academies include engineering and health, agriculture, digital & media arts, green building, and fitness & sports training. In addition, Alisal High School has a “CISCO and Robotics” pathway, designed to explicitly align with coursework at Hartnell College.

Looking ahead, project leaders envision increased alignment of math pedagogy and content across secondary and postsecondary education, especially in first-year math gateway courses that are being developed as part of systemwide changes in the CSU and California Community College systems. In addition, there are opportunities to engage new partners and further enhance the focus on inquiry for learning and improvement through the Math Advisory Collaborative. In this same vein, the leadership team expects to continue its work to date to develop a robust plan for tracking data related to math outcomes, college persistence, and college completion.

Monterey County’s cross-sector, multi-faceted approach to developing a new math course reflects the co-design, co-delivery, and co-validation approach. As the work continues, it is anticipated that this grounding will bring ongoing, collective attention to the needs of students as they move forward on their paths to and through college.



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Chapter Nine

lessons from the  
field: integrated  
student supports

*Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D.*



## lessons from the field: integrated student supports

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This last chapter closes with a synthesis of what we are learning from the seven foregoing profiles. While not comprehensive, insights are drawn directly from practitioner experience as they design and adapt an integrated set of student supports suited to the unique contexts of their schools and communities. A common theme of each profile is the goal of providing every student with equitable access to rigorous, student-centered learning, and to a coherent high school experience. It is hoped that this book will serve as an illustrative guide for others as they, too, work to meet the needs of all students in ways that allow them to fulfill their potential in pathways of their choice toward college, career, and civic engagement.

### **LESSON 1. INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS BEGIN WITH TEACHERS AT THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE**

Student learning and academic persistence is supported by classroom and expanded learning experiences that are coherently integrated and build upon each other. Yet, in traditional high schools, student supports are often conceived of as supplemental or extra-curricular, defined by their organizational separation from classroom teaching and learning. Linked Learning and pathway schools are challenging this traditional distinction between academic teaching and student support programs and teachers are leading the charge.

The reforms profiled in Chapter 3 illustrated this rethinking of the high school experience. Teachers at O’Connell High School led the work of integrating their community-based partners into their classrooms to co-teach and to become student success coaches and college and career success partners who are organizationally embedded into the daily life of each pathway.

Likewise, in Chapter 2, Talma Schulz at the Center for Powerful Public Schools recounted how teachers, working collaboratively with employer partners, redesigned workplace learning experiences that are integrated with the pathway’s academic, technical, and social and emotional learning objectives. This profile of the Community Health Advocates School (CHAS) illustrates how teachers can design in-school experiences that model professional norms and workforce expectations to better prepare students for employer-based externships in the senior year of high school.

And in Chapter 8, Elizabeth Newman described a learning collaborative of county school administrators, classroom math teachers, and college math faculty who came together to co-design, co-teach, and co-validate a new grade 12 math course. The goal was to create a smoother, more integrated pathway from high school into and through college level mathematics.

At the very heart of the practice examples in this guidebook is the idea that learning in classrooms, workplace settings, and in afterschool settings should be linked by a focus on clear specific learning objectives that teachers, school partners, and youth understand.

### **LESSON 2. LEADERS PROMOTE EQUITY AND INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS BY RE-THINKING TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Past studies of effective Linked Learning and pathway implementation emphasize the importance of school and system leadership that is committed to equity, organizational improvement, and student-centered learning (Saunders et al., 2013). Our case profiles help to illustrate *how* leaders support integrative collaboration for change—especially when that change calls for adults to do more than “get

better” at steady work like teaching their subjects or assigned content. Instead, adults must re-examine and change the organization of work and time and rethink teaching and learning altogether.

### **Leaders articulate a strategic vision for change.**

System leaders articulate the *why* of change—the vision that guides short- and long-term goals. In Chapter 7, Elisha Smith Arrillaga and Amal Amanda Issa illustrated how extending Linked Learning strategies to youth in alternative high schools was predicated on leadership commitment to equitable access to deeper learning opportunities for all youth in Oakland. And in Chapter 5, Kendra Fehrer took a look at how parent leadership has helped to bring community-based and culturally sensitive voice to envisioning college and career readiness for all.

### **System leaders ensure reform coherence at the school level and across schools.**

In Chapter 6, Marisa Saunders explored how Linked Learning reforms in Los Angeles were situated within larger political forces that sought to control school governance and define the terms for equitable access to opportunity. She then documented how LA’s Office of Linked Learning has sought to help school leaders navigate the ever-shifting reform winds by ensuring the alignment of Linked Learning with multiple district reforms, and by settings standards for quality across all schools in LAUSD’s Linked Learning initiative.

### **Effective leaders also understand how to pace and contextualize change.**

In Chapter 2, a school principal discussed how she sought to lead radical change at a pace that would not overwhelm the capacity of teachers and staff to respond effectively. High schools are often large complex organizations designed to promote stable work over time by hundreds of people at scale. Consequently, change is not always rapid or steady. The practitioners in our profiles of O’Connell High School, CHAS, and in Oakland’s continuation high schools described a process of incremental reforms and refinements across multiple years. It involved experimentation where school leaders sometimes had to stop, retrace their steps, and begin again in accord with the school calendar, human capacity, and budget cycles. While the vision for equitable access to student-centered learning was steady, implementation was better characterized by discontinuous cycles of forward leaps, interspersed with occasional backward steps.



### **Effective leaders take an asset-based approach to reform.**

The work at O’Connell, CHAS, and Oakland’s continuation high schools is compelling because these are places where Linked Learning has been implemented in high poverty-settings and hard-to-staff schools, and with youth who face multiple barriers to learning. In all of those cases, leaders came to their roles in the wake of a prior experience of failed reforms at the schools they now lead. These leaders, however, took an asset-based approach to reform and ascribe this to their own success. A common approach taken in these examples involved helping teachers, students, and school partners to understand the strengths that already exist in their school and communities. By honoring and working from their existing strengths, staff and partners at CHAS, O’Connell, and Oakland’s continuation schools were inspired to tap into and to cultivate their own sense of agency, to demand more, and to reach for higher student performance goals.

### **Effective leaders follow the principle of broad engagement.**

Public schools, school districts, and public postsecondary schools are essentially egalitarian organizations (i.e., not purely hierarchical ‘command and control’ organizations).

Leaders in such public institutions can set standards, rules, and accountability procedures, but getting actual work done requires that teachers, school partners, and other educators buy in to an implementation plan and bring their discretionary effort to the tasks at hand. Each of our case profiles illustrates how teachers, counselors, partners, and parents have to agree on the problem and on the solution—even when the state articulates goals and standards. At the system level, Elizabeth Newman’s profile of the countywide collaboration in Monterey showed how that work was predicated on careful efforts by leaders to engage the county, the district, and college and high school teachers in a new approach to senior year math. Likewise, Marisa Saunders’ account of reform in LAUSD illustrated the role that district leaders have taken to assess adult readiness for change and to build consensus for change as a precursor to effective implementation.

In their 2013 review, Saunders and her colleagues explored how distributed leadership supports Linked Learning (Saunders et al., 2013). The theme is continued in this review of practice exemplars. In Oakland, for example, where the school district explicitly embraced distributed leadership, you saw how this broad engagement approach supported the speed and quality of Linked Learning implementation in its alternative schools (Chapter 7), as well as in its embrace of a community school approach to family engagement in all of its high schools (Chapter 5).

### **System and school leaders seek to create agency for change among all adults who work with youth.**

Throughout these profiles, the concept of agency is described or implied in various ways. Some leaders talk about empowering their staff or colleagues; others talk about enabling or motivating the people who are charged with implementing change. The leaders in these profiles understand that it was not enough to distribute leadership, to authorize action, or exhort staff and partners to be creative and collaborative. Instead, leaders strove to make sure that teachers, partners, and staff felt supported and empowered to act on higher standards and ambitious goals. Each of the profiles in this volume illustrated different approaches to this concept of agency. In Chapter 4, for example, Jacob Olsen and Caroline Lopez-Perry described how they developed an in-service training protocol for counselors that builds on the counselors’ prior pre-service training, and helps counselors to see how their unique professional skills help them to add value and promote successful implementation of Linked Learning in their schools. The goal is not just to build capacity and knowledge among counselors, but to help them

understand how both their new and prior training empowers them to be part of the Linked Learning enterprise.

### **LESSON 3. STUDENT-CENTERED, INTEGRATED SUPPORTS REQUIRE ATTENTION TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND CAPACITY**

As Saunders and her colleagues have observed, the transition of traditional high schools to college and career-themed pathways implies major “shifts in the way schools operate [that] require schools to rethink traditional adult relationships – between administration and teachers, between school personnel and external partners, and among teachers” (Saunders et al., 2013, p9). Consistent with this observation, the profiles in this volume illustrate how educators are addressing professional learning to build capacity and agency for integrated students supports at all levels of the education system.

#### **Making space and designated time for adult learning and collaboration.**

A key design feature at CHAS (Chapter 2) and O’Connell High School (Chapter 3) is a revised school bell schedule and the reorganization of time and workspace to make room for professional collaboration, both among teachers, and between teachers and community-based or employer partners. By putting it on the schedule, leaders sent a powerful signal that collaboration was expected, and teachers and partners felt empowered to act accordingly.

#### **Reshaping professional development to support collaboration.**

The profiles on counselor training (Chapter 4) and new course development (Chapter 8) offered a bird’s-eye view of how educators are using co-design, co-implementation, and co-validation practices to learn together, across departmental and sector boundaries, to advance integrated student supports. Likewise, the profile of reform at O’Connell (Chapter 3) demonstrates how leaders can design common planning and learning time for adults to very intentionally model the collaboration that they want students to enact in classrooms and workplace settings.

#### **Creating new positions to support collaboration.**

Collaboration often requires staff and partners to work in different ways. Sometimes, however, integrated supports require new positions, or the redeployment of adults to take

on new tasks (Warner et al., 2016, p27). In Chapter 7, Amal Amanda Issa and Elisha Smith Arrillaga show how OUSD deployed community school coordinators and linked learning coordinators to support teachers, students, and partners to collaborate for student success. In LAUSD, the Linked Learning Office has taken a systems approach to professional development and to the deployment of dedicated staff to play coordinating roles for integrated supports. Likewise, in Chapter 5, Kendra Fehrer’s review of family engagement strategies in Oakland and Los Angeles illustrates the way that staff dedicated to family engagement facilitate the integration of parents as advocates for student success in the high school setting.

#### **LESSON 4. ADULT MINDSETS AND COLLECTIVE BELIEFS SHAPE AND OFTEN DETERMINE HIGH QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS**

Ten years ago, in *Beyond Tracking*, Jeanie Oakes and Marisa Saunders assessed the “promise and challenges” implied by Linked Learning reforms (Oakes & Saunders, 2008). They observed that technical aspects of reforms would be difficult, but even more daunting were the normative and political changes that were prerequisite to meaningful and lasting reform. Namely, they argued that public will for equity-focused reform needed to be cultivated, and that a collective embrace of equity among school educators could not be taken for granted.

#### **Equity is a central driver of pathway and equity reforms, and provides the logic for integrated students supports for universal college and career readiness.**

A common thread through each of the illustrative profiles is about how system, pathway, and community leaders built consensus for equity among all adults who work with youth. More importantly, the profiles suggest a common strategy for achieving equity: a shift among practitioners from content focused teaching to student-centered learning.

#### **Student-centered learning is the *how* of equity.**

As one teacher said to us, if equity is the *what*, then student-centered learning is the *how*. In teacher-centered learning, educators focus on delivering their curricular content in a standard way, and allow learning to vary across students. In student-centered learning, educators hold student learning constant, and vary the modality, activities, and pacing of the

curriculum to each student’s needs. As was evident from our profiles, a student-centered approach helped to shape adult perceptions about what low-income minority youth are capable of accomplishing (Chapters 2, 3, and 7), and about what families expect for their children and the role that parents can play in promoting college and career readiness (Chapter 5). The approach also helped to change beliefs about the role of school counselors (Chapter 4), and foster new professional identities among university faculty (Chapter 8). Integrating student supports with pathway learning goals and experiences was one more way of advancing student-centered learning and of making the experience of moving from classrooms, to partner activities, to workplace learning more coherent from the students’ perspective.

#### **A mindset of continuous learning and incremental improvement advances integrated students supports and high-quality pathway implementation.**

One major finding from SRI’s seven-year evaluation of Linked Learning implementation is that the more academically successful school and pathway programs implemented systems and norms of continuous learning and improvement (Warner et al., 2016). They engage educators, partners, and employers in sharing data on student performance, they interrogate their practices against the available evidence, and they use what they learn from common inquiry to adjust their interventions. Many of our profiles offered insight about how schools are applying this norm of continuous learning and incremental improvement. In particular, as part our review of school-level implementation





strategies, Chapters 2 and 3 offered examples of how pathway leaders and their community-based or employer partners stayed focused on their goals, and did not become too attached to initial plans or designs. In each case, adult collaboration was the pathway to integrated student supports, but they were always willing to change the plan and alter the nature of the collaboration so as to maximize their chances of achieving their goals over time.

### **LESSON 5. EFFECTIVE PATHWAY PROGRAMS INTEGRATE ACADEMIC LEARNING WITH ATTENTION TO AGE-APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS**

Many of the profiles in this volume clarify how practitioners seek to integrate attention to social and emotional learning within classroom and workplace learning spaces as student learning objectives (SLOs). In particular, the approach at CHAS and OUSD's continuation high schools has been to help employers to understand how their internships and engagements with students can advance student social awareness, growth mindset, and conscientiousness, as well as technical or professional competencies. As well, in Chapter 4 the authors explained how leaders within the school counseling profession are encouraging individual

high school counselors to co-develop a college and career readiness curriculum where counselors can be team players in advancing student's social and emotional learning in tandem with pathway teachers. Finally, Chapter 5 offered an illustration of how two school districts are working to engage families as a strategy to help youth make connections to resources, opportunities, and to caring adults in their broader communities.

As noted at the outset, a common theme of each profile chapter is the goal of providing every student with equitable access to rigorous, student-centered learning, and to a coherent high school experience. Yet, there is no one list of universally essential supports and no single prescribed set of steps for ensuring equitable access to a rigorous college and career ready pathway. Instead, what each profile has in common is a focus among teachers, community-based partners, and system leaders on collaborative inquiry for continuous improvement. The profiles illustrate how this is operationalized by caring adults. At the school level, adults make time to collectively ask: What problem of practice is getting in the way of our college and career preparation goals? How is that problem related to equity? How can we use student performance data, youth voice, and family and community engagement to better understand the problem? What resources and opportunities exist for us to work more collaboratively, modify our practices, integrate our supports, and get better at achieving our goals? At the systems level, the profiles show how district and community leaders build capacity and empower principals and teachers to collaborate with each other and with community-based partners to create a coherent, rigorous high school experience for all youth. The openness of the adults to continuous learning and their commitment to integrated supports for student success form the necessary foundation for creating schools where there is equitable access to a college and career ready pathway for all.

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