



Chapter Four

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

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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

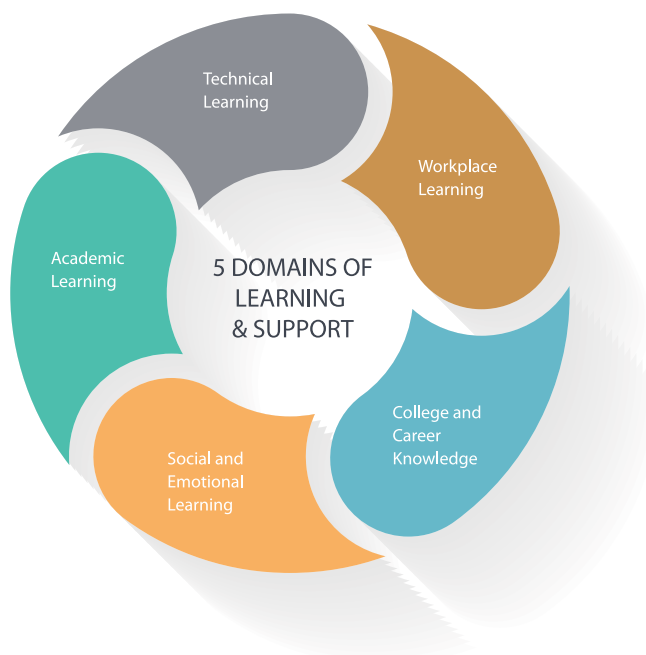
School counselors need a foundational knowledge base about career pathways and the Linked Learning approach to effectively integrate their school counseling program with the academic, technical, and workplace learning components of this new way of organizing the high school. In our experience, this is 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.

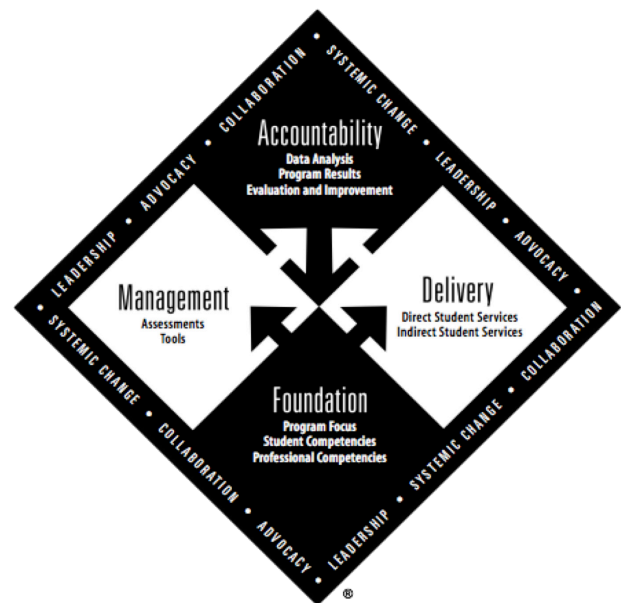
More specifically, *comprehensive support services*, the fourth core component in the Linked Learning approach, consists of five Domains of Learning and Support. These include: 1) support for academic learning, 2) support for technical learning, 3) support for workplace learning, 4) support to advance 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.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- Ruiz de Velasco, J., Newman, E., & Borsato, G. (2016). *Equitable Access by Design: A conceptual framework for integrated student supports within linked learning pathways*. Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities.
- American School Counselor Association (2012). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- 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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This chapter is part of a guidebook, made possible by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, on integrated student supports for college and career readiness. The guidebook offers 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.