lessons from the field: integrated student supports

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Chapter Nine

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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 though 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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Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Ph.D., is deputy director of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University where the focus of his work is on the study and promotion of change in public schools; the implications of education reform for disadvantaged students, education law, and policy; and the effect of immigration on schools and communities. He is an editor, with Marisa Saunders and Jeannie Oakes, of a book that address the importance of a youth-sector approach to education and the importance of expanded learning opportunities to low-income minority youth, *Learning Time: In Pursuit of Educational Equity*. He is also the lead author, with Elizabeth Newman and Graciela Borsato of *Equitable Access by Design: A Conceptual Framework for Integrated Student Supports within Linked Learning Pathways*. Prior to his appointment at the Gardner Center, Jorge served terms as a program officer for educational opportunity and scholarship at the Ford Foundation, and as a senior program officer at both the James Irvine and William & Flora Hewlett Foundations. He also served as a senior research associate at The Urban Institute and as a lawyer and policy analyst for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

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.