

Linked Learning: An Approach to Bridging the Skills Gap

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Well-paying jobs are increasingly out of reach in California for those without education and training at the post-high school level, which has negative impacts on the state's residents and on businesses who are unable to hire qualified employees.

In the context of this skills gap, we analyzed high schools and school districts that have embraced the Linked Learning approach to education, which incorporates academics, career-technical education, and work-based learning. These schools have leveraged Linked Learning to build strong regional partnerships in order to provide a skills based learning experience in the context of regional workforce development needs. Selected case studies have allowed us to distill best practices that with the support of local stakeholders can be replicated across school systems with varying capacities and regional industry clusters.

This report was prepared for the California Foundation for Commerce and Education (CFCE), a think tank affiliated with CalChamber. A 501(c)(3) organization, the Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocate for private enterprise and the market economy.

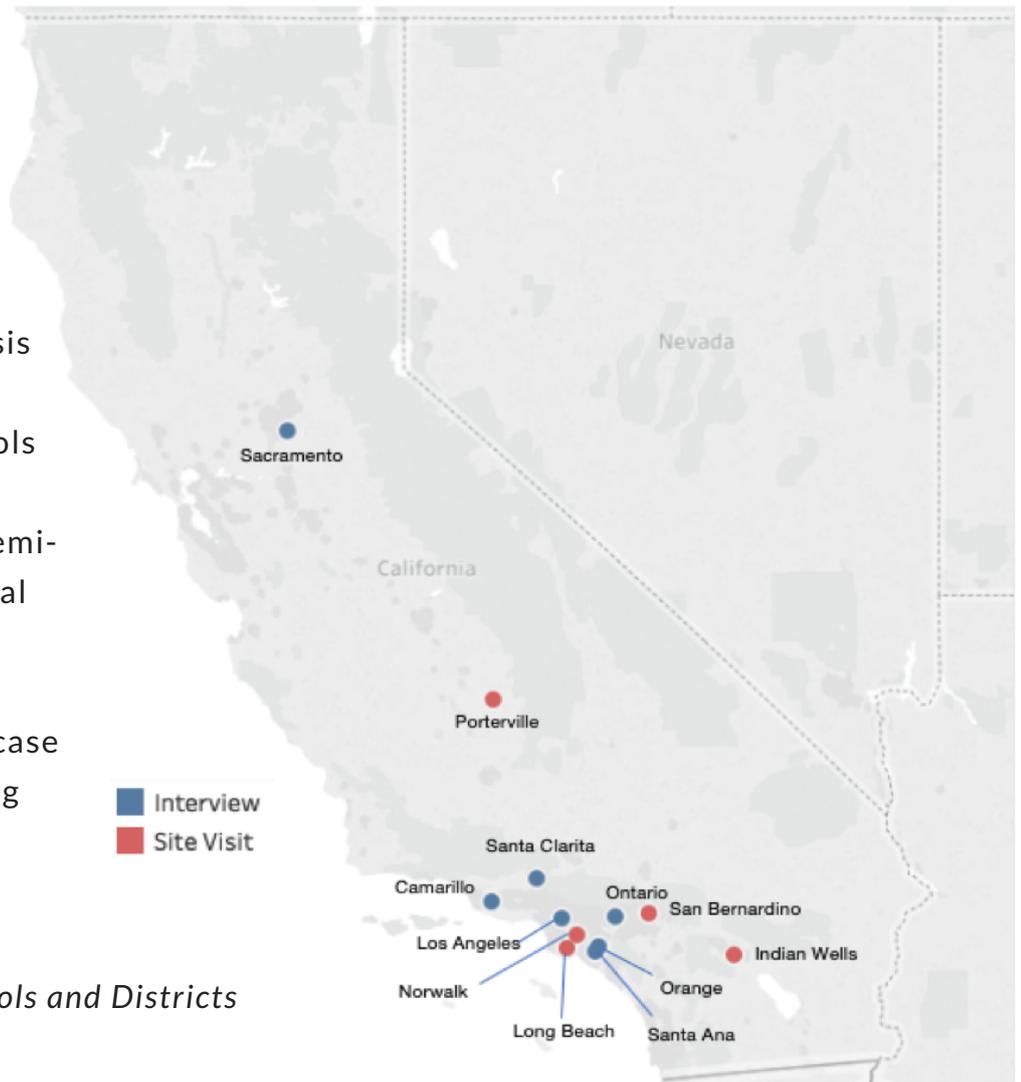
METHODOLOGY & RESEARCHABLE QUESTIONS

Our analysis utilized qualitative data collection methods, specifically interview analysis and case studies. Interviews allowed us to hear directly from Linked Learning school staff and industry partners about the efficacy of different pathways; case studies allowed us to evaluate Linked Learning schools and districts and CTE programs to identify best practices.

| Researchable Question | Approach | Methodology |
|--|-------------|---|
| What are the characteristics of successful partnerships between Linked Learning schools and industry stakeholders? | Qualitative | Interview Analysis, Case Study Analysis |
| Which Linked Learning pathways best integrate academics with regional industry? | Qualitative | Interview Analysis, Case Study Analysis |

INTERVIEWS & CASE STUDIES

In order to assess how well Linked Learning programs are meeting workforce development needs, we conducted a qualitative analysis of data collected from on-site visits at Linked Learning schools in Central and Southern California and standardized semi-structured interviews. Our final analysis focused on four case studies on Linked Learning schools and districts and one case study on a non-Linked Learning school. The interviews were conducted with two groups:



Linked Learning Schools and Districts



Industry Stakeholders

EVALUATION CRITERIA



Business Engagement:

The extent to which business entities are involved in the development and/or implementation of career pathways.



Logistics

Schools' handling of logistical issues that impact students' ability to enroll in desired career pathways or participate in work-based learning.



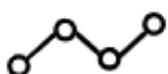
Capacity:

The ability of schools and districts to build partnerships with local businesses and increase the number of work-based learning placements.



Signaling

The ability of schools to leverage the Linked Learning brand.



Tracking Outcomes

How schools collect and utilize data on student outcomes.



Teacher Credentialing:

How schools are able to recruit effective career pathway teachers with relevant experience in the industries associated with their curriculum.

CASE STUDY SELECTION



Long Beach
Unified School
District



Porterville
Unified School
District



San Bernardino
City Unified
School District



Norwalk-La
Mirada Unified
School District



Orange Unified
School District*

FINDINGS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <p>Business Engagement</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key aspect of strong relationships between schools and businesses is communication. Career pathway advisory boards are the key mechanism that provide a direct communication line between these two groups. Significant variation exists in how frequently these meetings are held; some districts and/or pathways hold them as frequently as once a month, and others hold them as infrequently as once a year. • Different districts have different needs for facilitating business/school partnerships. |
| <p>Capacity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-based learning opportunities are a key avenue for Linked Learning students to apply their knowledge and skills in a real-world setting. However, there are often more students than internship/apprenticeship opportunities. |
| <p>Teacher Credentialing</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have difficulty recruiting teachers with industry experience due to the pay differential and difficulties navigating the transition from industry to education. |
| <p>Logistics</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistical issues such as transportation and job site insurance and safety requirements can present barriers to students seeking to access preferred pathways and work-based learning opportunities. • Logistical issues can be overcome with strong leadership at the district level. |
| <p>Tracking Outcomes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The business community responds well to school districts that share student data with them; employers seek to make data-driven decisions. • Post-graduation student outcome data is essential to evaluating how effective pathways are, and this data is often lacking. |
| <p>Signaling</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is room to develop the Linked Learning brand, so that the business community is more aware of the value the program brings. |

RECOMMENDATIONS

Business Engagement

-Increase Frequency of Contact between Educators and Industry Leaders: Frequent board meetings help empower businesses to provide meaningful input.

-Evaluate Work-Based Learning Opportunities in the Context of District Needs: Engagement strategy can vary depending on a greater presence of large corporations or small companies in an area.

Teacher Credentialing

-Identify Teacher Externship Opportunities: Districts can communicate the benefits of teacher externships to more companies, and/or explore developing new externship programs; this helps increase both the quality of teacher credentialing and meet regional workforce needs.

-Promote Dual Enrollment to Increase Student Access to Industry Professionals: Given how difficult it is to recruit industry professionals to teach in Linked Learning pathways, dual enrollment is a practical option to increase student access to teachers with industry expertise.

Signaling

-Work to Promote and Strengthen the Linked Learning Brand: Conduct brand outreach and leverage relationships with community leaders who can provide a visible platform.

Capacity

-Align Pathways with Regional Workforce Needs: Aligning career pathways with local in-demand industry sectors will make work-based learning opportunities more available to students.

Logistics

-Evaluate Logistical Options in the Context of District Needs: Potential solutions include district provided transportation to increase pathway options and work-based learning opportunities and co-locating classrooms in workplaces.

-Clarify Industry Partner Requirements for Work-Based Learning: Work-based learning coordinators should anticipate common concerns and be prepared with information that clarifies school and employer responsibilities.

Tracking Outcomes

-Make Student Performance Data Available to Employers: The largest barrier to making this data available is privacy concerns.

-Advocate for Workforce-Based Metrics in a State Longitudinal Data System: Support state efforts to develop data systems that track student education and employment outcomes.

USC MPP POLICY ANALYSIS PRACTICUM

Linked Learning: An Approach to Bridging the Skills Gap is the final product of the USC Price School Master of Public Policy capstone, in which students apply skills and knowledge gained throughout the program to a real-world policy issue and gain practical consulting experience in policy analysis.