



LINKED LEARNING ALLIANCE

The California Career Pathways Trust

Addressing the Need for Work-Based Learning

Thanks to the leadership of Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg and members of the Senate who participated in a Linked Learning-focused policy retreat earlier this year, the 2013-14 Budget signed by the Governor appropriates \$250 million to establish the California Career Pathways Trust. The fund will provide competitive grants to districts to support career pathways programs, strengthen K-14 alignment, and build scaleable work-based learning infrastructure. While these funds are intended to support a variety of pathway development and improvement efforts, work-based learning holds the greatest potential to transform current educational practice in the state. Work-based learning prepares students for success in college and 21st century careers by connecting what they learn in the classroom to the real world, supporting improved student outcomes through more intentional relevance to the college, career and civic aspirations of students.

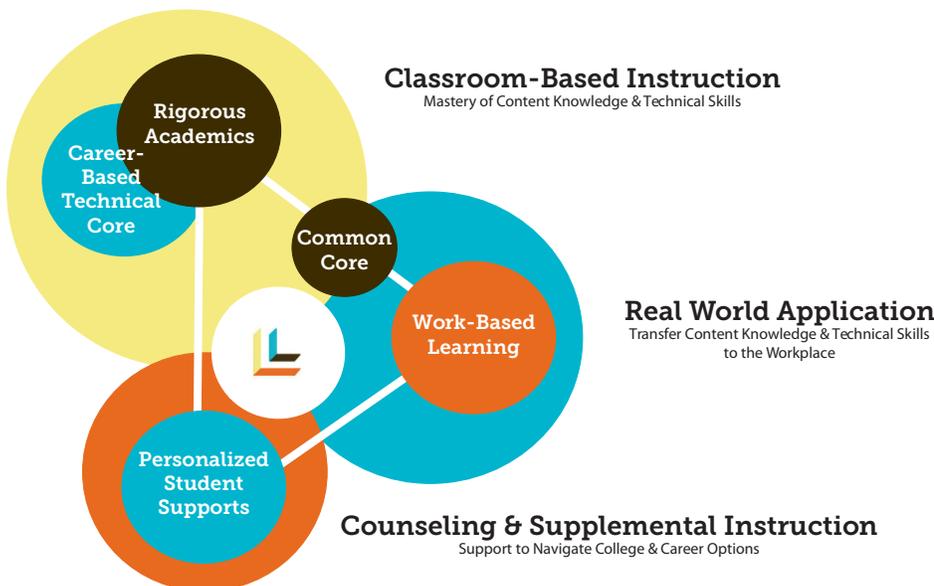
The State of Work-Based Learning

While vital to connecting academic and technical learning to the ‘real world’ and to building 21st century career readiness skills and competencies, the start-up capital and infrastructure needed to effectively implement a robust work-based learning program has been a barrier to student access to work-based learning opportunities. As such, work-based learning remains uncommon in traditional school settings.

It Isn't for Lack of Demand. Where it occurs, most schools and districts rely on personal relationships between teachers and local employers. Few have the time, or dedicated staff, to develop and nurture employer relationships through outreach, recruitment and orientation, or to place and monitor students.¹

Nor Is It for Lack of Supply. Many employers see the value of work-based learning for preparing the future workforce, but are hindered by liability costs and lack of coordination from school sites.² Again, employer engagement and program coordination are time-consuming activities, and require trained staff with dedicated time to perform this work. The capacity can be developed, but it requires a substantial up-front investment – which is a challenge for many districts.

Linked Learning & the Common Core State Standards Enhancing Content Mastery Through Work-Based Learning



As one of the four key components of Linked Learning, the capacity of districts and regions to provide work-based learning at scale to serve all students will be greatly impacted by the California Career Pathways Trust. Already, 63 districts and county offices of education across California are participating in the state Linked Learning Pilot Program, an initiative to develop and support systemic, district-wide and region-wide systems and policy for the delivery of Linked Learning. The need to connect all students to high quality work-based learning opportunities in these districts is great, but it can be achieved through investment in the necessary infrastructure.

Why Work-Based Learning Matters

Common Core State Standards are the What, Linked Learning is the How. The Common Core and Linked Learning emerged because educators and employers know – and the evidence confirms – that students gain a greater understanding of what they learn when they must apply content knowledge, analysis and problem solving related to the real world.³

A high quality work-based learning experience is one which provides students with direct experience in a workplace setting where they must apply the content and skills learned in their academic and technical courses, which includes the application of Common Core standards.

Relevance & Motivation. Making academic study relevant to college and career aspirations motivates students to complete their education.⁴ Work-based learning allows students to build relationships with professionals in their community, reinforces both academic and technical education, and enables students to gain valuable professional experience which will help them succeed in college, career and life.

Economic & Workforce Development. Work-based learning provides a catalyst for student engagement and success, but also improves workforce development and closes the skills gap. Over 300,000 youth leave California’s high schools each year without the experience or skills for college or gainful employment.⁵

Work-based learning provides a forum for collaboration between businesses and schools to better prepare students for the demands of the workplace and job market. Opportunities for engagement with professionals expose students to new knowledge and skills, as well as the work ethic, discipline, and values required to be successful in their careers and post-secondary training.

21st Century Skills That Cannot Be Taught in the Classroom. Many of the life and career skills vital for success in college and the 21st century job market – such as adaptability, initiative, leadership, productivity and responsibility – are best developed through applied experiences such as those provided through work-based learning.⁶

Endnotes

¹ Darche, S., Nayar, N., & Reeves Bracco, K. (2009). *Work-based Learning in California: Opportunities and Models for Expansion*. San Francisco: WestEd, pg. 19.

² Hart Research Associates (2013). *Effective Communications in Support of Linked Learning* (Memo). Washington, D.C.: Hart Research Associates.

³ Rustique, E. & Stam, B. (2012). *The Linked Learning Advantage: Using Linked Learning to Implement the Common Core State Standards*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

⁴ Tsoi-A-Fatt, R., & Harris, L. (2009). “Staying on track for high school graduation: promoting student engagement”. *The Prevention Researcher*, 16(3), 13-16.

⁵ America’s Edge (2013). *Ensuring the East Bay’s Economic Success: Reversing California’s health care “skills gaps” through Linked Learning*. Washington, D.C.: America’s Edge.

⁶ Rice, E. (2011). *Reframing Student Outcomes to Develop 21st Century Skills*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

Implications for Linked Learning

The California Career Pathways Trust provides a significant infusion of capital to develop sustainable work-based learning infrastructure, career pathway programs and regional partnerships aligned to the Linked Learning approach. Among other things, grants could support:

- Employer intermediaries and work-based learning specialists to broker school-business partnerships, provide professional development, and supervise students in work-based learning placements.
- The establishment of regional K-14 partnerships with business entities and community organizations to develop articulated pathways aligned to regional economic needs.
- The expansion of professional and program development opportunities for California Partnership Academies and Regional Occupational Programs.
- Additional support for industry sector initiatives through the California Community Colleges Economic & Workforce Development Program.