

THE LINKED LEARNING ADVANTAGE

21ST CENTURY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



21st century skills, also known as soft skills, are necessary to succeed in today's workforce. Yet, many employers cite that students graduate unequipped with these basic skill sets, making it challenging for both students and employers to transition from a school to work setting. Linked Learning is a solution to this challenge. Linked Learning students gain technical knowledge and skills, 21st century skills, productive dispositions and behaviors, and professionalism needed to meet modern workforce demands.

LINKED LEARNING: TRANSFORMING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Linked Learning is an approach for transforming high schools to prepare all students for college, career, and life. Linked Learning pathways are organized around industry-sector themes, are designed to expose students to a range of career options, and help students understand what it takes to successfully pursue a career. Linked Learning pathways can take the form of stand-alone small schools or academies within larger comprehensive high schools.

Linked Learning pathways integrate four core components throughout the student experience:

- **Rigorous academics** that prepare students to succeed in college.
- **Career-technical education** courses in sequence, emphasizing real-world applications of academic learning.
- **Work-based learning** that provides exposure to real-world workplaces and teaches the professional skills needed to thrive in a career.
- **Comprehensive support services** to address the individual needs of students, ensuring equity of access, opportunity, and success.

The comprehensive seven-year evaluation of the Linked Learning District Initiative, funded by The James Irvine Foundation and conducted by SRI International, provides evidence that Linked learning prepares students with the skills they need to succeed in college and careers. Through surveys of 12th graders conducted as part of SRI's evaluation, Linked Learning students reported that their pathway experiences helped them develop 21st century skills, productive dispositions and behaviors, and professionalism to a greater extent than their peers in traditional high school programs.¹ Further, through a postsecondary survey conducted 10 months after students' expected high school graduation date, Linked Learning students reported working in higher-quality jobs than their peers and were more likely to cite a high school experience as an important influence on their choice of major.²

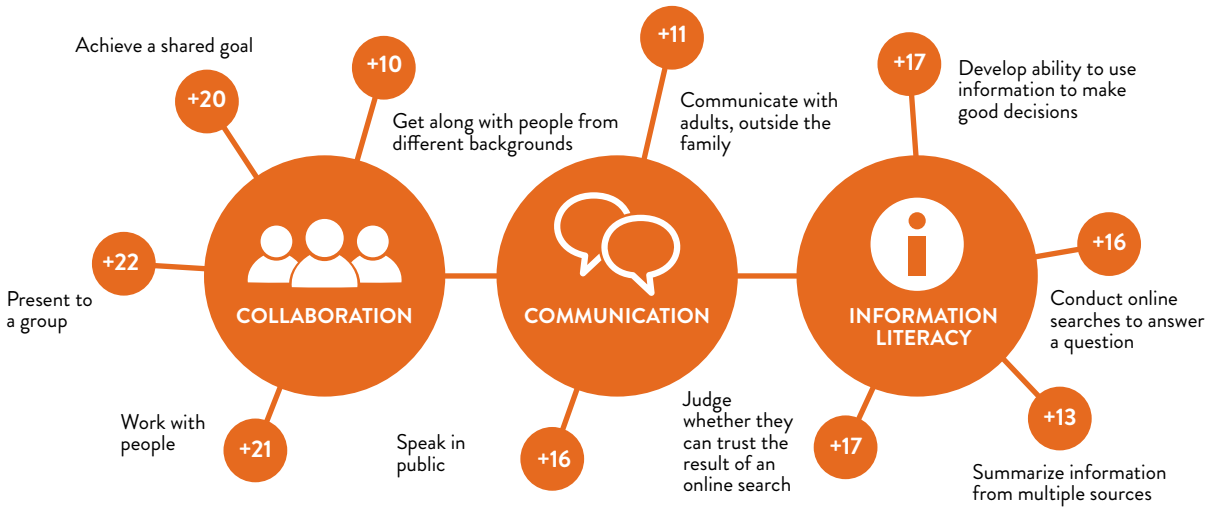
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Linked Learning students were more likely than comparison students to report that their high school experiences improved their communication and collaboration skills as well as their ability to act as intelligent consumers of information.

“One thing you really learn is that you are going to meet people you don't work very well with, but [you learn] to cooperate with [difficult] people,” said one Linked Learning student on working with a diverse set of colleagues.¹



Compared with peers, Linked Learning students gained 21st century skills (percentage point difference)



Differences between pathway and comparison students are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.
 Source: *Taking Stock of the Linked Learning District Initiative: Fifth-year Evaluation Report*¹

BUILDING PRODUCTIVE DISPOSITIONS AND BEHAVIORS

Linked Learning students reported that their academic experiences taught them organizational and time management skills, and helped them develop a sense of self-efficacy. Students also reported that their pathway experiences helped them learn to succeed through effort and perseverance.

Pathway students were more likely than peers to report gaining productive dispositions and behaviors (percentage point difference)



Differences between pathway and comparison students are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.
 Source: *Taking Stock of the Linked Learning District Initiative: Fifth-year Evaluation Report*¹

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALISM

Linked Learning students learn about expectations for professional behaviors, and are exposed to professional role models and careers. Linked Learning students surveyed felt that their work-based learning experiences, including internships, provided authentic exposure to professional standards and technical skills relevant to a variety of careers. Linked Learning students were more likely than peers in traditional high school settings to report that high school had improved their knowledge of expectations for professional behavior and applicable skills, such as how to create a resume and a job application letter.

“My internship was an opportunity for me to put into practice what I’ve been told to do... told to go in there, look confident, shake hands... [The] confidence, [knowledge of] dress, attire, punctuality... [I] don’t feel I would have gotten [these things] had it not been for the law academy,” said one Linked Learning student.¹

Pathway students were more likely than peers to report developing professionalism (percentage point difference)



Differences between pathway and comparison students are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.
Source: *Taking Stock of the Linked Learning District Initiative: Fifth-year Evaluation Report*¹

LINKED LEARNING STUDENTS IN THE WORKFORCE

Linked Learning students who were employed during the year after high school graduation were more likely than comparison students to have received help from a working professional in finding a job. They were more likely to be employed in a position that provided good benefits; such as paid sick days, paid vacation, and health insurance.

Compared with peers, Linked Learning students reported higher job quality (percentage point difference)

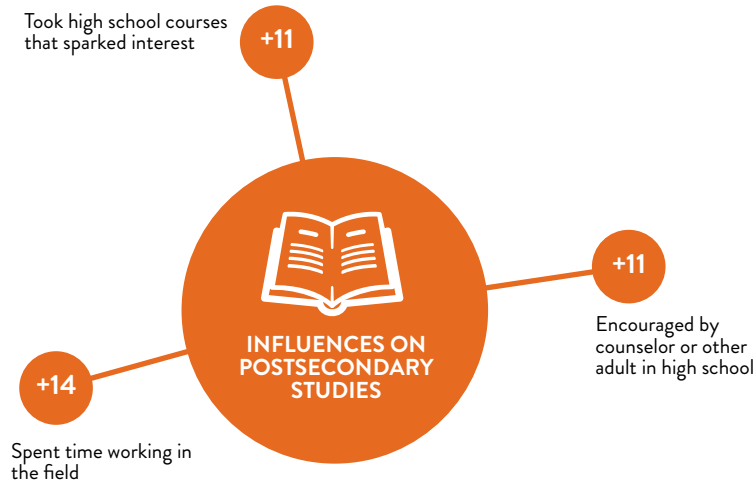


Differences between pathway and comparison students are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.
Source: *Taking Stock of the Linked Learning District Initiative: Seventh-year Evaluation Report*²

POSTSECONDARY READINESS

Linked Learning students going to college rated high school influences as more important to their choice of postsecondary goals and plans than comparison students. The students indicated that pathway courses and staff had a great impact on their college major or focus.

Compared with peers, more Linked Learning students reported high school influences as important on their major or program of focus (percentage point difference)



Differences between pathway and comparison students are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.
Source: *Taking Stock of the Linked Learning District Initiative: Seventh-year Evaluation Report*²

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Guha, R., Caspary, K., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Arshan, N., Park, C., Tse, V., Astudillo, S., Black, A., & Adelman, N. (2014). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Fifth-year evaluation report*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- ² Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Patel, D., McCracken, M., Harless, E., Park, C., Fahimuddin, L., & Adelman, N. (2016). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Seventh-year evaluation report*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.