



Implementing Health Pathways in Continuation High Schools

Findings from an Evaluation of Oakland Health Pathways

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Evaluation of the Oakland Health Pathways Project

This brief presents findings from the Oakland Health Pathways Project (OHPP), a joint initiative of Oakland Unified School District, Alameda Health System, and Alameda County Health Care Services Agency. The initiative is designed to improve educational and long-term employment outcomes for low-income youth of color in Oakland (Alameda County), California, while expanding and diversifying the local health care workforce. It applies Linked Learning, a successful approach to college and career preparation that combines classroom learning with real-world work experiences.

Funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Oakland Health Pathways Project began in 2014. SRI Education was engaged from the outset to evaluate the initiative. This brief draws on interviews with key school and district personnel as well as a student focus group to identify promising strategies for implementing a health pathway in continuation high school settings. These insights are timely as educators across the nation grapple with the question of how to decrease youth disconnection from school. As of 2019, approximately 4.5 million young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 years were neither working nor in school.¹ Continuation high schools are on the frontlines of this issue as they are often the last chance to re-engage students in education before they disconnect from the system. College and career pathways hold particular promise for this student population as pathways are designed to help students see the relevance of what they are learning to their lives after high school. The findings from this Oakland initiative can help other schools and districts interested in adapting a college and career pathway model for continuation or alternative high school settings or those simply in need of strategies to foster college and career readiness among a high-needs student population.

This brief is the last in a series of products resulting from SRI's evaluation of the initiative. Earlier briefs include:

- ***How Education and Industry Partner on Work-Based Learning*** distills lessons learned on effective cross-sector partnerships and delivery of authentic work-based learning.
- ***Student Experiences in Health Pathways*** draws on interviews with pathway personnel, as well as focus groups and surveys of participating students in their senior year, to describe the experiences of being enrolled in health pathways and the perceived impact of participation on college and career readiness.
- ***Student Outcomes in Health Pathways*** describes the high school and early postsecondary outcomes of students who participated in the OHPP.

Promising Strategies

Implementing Health Pathways in Continuation High Schools

This brief focuses on the implementation of health pathways in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) continuation high schools. These non-traditional high school settings represent a unique set of challenges as well as opportunities to re-engage youth who are off-track to graduate and prepare them for college and career.

All college and career pathways in OUSD use the Linked Learning approach, which organizes education around industry-specific pathways and integrates four pillars—rigorous academics that meet college-ready standards; sequenced, high-quality career technical education; work-based learning; and comprehensive support services—to help students graduate from high school ready to pursue meaningful postsecondary opportunities. The Linked Learning approach was originally designed to be implemented in traditional high school settings where students would progress through a sequenced, three- or four-year program of study. OUSD is at the forefront of districts considering how to implement college and career pathways in alternative or continuation high school settings, which often enroll students for shorter time periods and serve a particularly high-needs student population.

Drawing on the experience of students attending health pathways in continuation high schools as well as school and district personnel, SRI researchers have identified nine promising strategies for adapting the Linked Learning approach in schools of this type. These strategies may also benefit educators in traditional settings who serve a high-needs student population. They are outlined below and described in greater depth throughout the brief.



Integrated Career Technical Education and Rigorous Academics

- Focus on one career theme but foster broadly applicable employability skills.
- Integrate career technical content into courses students need to graduate.
- Break curriculum into smaller, stand-alone units that build on each other.
- Expose students to college-level coursework.



Work-based Learning

- Help students see themselves in careers.
- Make work-based learning opportunities accessible.
- Provide wrap-around student supports for internships.



Comprehensive Student Supports

- Start by understanding student assets and needs.
- Scaffold the transition to college and career.

About the Oakland Health Pathways Project

In 2014, The Atlantic Philanthropies awarded two grants totaling \$21 million to agencies charged with working together to support and expand health career pathways for high school students in Oakland. Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency (ACHCSA) received one grant of \$11 million, and the Alameda Health System (AHS) received a grant of \$10 million.

As a part of this initiative, OUSD developed health pathways in two continuation high schools: Dewey Academy and Ruidsdale Newcomer Continuation School. In California, a continuation high school is an alternative school, designed to accommodate students at risk of not graduating because of credit deficiencies, the need to work, or other family circumstances that require a more flexible schedule. Dewey and Ruidsdale Newcomer serve different segments of this at-risk student population. Dewey typically serves students who first attempted one of the district's traditional high schools and subsequently transferred to Dewey after falling off track to graduate or due to changed personal circumstances. Ruidsdale Newcomer specifically focuses on students who have immigrated to the United States within the past three years and speak a language other than English at home.

Health Pathways in Continuation High Schools (2018-19)

| | DEWEY HEALTH AND FITNESS PATHWAY | RUIDSDALE NEWCOMER HEALTH PATHWAY |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Pathway focus | Patient Care and Sports Medicine | Public Community Health |
| Enrollment² | 271 | 114 |
| Ethnicity² | 50% African American 8% Asian 38% Latino 4% Not Reported | 100% Latino |
| Subgroups² | 83% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch 20% English Learner 10% Special Education | 100% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch 100% English Learner 0% Special Education |

Project Partners

Oakland Unified School District serves approximately 36,000 students in district run schools.³ Nearly one third of them speak a language other than English at home, and over 70% receive free or reduced-price meals.⁴ Student enrollment across OUSD is approximately 24% African American, 13% Asian, 42% Hispanic or Latino, 12% white, and 7% other races or ethnicities.⁵ OUSD district staff support health pathways with work-based learning coordination and provide coaching on how to integrate preparation for health careers into instruction. OUSD also worked with schools to manage their use of Atlantic grant funds.

Alameda Health System is an integrated public health care system that operates multiple regional hospitals including Highland Hospital, Alameda Hospital, and San Leandro Hospital. AHS supported the development of health pathways by opening its hospitals to local students to participate in internships and other career development programs. AHS runs HealthPATH, a workforce development initiative that prepares youth and young adults for health care careers.

Alameda County Health Care Services Agency is a public health agency administered by Alameda County that provides health care services through a network of public and private partnerships. ACHCSA administers the County Office of Public Health as well as school-based health centers at a number of Oakland high schools. These centers provide students access to basic health care services, as well as on-site work-based learning opportunities.



Integrated Career Technical Education and Rigorous Academics

Two of the core pillars of the Linked Learning approach are sequenced career technical content and a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum. Ideally, these two elements are integrated so the career theme is evident both in career technical education and academic courses. Implementing these pillars in OUSD continuation high schools required some adaptation to accommodate structural differences in the schools (e.g., smaller school size, rolling in-take of new students throughout the year) and to best meet the needs of their over-age and under-credited student populations. OUSD staff and students identified the following strategies as key to successfully implementing integrated career technical education and rigorous academics in the continuation high school setting.

Focus on one career theme but foster broadly applicable employability skills.

Continuation high schools are typically smaller than traditional high schools; the California Continuing Education Association recommends that student/teacher ratios be no more than 1:15.⁶ This ratio is helpful for tailoring student supports, but it can be challenging to provide diverse pathway options, as the economies of scale that exist in large comprehensive high schools do not apply. Consequently, Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer each decided to offer a single career pathway to all students. This allows schools to go in-depth in that career theme and develop a high-quality experience. However, given that students do not have a choice of career theme to pursue, OUSD staff argue that it is crucial that the theme feel relevant to students' lives, align with local labor market needs, and foster broadly applicable employability skills that are key to success in any career.

Health pathway content is broadly relevant to students even if they do not plan to pursue a health career. For example, a student at one of the health pathways was able to recognize his father's heart attack symptoms and knew he needed to go to the hospital because of information he learned in class. His teacher explained:

“ A lot of these skills I'm teaching aren't just for a medical profession. [They're] skills you might want to know, need to know, for every day because a lot of it revolves around your health ... For example, I'm teaching them CPR/first aid, and they become CPR and first aid certified by the end of the year ... We're not just teaching them the medical profession but we're teaching them a lot about their own bodies, how their own bodies work, and different skills that they might want to know.”

The pathway should be relevant to students' futures as well, aligning with local labor market needs and with a range of accessible, entry-level positions that appeal to students. One teacher explained that it is important to think “beyond doctors and nurses” because as soon as students hear those words they think “about a lot of school and a lot of money.”

This teacher demonstrated the variety of accessible career opportunities in the health field through her choice of guest speakers, and stated:

“ I’ve had a nurse ... a veterinary nurse, a dental assistant and then ... one person doing ... home care ... All these professions that these people had were professions that students could easily get into after high school and they usually do not have to complete all this college beforehand ... They’re really amazing entry-level positions where they can work themselves up into the medical field.”

Staff at Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer also acknowledge that not all students will pursue a health career and thus embed the pathway curriculum with employability skills that are transferable to a broad set of professions. For example, the third period at Dewey is dedicated to college and career coursework. In addition to the health-themed courses, students can choose to take classes in interviewing skills, resume writing, or financial literacy. Rudsdale Newcomer requires students to email staff if they are going to be absent to help these young people learn proper workforce etiquette. In addition, due to their unique population of students who are all recent immigrants to the United States, staff at Rudsdale Newcomer emphasize the importance of teaching students norms of social interaction that may differ from those in their countries of origin, such as how to shake hands, make eye contact, and keep appointments.

Integrate career technical content into courses students need to graduate.

Many continuation high school students arrive on campus over-age and under-credited by traditional metrics. Additionally, these students often have greater responsibilities outside of school, such as caring for siblings or financially supporting their family, that make prioritizing school a challenge. Convincing these students to take coursework beyond what is required to gain their diploma is difficult. As a result, staff at both Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer have looked for ways to incorporate the career technical education component of the health pathway into the core academic subjects that comprise the majority of the students’ coursework. One educator shared this reflection:

“ How do we give students more options to get exposure in classes that have a really deep connection, not only to the academic subject, but also [to the health theme, and] gets them the credits they need?”

One administrator explained that most students come to their school with all of their elective credits completed, so courses need to serve double duty in order to satisfy students’ dual desire to make progress toward graduation and learn skills that will help them transition to a career. To this end, one school has adopted a district-developed algebra curriculum that is aligned with the health theme. A lesson on recognizing linear patterns, for example, uses data on youth STD rates. In another unit, students learn the properties of exponential functions while investigating the roles of vaccinations in stopping the spread of infectious diseases.

Teachers of core academic subjects may need support to successfully integrate a career technical theme into their curriculum. For example, an administrator at one school described a math teacher who wanted to incorporate medical measurements into his curriculum but did not know where to find content authentic to a medical profession. In California, the University of California Curriculum Integration (UCCI) website offers a searchable [database](#) of teacher-designed courses that integrate a range of career themes into core academic subject that satisfy the state’s college eligibility requirements. Another option for supporting staff to integrate career technical content is to offer the opportunity for teachers to engage in summer externships in the health industry. Through the OHPP initiative, OUSD provided teachers with stipends for externships and required them to create lessons based on their experience. Finally, industry partners can be great resources; staff at Dewey are currently working with an industry partner to incorporate into a biology class what students would need to know to become emergency medical technicians.

Break curriculum into smaller, stand-alone units that build on each other.

Both Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer operate on hexmesters (six-week learning periods) and receive new students at least every hexmester. The typical Linked Learning model calls for a program of study that builds over the course of three or four years, but in the continuation high school setting this simply isn't feasible. With students arriving and graduating every six weeks and staying enrolled at the school anywhere from six weeks to three years, the health pathway program must be adapted in a way that allows for short-term students to have a meaningful experience and long-term students to build on their previous coursework. Teachers must take the high rate of student turnover into consideration when designing curriculum. One teacher described it this way:

“ If I teach something in one unit, I cannot continue the next six weeks because ... students are just leaving or graduating or just coming in, so, my six-week units ... stand on their own, but they also build upon each other ... For example ... I'm teaching vitals right now ... how to take blood pressure, take heart rate, oxygen levels, so I'm teaching all of that and this six-week unit stands on its own, and then I'm going to move on to ... doing the CPR [unit]. And even though the CPR [unit] is like an extension to ... this vitals unit, they don't need to be ... here for the vitals unit to be able to do the CPR [unit].”

Another teacher uses a similar approach. His “Fit for Life” class is designed such that students do not necessarily need to have taken the previous unit in order to understand the content of the current unit. What is crucial is for students to realize how their current focus, whether it's developing a workout regimen or learning about plant-based nutrition, relates to their understanding of fitness.

Essential to the success of this system are opportunities for teachers to help students who join in the middle of a hexmester get caught up. At Dewey, this occurs during lunch, during the “expanded learning time” offered after school, and at Saturday schools that are offered once per hexmester. These opportunities benefit the students who have joined in the middle of a hexmester, as well as those who must leave class early to attend internships or who need to make up for unavoidable absences.

Expose students to college-level coursework.

Many of the students enrolled in continuation schools have formed a belief that academic success is unattainable for them. As a result, staff must persistently encourage students to reevaluate their perception of what is possible. Dual enrollment courses allow students to earn college credit, while still receiving structured support from their high school staff. Succeeding in a college-level course can help students see themselves as “college material” and can reduce the cost of earning a college degree.

Dewey's students have the opportunity to take a dual enrollment course located on the school's campus. The course is taught by a professor at the nearby community college, but a high school teacher who is well known to the students is also in the classroom. An administrator explains:

“ We ... always have a teacher here as a teacher of record on our side to be in the classroom to support students, to help them navigate any of the challenges they have with their university professor ... It is super important because our students ... feel either social anxiety or just the feeling in general ... “that's not where I'm supposed to be.” So I think [it] helps ... when they have that caring adult that knows them and is encouraging them and pushing them through it.”

However, administrators caution that this exposure to college-level coursework must occur at the right time and with the right supports. One administrator explained that if you push dual enrollment on students before they are ready, they may fail the class, which can impact their future eligibility for financial aid. Staff must balance setting high expectations for students with making sure these young people fully understand what they are getting themselves into. Related, students should demonstrate strong attendance and ability to complete tasks before signing on for college coursework. At one school, staff helped support students' readiness for an EMT training at the community college by developing a high school-level EMT pre-course that both satisfies a science requirement and previews some of the material they will be experiencing if they take the community college course.

Given the variation in preparedness of continuation school students, frequent turnover, and small size of the student body, identifying enough students who are both interested and ready for a dual enrollment opportunity can be a challenge. OUSD has an agreement with local community colleges that requires a minimum enrollment of 35 students to run a dual enrollment class for the schools' students. This number was lowered to 25 for continuation school students;⁷ but even with this accommodation, class size remains a barrier. As a work around, one administrator is collaborating with a neighboring school to pool interested and qualified students so that college courses can be offered on at least one of their campuses. In addition, the school has students in concurrent enrollment—where students take a class at the community college (with no minimum enrollment requirement) complemented by a related support class at the high school.

DISTRICT SUPPORT: ENSURING EQUITY

In OUSD, district staff view equity as central to their decision-making regarding allocation of resources to schools. In some cases, this means ensuring that the highest-needs students and schools receive extra support.

For example, continuation high schools typically serve extremely high-needs student populations in small school settings. Their small size means that they may not have a sufficiently high student enrollment to support the programming or staff positions available at comprehensive high schools, such as a full-time counselor. In Oakland, the district office attends to these differences through additional funding allocations.

In addition, the district has strategically supported continuation high schools in gaining access to sustainable external funding. For example, the district helped continuation high schools access federal Perkins funding by supporting staff to obtain career technical education certifications.



Work-based Learning

Another pillar of the Linked Learning approach is work-based learning. Work-based learning is an instructional strategy that exposes students to career options, allows for the development and mastery of skills, involves industry or community professionals, and connects to classroom instruction.⁸ Work-based learning opportunities span a continuum from career awareness to career training. These learning experiences can be particularly transformative for students in continuation high schools because they can help them re-envision their capabilities. Many of the same considerations for implementing work-based learning in traditional settings, such as ensuring accessibility and adequately preparing students for opportunities, also apply in continuation high schools.⁹ However, students in continuation high schools may face additional barriers to participation—such as working full-time jobs during the school year. OUSD staff and students have identified the following strategies for implementing work-based learning in the continuation high school setting.

Help students see themselves in careers.

An aim of Linked Learning is to cultivate students' understanding of career pathways and options. Done right, work-based learning opportunities can help students see themselves in a career they might not otherwise have considered. Helping students envision a pathway to a career can serve as motivation for continuation high school students to course-correct and re-engage with school. For example, one student shared:

“ [Internships] ... kind of opened up things I wanted to do in the future ... I have a clear vision of what I want to do ... I want to be like a midwife or an obstetrician ... We're just barely taking baby steps and imagine those baby steps turning into a whole life and a whole career ... There's more doors opening up ... It makes me want to come to school because I need to graduate. I need to get that diploma so I can be able to go to college and do what I want to do.”

Work-based learning also holds promise for students in continuation schools who have felt unsuccessful in traditional school settings. A student shared how the opportunity to have an internship contradicted the often-held narrative that undervalues continuation students:

“ When I hear continuation school, I was always told: ‘Oh no, that's not a good thing,’ you know? ... When there's internships like this telling us, ‘You know what. Forget everything that you've been told. You still have a chance to become what you want to become ...’ even though everyone's telling you, ‘You go to a continuation school, that means you are not going to become anything in life.’ But ... we're given these opportunities and we see people put in so much effort for us to feel better about ourselves and be able to move forward in life instead of staying stuck in that mindset that we're not worthy of doing anything outside of this.”

Choosing industry partners who reflect the backgrounds of the student population and who have faced similar barriers can help students imagine themselves in specific careers. For example, one student explained how powerful it was to meet nurses who were Dewey alumni during her internship:

“ They [had] mess-ups and ... they're here now. And it just gave me a lot of motivation. I was like, wow, so you actually did go to a continuation school and a community college and you're here ... she taught me a lot of steps to get there and like classes to get there and I'm like writing all these notes down.”

In addition, one teacher discussed how he intentionally brought in Black yoga professionals, because “you think it’s just a White thing,” and “because most of my kids are Black and Brown, and they need to see themselves in these professions and thriving.” Another teacher who worked with students with limited English proficiency noted the need to identify Spanish-speaking partners for students, not just to facilitate conversations in Spanish, but to demonstrate to students that there are medical professions in which knowing a language in addition to English is an asset.

Make work-based learning opportunities accessible.

Staff at Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer reinforced the importance of structuring work-based learning opportunities to reduce the barriers that hinder students from participating. Students must often make tradeoffs between time spent in class, work, or other family obligations in order to make time for internships. Stipends can incentivize students who might otherwise need to work. One staff member described the importance of stipends:

“ One of the incentives of being in an internship is you make some money. [In] my HEAL program, you get \$800 if you have perfect attendance. And I say it that way because every time they are about to be absent I say look, that’s going to knock it down to \$600 right away, come on ... It always works out to around \$15 an hour.”

However, another staff member noted that for students who work full-time jobs, internship stipends may not be enough to offset lost wages. As a result, it is imperative that work-based learning opportunities be offered during the school day so students who must work in the evenings can still participate. Staff can take advantage of the less stringent seat time and scheduling requirements in continuation high school settings to allow students greater flexibility in when and how they access work-based learning opportunities. To ensure that these school-day opportunities do not come at the expense of earning credits needed for graduation, staff at Dewey worked with one long-time internship partner to ensure the partner’s curriculum enabled students to earn credit for participation.

School-based opportunities can also help students who are not able to access off-site opportunities explore career options. For example, a newly built health sciences lab at Dewey brings hands-on experiences to students. Students rotate through stations focused on different health content (e.g., nursing, radiology, dentistry) and technical skills, such as drawing blood. Similarly, both Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer prioritized offering on-site CPR certification for all students. At Rudsdale Newcomer, staff found that there were not many CPR trainings offered in Spanish and they were of lower quality. As a result, three staff members pursued CPR trainer certification and now integrate CPR certification as a unit in a longer class about first responders. One career technical education teacher noted that in addition to being valuable in the labor market, the CPR certification has been a “game-changer” for the school culture and empowering for students.

Provide wrap-around student supports for internships.

Internships are among the more advanced opportunities on the work-based learning continuum and have the potential to be particularly transformative because they get students out of the classroom and into real-world work environments where they can interact with industry professionals. However, the same attributes that make these experiences so valuable also create logistical hurdles that can hinder successful participation. To succeed in internships, all students need adequate preparation and support. This is especially true in continuation high schools, where students may lack confidence and find navigating a corporate environment intimidating.

In traditional high school settings, internship opportunities are often taken up by only higher achieving students.¹⁰ This is due to a combination of factors, including GPA requirements, self-selection, and the burden of completing applications. Staff at Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer found that, to be successful in reaching students in continuation schools, staff need to be more inclusive and also more directive in supporting internships. Staff stressed the importance of providing services spanning the application process through the internship itself.

Staff provide internship preparation support via different mechanisms, including school-based classes on job-readiness, a partnership with a nonprofit organization to provide job-readiness classes, and informal offers of support and encouragement to complete internship applications.

One teacher described the need to provide support for the logistical steps in the application process paired with encouragement to address a lack of confidence:

“ My kids lack a lot of the skills necessary to go for a job interview: resumes, cover letters, writing emails ... my process ... is sitting with them, and encouraging them to fill out the whole application and when they get upset ... I say, ‘You know what? Just chill out for a few minutes’ or ‘We can come back to it another day.’ ... Their tolerance level for applications and resumes and cover letters is very low. One, because their skills are very weak. Two, because in general their self-esteem is not very high.”

For students in continuation schools, who may not have experienced much success in school, helping them to persevere, see themselves as capable of filling out the application, and providing them sufficient time during the school day to work on their application, are important components of the support.

At Dewey, to assist students enrolled in internships, one staff member has a release period to support students working with the school's main internship partners. As part of his role, he accompanies students to the local health center for the TB testing needed for some health placements, and he texts parents to keep them informed of the placement. In addition, students who participate in summer internships benefit from a district-wide internship support program; this program focuses on job skill development and builds in time for students to meet regularly with an instructor to reflect on and problem solve any challenges with the internship.

Challenges can be particularly acute for continuation school students, requiring a more intensive level of support than for students in traditional high school settings. For example, one continuation high school increased scaffolding for students enrolled in an internship program at a local hospital after students did not show up. The school co-enrolled students in an internship course at the school and also provided encouragement and help navigating to and through the hospital to the internship. As one staff member shared:

“ [T]he biggest complaint from [the hospital that hosted internships] was like: ‘They’re not getting here.’ And so having [a teacher] actually get them there for the first few times, go walk them to the shuttle and actually help them navigate [the hospital] ... those are things that we’ve done to support the work-based learning internships ... [T]hey were not in environments where they were necessarily encouraged by the adults around them or their confidence was depleted ... I think that helps them see that, hey, somebody else believes I can do it; so if they are going to like go with me there, then I gotta show up.”





Student Supports

The final pillar of the Linked Learning approach is comprehensive student supports. Student supports are often a place of strength in continuation schools, where the lower staff-to-student ratios allow staff to get to know students more deeply and provide greater individualized support. Continuation high schools can leverage the strength of these relationships and their knowledge of students to support the college and career readiness goals inherent to the Linked Learning approach. The earlier sections of this brief discuss some of the supports OUSD staff provide for instruction and work-based learning. In addition, OUSD staff and students identified the following strategies for successfully implementing comprehensive student supports in the continuation high school setting.

Start by understanding student assets and needs.

In order to effectively support students, it is imperative for staff to first learn who students are, what assets they bring to school, and what challenges they face that make engagement and persistence in school difficult. Staff at OUSD continuation high schools have prioritized getting to know their students and, in several cases, made major revisions to their program to better support student needs. For example, one administrator recognized that a majority of her students were working in the kitchens of fine dining restaurants in Oakland. She spoke with her students' employers and learned that what they needed to be successful, more than anything else, was stronger English proficiency. This feedback from employers reshaped the staff's thinking on how to support these students, as most clearly evidenced by an increase in the rate of teaching in English:

“ We’ve gotten super focused as a school on speaking English and really pushing English, and that’s why students are here—they feeling like they’re really learning English and being pushed in every class has definitely upped the engagement. I would say [in] our culture and climate, we’ve made huge progress. We have the most incredible exhibitions, and the more we do that the more students understand what it is and look forward to it and are really like, ‘I want to present my work’ and ‘I want to show what I’ve learned.’ ”

Staff at Ruidsdale Newcomer reframed students' fluency in languages other than English as a strength, rather than a weakness. In addition to Spanish, the student population speaks several Mayan languages, including Mam. Staff reported that due to immigration patterns in the San Francisco Bay Area, there is demand for interpreters who can speak these less common languages. This realization inspired a medical interpreting unit in which students learned how to translate medical terminology from their home language to English and vice versa. The culmination of the unit was a day where doctors from Children's Hospital came to Ruidsdale Newcomer and engaged in a scenario-based activity in which students served as medical interpreters between the doctors and Ruidsdale Newcomer staff who acted as patients. These scenarios were specifically designed to be relevant to students' experiences outside of school.

For example, there was a scenario involving a burn wound, which is a common occurrence in the kitchens where many students work. One staff member described the positive feedback students received from a Children's Hospital interpreter:

“ The person who does interpreting at Children's Hospital was there ... he leads their interpreting services ... he actually told some of my students that they were ready to become interpreters if they wanted to after Rudsdale [Newcomer], so they exchanged contact information.”

The importance of understanding students' needs also extends to postsecondary education. Staff at one of the continuation high school health pathways learned that students from their school who had enrolled in a summer school class at a local community college all dropped out before completing the course. To understand what went wrong, staff followed up with the students and analyzed the syllabus for each course a student took to see what the expectations were. They learned that the students were neither academically nor socio-emotionally prepared for the college classes. As a result, they are adding more rigorous reading and writing assignments into the high school curriculum and, as discussed in the next section, increasing the supports they provide for students transitioning to postsecondary.

Scaffold the transition to college and career.

Student focus group data suggests that participation in rigorous curriculum and work-based learning opportunities can transform the way students perceive their ability to pursue postsecondary education and help them see themselves in careers they might not have considered otherwise. However, the transition from a small and highly scaffolded continuation high school environment to college or the workforce can nonetheless be daunting. Moreover, continuation high school students compared with traditional high school students typically have fewer social and financial resources they can rely on during this period of transition.

Staff at both Dewey and Rudsdale Newcomer are testing new strategies for supporting students as they transition to postsecondary. At both sites, staff are looking for ways to set up supports that students will continue to be able to access after graduation. For example, Dewey staff are collaborating with a local community-based organization, New Door Ventures, that works with youth aged 16 to 24 years. The vision is that, if Dewey staff can help connect students to community-based organizations, such as New Door while still in high school, they will be able to continue to access those supports after they graduate.

For students who want to pursue college, staff from both schools mentioned the importance of taking students to visit college campuses and introducing them directly to the offices and administrators they will be interfacing with if they enroll. A staff member at Rudsdale Newcomer also organizes informational meetings with affinity groups on college campuses, such as the PUENTE Project or Latinx Cultural Center. She shared this reasoning:

“ I want students to feel like there is someone [they] can talk to. Because a lot of our students who have dropped out of community college ... report back from what I recognize as imposter syndrome. That feeling of “I don't belong here. I'm posing.” ... Based off that feedback, I try to scaffold the amount of support I do. So, we'll go to a community college. They see faces. They know names now.”

Finally, Rudsdale Newcomer is experimenting with a new, more intensive bridge to community college. The school is encouraging a group of five students, who are done or nearly done with their graduation requirements, to primarily enroll in community college classes but still take one support class at the high school. By retaining them as students, staff can provide stronger scaffolding for the transition. For example, the high school counselor accompanied the students to the community college and helped them pick appropriate classes. Moreover, there are at least two Rudsdale Newcomer students in each class, which also creates a support system. For the Rudsdale Newcomer population of recent immigrants, this approach has the added benefit of allowing students to stay in a California public high school for the three years they need to qualify for in-state tuition under California Assembly Bill 540. As one administrator shared:

“ The idea is to keep them tethered to what’s familiar and where the resources are in K-12, and then really have that hand off to [college] be very gradual.”



Conclusion

The Linked Learning approach holds promise to re-engage youth who are off-track to graduate and prepare them for college and career. Exposure to dual enrollment classes and work-based learning experiences have the potential to help students re-envision what they are capable of, and comprehensive student supports can help facilitate student success and scaffold the transition to postsecondary. However, staff at continuation high schools need to tailor and adapt the Linked Learning approach to work in settings that often enroll students for shorter time periods and serve a particularly high-needs population. With the help of the OHPP initiative, OUSD is in the vanguard of districts experimenting with how to make college and career pathways a reality in continuation high schools. OUSD staff's experiences working through these implementation challenges may benefit those engaging with similar populations.



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The Linked Learning Alliance serves the coalition of educators, employers, and community organizations dedicated to advancing equity and excellence through Linked Learning. The Alliance provides a collective voice for this field, advocates for policies that support the Linked Learning approach, sets the quality standard for Linked Learning in practice, and brings diverse stakeholders together to improve outcomes for students.

www.linkedlearning.org



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