

ANTELOPE VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Funding Pathways to Advance Local Economic Development

Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) is in the high desert an hour north of Los Angeles, bordering San Bernardino, Kern, and Ventura Counties, and covering 1,200 square miles. The district serves a diverse population of approximately 22,000 students (see Figure 1). These students come from eight local K–8 districts that feed into the high school district. AVUHSD has some of the highest quality Linked Learning pathways in the nation, including two of the first pathways to be certified Gold by the Linked Learning Alliance for their high-quality implementation. The district also benefits from a robust aerospace industry that provides students with work-based learning opportunities and access to industry professionals.

Figure 1: AVUHSD Demographic, Pathway, and Performance Data (2019–2020)

Total Students Grades 9–12	Number of Pathways in District	Graduation Rate	11 th Grade Smarter Balanced Standardized Test Performance		Graduates Meeting A–G Course Requirements for UC/CSU Admission
22,065	25 1 Silver certified 2 Gold certified	82.50%	37.65% meet or exceed standards in ELA	11.19% meet or exceed standards for math	33.50%

African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Not Reported
16.60%	0.28%	1.26%	1.35%	64.04%	0.10%	11.74%	4.60%	0.00%

Source: Dataquest

IMPLEMENTING THE LINKED LEARNING APPROACH

AVUHSD, which has eight traditional high schools and three alternative high schools, established in the 1990s a pathways “mindset” through a School to Career initiative. District leaders recognized the value of focusing on students’ career development, in addition to their academic development. The district then initiated the creation of Linked Learning pathways in 2013 with a single pathway at one school: the Multi-Media and Engineering Academy at Lancaster High School, which would become the first Silver certified Linked Learning pathway in the state.

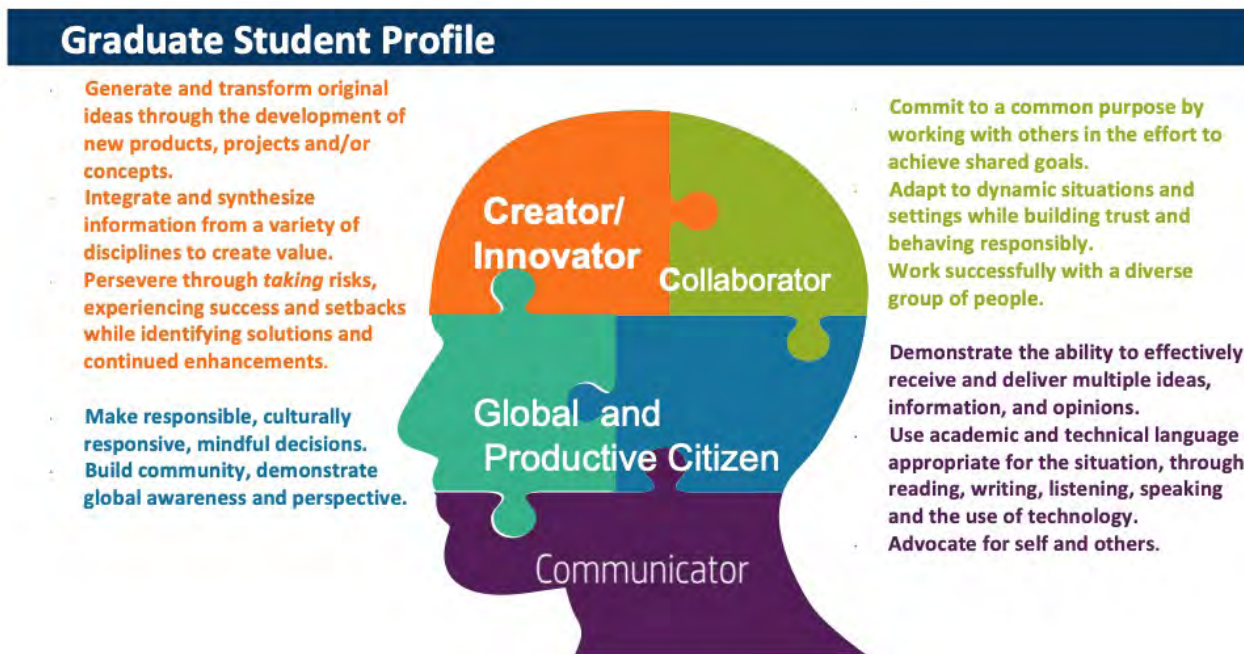
¹ Linked Learning Certification establishes clear standards for implementing the approach with fidelity. Schools with certified pathways show their dedication to continual improvement, unlock real benefits for students, and are recognized for excellence.

This first pathway was created within the context of a community that already had a decades-long commitment to career technical education (CTE). In the words of one district leader, “Having a viable CTE program is essential to the community and local industry and is as important as college preparation programs.”

The community also navigated years of economic challenge. The *2017 Economic Roundtable Report* of the Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance (GAVEA) notes that: “The subprime mortgage crisis hit the region’s population base harder than almost anywhere else in the nation, and thus, the subsequent recovery lagged the greater Los Angeles area substantially.” The district, where approximately 74% of the student body is socioeconomically disadvantaged, looked for ways to both meet the needs of its students and positively impact the local economy.

AVUHSD’s board believed in the power of linking college *and* career preparation to support local workforce development. Linked Learning was a way to put that belief into action and advance a mindset of preparing all students in this way throughout the district. The importance of integrating college and career preparation also comes through in the district’s graduate student profile (see Figure 2), which articulates a vision for students. Concepts like “Use academic and technical language appropriate for the situation...” and “Integrate and synthesize information for a variety of disciplines to create value” are aligned with the Linked Learning approach. The 25 pathways that are currently in place in AVUHSD represent the district’s commitment to the community to prepare a diverse student body for their futures in college and career.

Figure 2: AVUHSD Graduate Student Profile



2 <https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/Invisible-CA-Antelope-Valley.pdf>

3 <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrCharterSub.aspx?cde=1964246&agglevel=district&year=2019-20>

Although this district was not part of the [California Linked Learning District Initiative](#), which was a foundation-funded demonstration of systemic implementation of Linked Learning, AVUHSD used existing resources to get its first Multi-Media and Engineering Academy pathway off the ground. District leaders believed there were benefits to starting small. They had to be very deliberate in all of their actions during the startup process and develop strong systems for funding, teacher assignments and student engagement, and curriculum design—before increasing the number of pathways. AVUHSD now uses and combines, or “braids,” funds in multiple ways to sustain and grow its pathways.

To expand Linked Learning, support student success through a pathway structure, and promote workforce development, the district has:

- Adopted policies that support Linked Learning
- Ensured Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals address college and career readiness
- Tapped into relationships with business partners, and used funding made available by these partners to advance Linked Learning
- Used a “braided funding” strategy to pay for Linked Learning expenses
- Drew on federal funding to support collaboration time for educators to continue to strengthen an integrated approach to college and career preparation

DISTRICT POLICIES THAT ENSURE INTEGRATED COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION FOR STUDENTS

Board policies institutionalize the district’s commitment to support Linked Learning. These policies also support district decision making by documenting the district’s priorities around college and career preparation.

Board policies, and the district’s mission and vision, provide publicly available guidance that supports pathways.

AVUHSD has a board policy that states that the educational program “shall be designed to help students develop the academic, career, and technical skills needed to succeed in a knowledge- and skills-based economy. The program shall include a rigorous academic component and provide students with practical experience and understanding of all aspects of an industry,” and goes on to include development of industry connections to provide work-based learning opportunities.⁴ Although it does not do so exclusively, this board policy specifically identifies Linked Learning as one of the acceptable methods for providing CTE education.

⁴ AVUHSD Board Policy 6178

In addition to board policies, district staff indicated that AVUHSD's mission and vision are critical drivers for continued support of college and career preparation. These guiding statements, noted below, support local decision making and help to maintain the district's commitment to effectively preparing students for their futures.

AVUHSD MISSION:⁵ Our mission is to provide a safe and secure learning environment that promotes a rigorous curriculum and enables our students to develop the necessary academic, technical, and work-related skills of the 21st century.

AVUHSD VISION: Our vision is that every student who graduates will be prepared to pursue college and any career to which he or she aspires.

LCAP engagement strategies bring the community into the pathway decision-making process.

AVUHSD's staff and the District and School Leadership Team review all LCAP goals from a Linked Learning perspective, taking into account how they do or do not support college and career readiness. The intent is to avoid a "siloed" approach to individual goals or programs. Instead, district staff and leaders to view their goals holistically and consider the degree to which they collectively support effective pathways for students. The community's feedback can then be taken into account to continue to strengthen the district's pathways. Year after the year, the community has indicated its support and passion for CTE and integrated college and career pathways.

DISTRICT FUNDING PRACTICES FOR PATHWAYS

Effective funding practices allow AVUHSD to sustain current pathways and create the conditions for continued growth.

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is a primary source of funding for pathway staff.

AVUHSD relies heavily on state funding for staffing to support pathways. For example, the district uses LCFF to pay for district-level work experience coordinators. Additionally, the Director of Industry Liaison and Post-Secondary Partnerships position, which helps to engage local partners on an ongoing basis, is supported with LCFF and CTE funds.

The district uses other sources of state funding to provide additional, targeted pathways supports. For example, Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) and Strong Workforce Program (SWP) funds pay for supplemental master schedule sections to expand and enhance current pathway offerings.

⁵ <https://www.avdistrict.org/about>

Philanthropic funds support the district's overall Linked Learning approach.

Private funds, including philanthropic dollars, can differ from public dollars, such as state and federal grants, in that they may have fewer restrictions on what they can be used for when supporting programs. In AVUHSD, local funds from private funders, including philanthropies, Northrup Grumman and Lockheed Martin, combine to support the Linked Learning approach overall. Those dollars go to equipment, field trips, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiatives. Now that the district has had a partnership with these companies for years, philanthropic funding comes with considerable flexibility. That flexibility has been afforded by the heightened level of trust that came from those companies seeing the positive results of their investments.

AVUHSD leaders note caution when it comes to pursuing pathway resources, reminding others not to “chase” funds, in the form of philanthropy or grants of any kind, if doing so would cause movement away from the vision or goals for pathways and students. AVUHSD, with its clarity of purpose, is an example to others in this regard. The district got its first pathway off the ground without the use of grants and other funding sources used by districts in the Linked Learning District Initiative. However, AVUHSD started small, and aligned and strengthened its internal pathway systems from the outset.

Braiding funds is a critically important part of successfully supporting pathways.

Braided funding is the practice of combining funding sources in service of a broader goal, in this case in service of strengthening existing Linked Learning pathways and developing new ones.

AVUHSD uses multiple funding sources to support key Linked Learning expenditures, combining Title I, Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), Strong Workforce Program (SWP), California Partnership Academies (CPA), Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG), and Middle School Planning Grant (MSP) funds to pay for additional time for school staff to coach Linked Learning teachers. The district combines [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#) (Perkins) and Title II funds to pay for professional development for teachers and staff.

Additionally, AVUHSD combines LCFF with SWP to pay for pathway leads. These pathway leads serve as a department chair for their pathway, coordinating student and staff activities across the pathway, leading teacher collaboration time, and often facilitating industry and post-secondary partnerships as well. The role of pathway lead is particularly important for AVUHSD because the district has designated language in the Collective Bargaining Agreement to provide compensation for these leads. Since

funding the pathway leads represents an ongoing cost, regardless of whether the economy is running strong or experiencing challenges, braiding funds from multiple sources allows the district to pay for these positions in support of their pathways without overtaxing any single funding source.

Federal funds can help round out funding for pathways, providing the ability to pay for additional staff time to offer a range of services, and for colleagues to collaborate.

AVUHSD provides a particularly salient example of how funds from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—the 2015 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—can be leveraged in support of pathways. AVUHSD uses ESSA's Title I: Improving Academic Achievement funds extensively to cover additional staff time for a range of supports, including time for school staff to coach Linked Learning teachers, time for district staff to direct/coordinate pathways, and time for district staff to coach pathway teachers. Title I also funds field trips, equipment, and technology. The district uses Title II, Part A: Supporting Effective Instruction funds to pay for Linked Learning integration through teacher induction programs, and other integrated professional development offerings. AVUHSD also uses Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment funds to support local curriculum alignment efforts.

A JOURNEY TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

Antelope Valley Union High School District's experience shows how a district can start small and make the case for Linked Learning pathways that support students and the local economy. In doing so, this district has also developed important industry partnerships that are an essential part of its braided funding approach and resilience over time.

This case study is part of a Linked Learning Insight Kit which examines the funding practices and policies of three California school districts to understand how they ensure students are connected to their sense of purpose and on the path to college and career success through times of economic prosperity and hardship.

Access the full kit, including insight brief and additional case studies, at [LinkedLearning.org](https://www.linkedlearning.org).