

LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Funding Systemwide Linked Learning Implementation

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) has implemented Linked Learning systemwide and shown the positive impact this approach can have on a diverse student body. The district has developed a reputation, both within California and nationally, as a successful innovator in education. In a 2019 [report](#), the Learning Policy Institute identified LBUSD as “positive outlier” district where Latinx, white, and Black students achieve at higher than predicted levels. Battelle for Kids, a national nonprofit organization, [lists LBUSD](#) among five of the world's highest performing school systems.

Long Beach Unified serves a diverse student population (see Figure 1), all of whom are being prepared in high school for both college *and* career through Linked Learning. Given Long Beach’s success in scaling Linked Learning over the past decade, lessons learned about its efforts to fund and sustain this systemic effort across all high schools in the district may present distinct value.

Figure 1: LBUSD 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
23,124	40 5 Silver certified 3 Gold certified	87.5%	52.57% meet or exceed standards in ELA	27.29% meet or exceed standards for math	51%

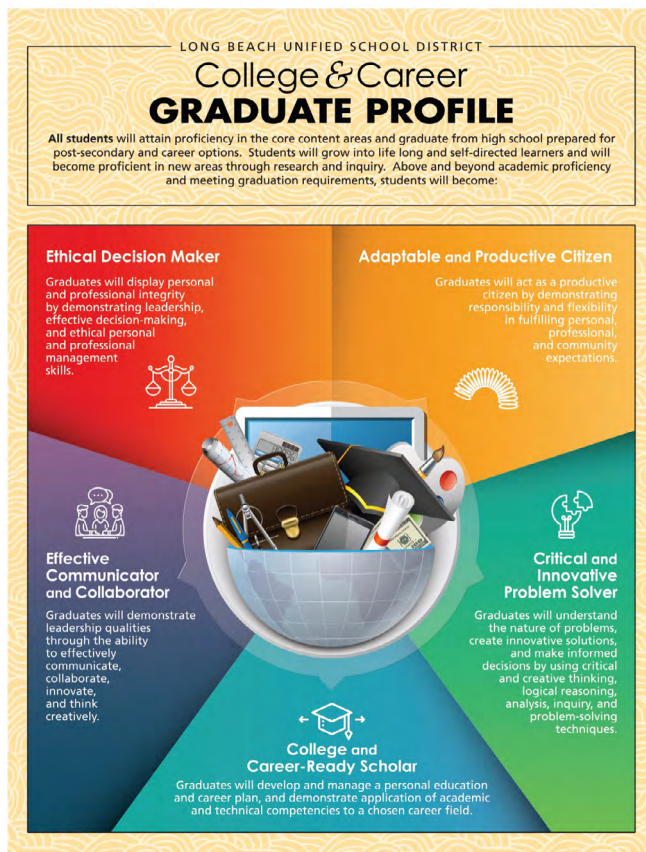
African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Not Reported
13.40%	0.19%	8.31%	3.91%	55.6%	1.38%	13.49%	2.14%	1.55%

Source: Dataquest

SCALING THE LINKED LEARNING APPROACH

LBUSD started its Linked Learning journey in 2009 as part of the California Linked Learning District Initiative, funded by The James Irvine Foundation, which piloted Linked Learning across nine California school districts. Since then, LBUSD has systemically implemented the Linked Learning approach, instituting “wall to wall” pathways, in which approximately 90%¹ of high school students participate in an industry-themed pathway program of study. LBUSD serves about 23,000 students in 38 pathways, five of which are Silver certified and three of which are Gold [certified by the Linked Learning Alliance](#).² As a pioneer in the Linked Learning field, LBUSD has integrated the strands of Linked Learning into its work and vision for students. The district’s [graduate profile](#) (overview shown in Figure 2), emphasizes the core tenet of preparing students for both college and career opportunities, stating: “All students will attain proficiency in the core content areas and graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary and career options.” The profile also defines a “college- and career-ready scholar” that has a developed plan and college and career competencies within their chosen career field.

Figure 2: LBUSD Graduate Profile



- 1 Students in alternative education programs do not participate in pathways. Some students participate in academically focused pathways, without an explicit career theme.
- 2 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.

To maintain a systemwide pathway structure and pursue LBUSD's vision for all students to be prepared for postsecondary college and career options, the district has:

- Adopted policies that support Linked Learning
- Leveraged feedback from the community to inform development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) in support of Linked Learning pathways
- Utilized state funds to pay for staff to support Linked Learning implementation
- Used a “braided funding” strategy to support high-quality pathway experience

DISTRICT POLICIES THAT ENSURE INTEGRATED COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION FOR STUDENTS

In LBUSD, board policies institutionalize the district's commitment to support Linked Learning. These policies also support decision making by documenting the district's priorities around college and career preparation. Community engagement in the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process supports district decision making as well, by tapping into stakeholder insights to inform the district's instructional planning efforts.

Board policies provide publicly available guidance in support of pathways.

LBUSD has enacted board policies that support the conditions for Linked Learning. Among such policies is one describing the course of study, which specifically identifies the need for the district to provide opportunities for students “...to attain the skills, knowledge, and abilities they need to be successful...” while in high school and after graduation.³ Two additional board policies address career and technical education as well as work-based learning opportunities for students.⁴ In particular, Board Policy 6178 explicitly connects career technical education and core academic instruction, making it clear that integrated college and career preparation is the expectation for LBUSD:

The Governing Board desires to provide a comprehensive career technical education (CTE) program in grades 7–12 which integrates core academic instruction with technical and occupational instruction in order to increase student achievement, graduation rates, and readiness for postsecondary education and employment.

As one district Linked Learning leader noted: “If there are the board policies that say ‘this is what we’re going to do’ then it supports the superintendent and his decisions, it supports the assistant superintendents who are implementing the work at the sites... Having the board policy and having a board that supports it might be the most important thing.”

Having a high level of commitment clearly enshrined in local policy frames the expectation for staff and the community that the Linked Learning approach of integrating college and career readiness represents the way the district does high school. And that approach needs to be funded.

³ LBUSD BP 6143

⁴ LBUSD Board Policies 6178 and 6178.1

Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) engagement strategies bring the community into the pathway decision-making process.

In LBUSD, all LCAP focus groups that are convened to collect stakeholder input, including student focus groups, draw out feedback specifically about Linked Learning. In these forums, stakeholders have offered a number of insights, including that they see Linked Learning as a way to promote equity. This view reinforces the importance of the Linked Learning approach at LBUSD, as well as the need to fund it—not just because research shows its efficacy, but because it is also a priority for the community. A Linked Learning leader in the district emphasized the importance of having Linked Learning represented in the LCAP because it directs dollars to college and career preparation and because “...having [Linked Learning] in the LCAP continues to give that strength to it.”

LOCAL FUNDING PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINING PATHWAYS

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

LBUSD relies heavily on state funding for its pathways. LCFF pays for staff that power Linked Learning across the district. For example, LCFF funds a district Linked Learning director who provides systemwide direction and oversight, and a coordinator of work-based learning to support the development of cross-sector partnerships and learning opportunities of this type.

As one district leader put it, “LCFF is one of our most important sources [of funding] because that’s where we’re paying our coaches, and we’re paying our people to do the implementation of the work.” LCFF-funded pathway coaches play an invaluable role in offering ongoing capacity building assistance for staff to strengthen instructional practice, and further integrate college and career programming for students.

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.

As a “wall-to-wall” pathway district, where the vast majority of high school students participate in career-themed pathways, LBUSD chooses to centralize pathway support services for schools. For example, LBUSD braids its federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) grant, state Strong Workforce Program (SWP) grant and Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG), and LCFF dollars, to provide additional time for district staff to support work-based learning initiatives for students across the district.

Multiple funding sources are used to support key Linked Learning expenditures in LBUSD. At the school level, Perkins, LCFF, and California Partnership Academies (CPA) funding are braided to support a release period for pathway leads. The district also

braids LCFF, SWP, and philanthropic funding to provide tutors for students that need academic assistance. And because Long Beach is a wall-to-wall pathway district, all Title funds support student achievement in pathways.

Strong Workforce Program Application

Although the SWP application does not require references to Linked Learning, LBUSD chooses to frame its SWP work with an eye toward Linked Learning components, which include an integrated program of study, work-based learning, and integrated student supports. In its most recent 2020-2021 SWP application, LBUSD specifically addressed the need for work-based learning and professional development for staff to integrate college and career coursework for students. As one leader put it, “whenever we approach a grant, we’re making sure that we’re covering the best way to support all... components of Linked Learning.” This approach to grant applications allows the district to draw on many funding sources to support Linked Learning implementation.

FUELING A SYSTEMWIDE SUCCESS STRATEGY

A study of Long Beach Unified School District shows how one district can support a robust and systemwide application of Linked Learning through board policy, braided funding techniques and community engagement. This centralized, comprehensive approach has demonstrated an efficient and effective way to provide an exceptional learning experience on a scale that bodes well for the future of the Long Beach community.

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).