

Meet the Linked Learning Fellows

Matin Abdel-Qawi, High School Networks Superintendent, Oakland USD



Matin has been an equity centered educational leader in Oakland USD for over 20 years. As a High School Network Superintendent, Matin is responsible for supervising the schools supported by the High School Network and the Linked Learning office. Matin started his career in education as a teacher at Claremont Middle School. It was there that he realized the need to bring Oakland's legacy of social activism to the classroom. He advocated for all scholars, not just the scholars from the neighborhood, to have access to Algebra in the eighth grade. Matin is also the founding principal of East Oakland School of the Arts (EOSA). On the Castlemont campus, he created a small autonomous school founded on the belief that all students will perform at high levels when given the love and support needed. After leading EOSA for seven years, Matin took his experience of advocating for African American male students and became the director of African American Male Achievement's Manhood Development Program (MDP). In that role he designed and started several MDP programs at schools across the district. In 2013, Matin became the principal of Oakland High School where he created systems and programs that are rooted in equity, diversity, and access for all students.

Why Matin is energized about being a Linked Learning Fellow: *"The public high school experience has, since its inception, been focused on filling factories and assembly lines with an endless stream of compliant workers. Linked Learning is the path to a life that begs the question, 'What is my passion and how do I make a living doing it?' The opportunity to be in fellowship with like-minded educators gives all the scholars we are connected to the opportunity to have a higher quality Linked Learning experience."*

Cynthia Bater, Program Administrator for Linked Learning, Long Beach USD



Cynthia is a widely respected educator and expert on district-led systemic implementation of Linked Learning. Cynthia is currently Long Beach USD's Program Administrator for Linked Learning, a position she has held since 2015, after previously serving in a key role supporting the district's Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools and as the Dean of Students at the California Academy of Math and Science (CAMS). At Long Beach USD, Cynthia manages Linked Learning as a district-wide strategy and oversees implementation to ensure quality pathway experiences for all students. She has secured and manages

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multiple multi-million-dollar grants to accelerate integrated college and career preparation. A collaborative leader, Cynthia works closely with partners representing institutions in the Long Beach College Promise, with industry representatives to expand work-based learning opportunities for students and serves as the project manager for the Advancing Linked Learning Innovation Network (aLLin), a regional Linked Learning Hub of Excellence.

Why Cynthia is passionate about Linked Learning: *"I have a passion for effecting the course of peoples' lives through educational opportunities that lift all students regardless of life circumstance to reach their full potential, realize their dreams and aspirations, and contribute to the economic mobility and stability of their family and community; to that end I believe that the Linked Learning approach with its four components can ensure all students have access to high quality engaging instruction that will provide the education and skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. I look forward to working with my colleagues through the Linked Learning Fellows program to extend the influence and impact of Linked Learning to all students in California and the nation."*

Cynthia "Cindy" Brown, Director of Student Pathways, Porterville USD



Across Cindy's 35-year career in education, she has consistently advocated for student success in college and career preparation with her work extending into the public and private sectors, spanning from K-12 into postsecondary levels. She has been at the forefront of leading Porterville USD in their district-wide implementation of the Linked Learning Pathways Program. Securing over \$62 million in public and private funding, she has reinvigorated education using the Linked Learning approach. She has led and developed a notable

district-wide system of implementing college preparatory and career themed pathway academies that have received statewide, national, and international recognition. Cindy has also been instrumental in building multiple partnerships with workforce and professional industry experts to connect educational lessons with the real world. She is a member of various committees and has provided various consultancies to district educators across the nation. Her mentoring focus is on developing equitable school district systems and implementing innovative strategies to create meaningful work-based learning experiences that empower our future leaders.

What Cindy hopes to gain through the program: *"Linked Learning is a dynamic educational approach that gives purpose to learning. Students need meaningful learning experiences more than ever before. It gives me great excitement to serve as a Linked Learning Fellow to advocate and deepen the practice of transforming education."*

Kerin Coffey, Teacher and Academy Coordinator, Biomedical Sciences Academy, Eastside High School, Antelope Valley USD



Kerin Coffey is a veteran educator with over 20 years of classroom teaching experience. Kerin spent the early years of her career teaching seventh grade life science. When Project Lead the Way launched Principles of Biomedical Science, Kerin found herself reinvigorated with the opportunity to share her love of science through the lens of health-related careers with high school aged students. In the fall of 2015, Kerin joined the Biomedical Science team at Eastside High School in Lancaster, California. In partnership with her dedicated colleagues, this learning pathway quickly grew into a flourishing Academy grounded in the Linked Learning approach. In 2019, Eastside High School's Biomedical Sciences Academy was recognized as one of the first 12 Gold Certified Linked Learning pathways in the nation.

What Kerin plans to achieve through the Fellows Program: *"My desire to be a Linked Learning Fellow is to inspire teachers to approach learning in a new way that not only benefits students, but that also has the potential to renew their love of teaching. Students deserve this type of learning experience and I want to help get them there!"*

Esther Dabagyan, Principal, STEM Academy of Hollywood, Los Angeles USD



Esther has deep experience teaching students of all ages, from middle school to adults. She loves to empower students and educators at the Linked Learning Gold Certified STEM Academy of Hollywood, where she was a teacher, design team member, lead teacher, instructional coach, and now a principal. Esther emigrated from Armenia in 1987 and has lived in Los Angeles since then. She graduated from University of California, Irvine with a BS in Biology and BA in Comparative Literature and holds an MA in Science Education from California State University, Northridge. Esther was also a dedicated science teacher for more than 15 years.

Why Esther believes this opportunity is more important now than ever before: *"At a time when education, technology and resource inequality is greater than ever, Linked Learning is in a unique position to transform lives through advocacy, research and reform."*

Laura Gallardo, Principal/Coordinator of College and Career, Hemet USD



Before joining Hemet USD as a district leader for college and career readiness, Laura had 16 years of classroom experience including teaching CTE in the field of Agriculture and Energy Utilities, as well as biology in San Bernardino City USD. As a classroom teacher who successfully combined rigorous academics with CTE learning, Laura helped Linked Learning pathways across the district earn Linked Learning Gold Certification. As a part time professor at California State University,

San Bernardino Laura works to help future CTE teachers earn their credential and start their journey into education from industry. Laura is a strong believer in the power of integrated learning and advocates for equitable access to high quality educational experiences for all students.

Why Laura is a champion for combining college and career-based learning:

"Linked Learning provides 21st century students an education that challenges the status quo to keep up with the demands of our ever-changing world of work. Linked Learning encourages educators to think bigger, broader, and bolder for our students, our communities, and our economic future."

Renée Shipman, Vice Principal, Wilson High School, Long Beach USD



For the past 10 years, Renée has been a leader in Linked Learning high school reform in Long Beach USD. Her work includes district and site implementation of Linked Learning pathways, expansion of work-based learning experiences, and bringing college and career readiness to scale. Renée has served as a coach and mentor to district staff, including administrators, teachers, and counselors. Renée has also supported other districts in their Linked Learning implementation, collaborating with regional partners and

districts across the nation. At the center of Renée's work is the idea that all students should have equitable access to high-quality educational paths that lead to multiple opportunities for college, career, and success.

Why Renée is feeling motivated about the opportunity: *"I am looking forward to collaborating with a group of leaders that understands the power of relevance and engagement for all students. Linked Learning is the passport to college and career readiness, and I am excited to join a team that is leveraging our knowledge and expertise to bring this high school reform to more communities."*

Joy Soares, Director, College and Career, Tulare County Office of Education and Director, Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative



Joy has been a member of the Tulare County Office of Education team since 2012. In her role as the Director of College and Career, she provides leadership and support to leaders and districts in Tulare County and across the state with several collaborative networks. As the Director of the Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative, she serves the two-county regional network to advance college and career readiness for all students. Joy works within the intricate and intentional workgroup and network system that vertically and horizontally aligns the K-12, postsecondary and industry segments. Her approach to education is unique, stemming from 15 years in industry and desire to ready students for college and their career beyond. Her 12-year teaching career was in poverty schools with high English Learner populations. She was in school site administration before joining the county office as the Project Based Learning Staff Developer

What motivates Joy about being a Linked Learning Fellow: *"The significant impact of a high quality, robust Linked Learning experience yields more than post-secondary readiness for our students; it provides equity and access for life changing opportunities. Being part of the inaugural Linked Learning Fellows is an exciting opportunity for improving and driving systems change through learning, sharing and networking with others who are ardent advocates, as well."*

David Trachtenberg, Teacher, STEM Academy of Hollywood, Los Angeles USD



David teaches biology at the STEM Academy of Hollywood where he also serves as chair of the Community Outreach Committee and Science Department. He has been instrumental in developing and sustaining strong industry partnerships to provide with opportunities for meaningful work-based learning. He also led the charge to ensure student internships continued on a virtual basis as the pandemic persists. He passionately believes that syncing education with the skills required for success in college and career is instrumental in enabling our students to address the world's problems and live meaningful, fulfilling lives.

Why David is embracing this opportunity: *"Linking learning in our schools with the skills sought by industry and higher education makes education more efficient, increases positive student outcomes and creates cultures of success throughout our communities. I am excited to share my experiences with this work and to help as many students and schools benefit from this approach as possible."*