Linked Learning and the Local Control and Accountability Plan
A Comprehensive Strategy to Support Student Success

Linked Learning is an approach to curriculum and pedagogy as much as it is an approach to leadership and planning. Effective integration of academic, technical, and work-based learning, with appropriate support services, requires coordination and communication across districts' departments, school sites, within districts, as well as with external stakeholders. Effective implementation requires consideration of how resources are allocated, how professional development is provided, and how program planning occurs systemically at both the school and district levels.

The Need for a Unified Strategy

With the transition to Local Control Funding and ongoing development of Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) for districts across the state, the linkage between various programs and objectives is more important than ever. With eight state priorities to address in the LCAP, identification and attainment of district goals will be more easily achieved through a unified strategy for addressing priorities (in contrast to separate strategies for school climate, student achievement, basic services, parent engagement, etc.). In addition, the stakeholder engagement required in the LCAP can be an important process for creating the plan and rallying community action to realize its objectives.

Linked Learning as the Means

Linked Learning can serve as an overarching strategy for the LCAP, addressing most – if not all – of the state's priorities and for coordinating activities, expenditures, and services (*refer to the chart on the following page*). Furthermore, districts' strategy for implementing the Linked Learning approach can be informed and supported through the stakeholder engagement and goal setting processes that are required in the LCAP. By re-evaluating funding and organizational practices, and their intended goals, towards a unified vision of college and career success for all students and the implications of these goals for teachers, administrators, counselors and other district staff, districts' efforts to implement Linked Learning and meet LCAP requirements should be means to the same ends.

Keeping Students at the Center

Recognizing the unique needs of different communities, and the unique composition of their student populations, the Local Control Funding Formula, and development of Local Control and Accountability Plans, together offer districts greater flexibility in determining the best use of funds to serve students. While the LCAP template provides guidance on the core conditions of learning, and outcomes that are statewide priorities, it is useful to consider other indicators that can showcase district efforts to improve student outcomes in college, career, and preparation for life after high school. It is vital to remember the relationship between student engagement and student performance, and look at the most effective strategies to provide a collective structure for all students, especially those who are often underserved and assumed less likely to succeed – such as English language learners, foster youth, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and students with special needs.

As local accountability and flexibility come to the fore, the role of the community – its families, businesses, and other stakeholders – comes to the fore as well. By effectively bringing the community into both the planning and implementation of school district plans, districts can better define and achieve student success, and promote collaboration and collective responsibility, all of which ensures that students graduate ready for college, career and life.

Stakeholder Engagement – Envisioning Outcomes and Planning for Action

In the LCAP, a district is expected to describe the stakeholder engagement process which is used to develop its plan, identify the goals and progress indicators, and identify specific actions that the district will take to meet its goals. If structured appropriately, the stakeholder engagement process can assist significantly in defining goals, determining indicators, and in identifying the best strategies to achieve district goals. Effective stakeholder engagement can also help to increase community commitment and collective ownership for the outcomes of the district plan.

Develop a graduate profile. An effective plan of action for a district's LCAP builds from the end it seeks to attain. One way to frame this is to consider the ideal qualities, competencies, and experiences that high school graduates should have – in other words, to define a graduate profile. Community input is a natural starting point, and intersects well with requirements for the public vetting of a proposed LCAP. What is the ultimate goal for students in the district? What does college and career readiness mean to the community? Through focus groups, polls of the community, town meetings with students, teachers, parents, local employers, postsecondary representatives, and other community members, a graduate profile can be developed that reflects community needs, and which can lead to community action to meet those needs.

Build a strategic plan. The strategic plan is the LCAP itself. Building from the end goal of college and career-ready graduates, it identifies reachable, reasonable, measurable, and achievable goals, and the necessary supports and resources for teachers, administrators and other staff to meet those goals. It can inform the types of instructional resources, support services, and professional development needed to support student engagement and student achievement, as well as facility plans and teacher assignment needs. Discussions with stakeholders can inform appropriate indicators beyond those required, as well as growth targets, and ideally catalyze a collective sense of ownership to meet improvement goals, create high quality learning experiences for all students, and close opportunity gaps.

The graduate profile can be the unifying goal towards which all actions and objectives are focused, while the strategic plan can serve as the comprehensive plan of action to work towards the goals of the graduate profile (*refer to the table on pages 6 and 7 for examples of Linked Learning-relevant actions and expenditures*).

Develop a distributive leadership model. An effective model of distributive leadership embeds responsibilities at all levels, relying upon district, school, and community engagement in planning, evaluation, and decision-making. Both internal and external partners play influential roles in the success of district and school-level initiatives. As such, a sense of ownership for the strategic plan should be embedded throughout the district and community. This can be achieved through advisory committees and other governance structures (refer to the SCOPE brief *Distributive Leadership in District Reform*[4] or

the "Distributive Leadership in Practice" sidebar in this document for more information on distributive leadership models).

Goals and Indicators – Setting Targets and Measuring Progress

A graduate profile can be viewed as a benchmarking document. It states the ideal outputs of the district in terms of student competencies, attributes, and achievement. The graduate profile and its descriptors of college- and career- ready students can connect to both required reporting elements of the LCAP, as well as others which the district and community feel are relevant. Just as the stakeholder engagement process can inform the profile and the action plan, so too can it inform what is reported in the plan, an actionable timeline, and reasonable growth targets.

> **Distributive Leadership in Practice**
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> Long Beach USD uses a distributive leadership model with its small learning communities (SLC). A district level SLC Director, and cross-disciplinary implementation team, work with schoolsite SLC leadership teams, community and postsecondary partners to support site level and district-wide implementation. In addition, the district has Common Core implementation teams with overlapping membership to address materials, professional development, and curriculum as they pertain to implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Activities, Services, and Expenditures

With a plan of action established through the strategic plan, the next step is to identify the specific activities, programs, services and other expenditures that will occur to meet district goals. Among other things, these inputs can include professional development, instructional materials, facility upgrades, programs of study, teaching, counseling or other staff additions, and technology and equipment purchases (*refer to the table on pages 6 and 6 for additional examples*). Long Beach USD's Continuous Improvement Plan [5] webpage provides useful templates and guidelines for thoughtful expenditure and program planning purposes.

Coordinate resources and programs. LCAPs will require districts to incorporate a wide range of elements into their three-year plans (standardized test achievement, a-g eligibility, career pathway completion, parental involvement, etc.). It is important to see that these are **not** separate priorities that demand separate strategies – they are interdependent and definitely impact one another. Applied as an overarching strategy for district planning, a Linked Learning approach to resource allocation and instructional planning would be to reduce unnecessary overlap and replication where possible.

Serve 'unduplicated' pupils equitably. Districts receiving supplemental and concentration funds to serve English language learners, foster youth, and students receiving free and reduced-price meals should look at supplemental services and specialized programs that can support the participation and success of those students in Linked Learning pathways. Rather than developing or sustaining separate programs for distinct student groups, districts should look at Linked Learning programs as a common strategy to serve most, if not all students, and use additional funds to provide targeted supports to the students who need them. Extended-day, summer, and work-based learning strategies can be adapted to reinforce English language acquisition through contextualized curriculum and projects. District-wide,

site-specific, and personalized support services can be utilized to close opportunity and achievement gaps for unduplicated pupils (*additional examples are provided in the table on the following pages*).

Common Core Implementation Grants

Common Core implementation funds need not be restricted to professional development for math and English teachers. Teachers of other subjects will play a vital role in reinforcing the acquisition of critical thinking, problem-solving and other competencies expected in Common Core aligned assessments – they should be included in those professional development activities accordingly. By doing so pedagogy will be improved across disciplines, as teachers can develop consistent performance expectations and inter-disciplinary projects that reinforce learning across subject areas.

Spend funds efficiently. Assess and evaluate current initiatives, funding sources and reporting requirements against LCAP objectives and district goals. Are there ways to restructure interventions, facilities, staffing, professional development, course materials or other expenditures to address multiple LCAP priorities, serve multiple student groups, and address multiple subject areas? Linking expenditures across departments, programs, and areas of expertise and will facilitate collaboration and reduce the number of activity, subject and skill silos. For instance, Common Core funding need not only benefit the professional development of English and math teachers – other subject-area teachers can benefit from this professional development opportunity, so that their curriculum reinforces the development of strong critical thinking, problem solving, reading, writing, and mathematic skills, as relevant.

Diversify program funding. If programs are dependent upon a single grant or other source for continued operations, it will be difficult to ensure their survival in lean times. Look at ways to expand, restructure or combine projects that have similar objectives but may serve different groups. Weave multiple funding sources to support common programs, with each fund supporting different aspects of the same initiative.

Local Control and Accountability Plans: Aligning Linked Learning to State Priorities

State Priorities		Elements	Relevance to Linked Learning	Opportunities for Expenditure and Program Planning
Conditions of Learning	**Basic** *(Williams Act Requirements)*	**Teacher assignment & credentialing** / **Access to standards-aligned instructional materials** / **School facilities maintained in good repair**	**The Linked Learning approach is focused on the integration of academic, technical and work-based learning – which has implications for teacher, facilities and instructional material standards.** An appropriately assigned teacher is one that can effectively integrate their subject material with other subjects and a pathway's career theme. School facilities and instructional materials should facilitate cross-disciplinary and project-based learning.	• Improve hiring processes and teacher professional development plans to ensure that appropriate teachers are hired for pathway courses, and that they are supported in additional training, as necessary. • Revise job descriptions and selection criteria, and work with teacher preparation programs to ensure a pipeline of appropriately trained interns and student teachers. • Work with teachers' unions to institute provisions to retain uniquely qualified pathway teachers regardless of seniority. • Upgrade lab and classroom facilities to serve project-based learning needs. • Ensure the use of up-to-date materials that are aligned with subject area content and CTE model standards.
	Implementation of State Standards	**Implementation of academic content and performance standards** *(incl. Common Core, Next Generation Science Standards, CTE, English language learners)*	**Smarter Balanced assessments will focus on critical thinking and problem solving, and will include performance tasks.** Linked Learning curricular structure emphasizes course integration and real world applications, facilitates students' ability to think critically and solve problems, and engages them with the college and career relevance, and complex challenges needed to inspire persistence.	• Provide teacher professional development to create performance tasks and curriculum units that embed Common Core content standards across subject areas, including CTE. • Develop project-based and work-based learning curriculum that is aligned to Common Core and integrates rigorous academic content standards. • Utilize digital tools and platforms that directly support pathway development and implementation. • Develop extended-day and 'summer bridge' contextualized learning programs for English learners to facilitate language mastery. • Provide teacher professional development to create project-based and work-based learning curricula that reinforce English language acquisition.
	Course Access	**Pupil enrollment in a broad course of study that includes all required subject areas**	**The Linked Learning approach sets a higher expectation than simply completing high school.** College and career readiness are premised upon an education which not only meets graduation requirements, but also provides the preparation necessary for a full range of postsecondary training, education and career options for all students.	• Expand student access and enrollment in Linked Learning pathways – industry-themed programs of study that integrate rigorous academics, real-world technical skills, work-based learning, and personalized supports. • Increase equity of access, enrollment and completion of Linked Learning pathways according to race/ethnicity; gender; English proficiency, special education or socioeconomic status; or prior student achievement. • Develop middle school outreach and marketing that reaches all students and families. Develop personalized support services to support student achievement. • Increase participation of students with special needs in Linked Learning programs by developing integrated programs of study adapted to their individual education plans. • Develop extended-day and 'summer bridge' contextualized learning programs for English language learners to facilitate language mastery.
Pupil Outcomes	**Pupil Achievement**	**Standardized tests** / **API** / **College & career ready** *(incl. 'a-g' and CPA, Linked Learning, & ROP pathways)*	**The Linked Learning approach has been shown to lead to higher earnings[6], 'a-g' course completion[7], and postsecondary enrollment.[8]** This approach integrates academic, technical and work-based learning, reinforcing content through real world application. Students do better on tests because they understand subject	• Expand access to, enrollment and persistence in, and completion of Linked Learning pathways. • Increase the number of CTE pathway courses approved by the UC for 'a-g' requirements. • Increase AP, IB and honors integration in pathway programs. • Provide professional development to support teacher teams to develop multi-disciplinary project-based and work-based learning curricula that connect academic learning to student career interests.

Pupil Outcomes *(continued)*	**Pupil Achievement** *(continued)*	**English learners that become English proficient**	content better. The multiple modes of instruction utilized in the Linked Learning approach are an excellent way to reinforce English language acquisition through contextualized learning, and can even be adapted to align with individual education plans for students with special needs.	• Develop dual enrollment opportunities to facilitate postsecondary access and persistence. • Provide teacher professional development to create performance tasks and curriculum units that embed Common Core content standards across subject areas, including CTE. • Provide teacher professional development that integrates and embeds Common Core content standards across subject areas, including CTE. • Develop personalized supports that address the academic, personal and socio-emotional needs of students. • Develop extended-day and 'summer bridge' contextualized learning programs for English language learners to facilitate language mastery. • Provide teacher professional development to create adapted project-based and work-based learning curricula that reinforce language acquisition for English language learners.
		English learner reclassification rate		
		AP exam pass rate		
		Pupils determined to be prepared for college by the Early Assessment Program (EAP)		
	Other Pupil Outcomes	**Pupil outcomes in required subject areas**	Districts can report data on the number of students engaged in high quality work-based learning experiences, dual enrollment course completion, postsecondary enrollment and persistence, and student earnings after graduation.	• Increase the number work-based learning opportunities for students, especially internships and summer jobs aligned to Linked Learning career pathway programs. Include the number of such experiences in reporting. • Increase dual enrollment access and completion within pathway programs.
Engagement	**Parent Involvement**	**Efforts to seek parent input in decision making**	**Parental and family input and engagement are vital to fully understanding the holistic support needs of all students.** Their participation is essential to increasing student motivation and self-efficacy, and recognition of student assets.	• Elicit parental involvement in advisory committees. • Hold student project showcases, family information nights, and other family activities that help parents understand what and how well their children are doing in school and the opportunities they have.
		Promotion of parent participation		
	Pupil Engagement	**Attendance rates**	**Linked Learning students graduate high school at higher rates.**[9] Students are more engaged because integrated academic and career technical curriculum help to make connections between what they learn, ways to apply it, and why it's important based on interests and aspirations.	• Develop career pathways, inter-disciplinary projects, and work-based learning curriculum connect academic learning to student career interests. • Develop and utilize transitional supports, including summer bridge, mentoring, and tutoring programs to ensure success of all students. • Develop personalized student supports that address the academic, personal and socio-emotional needs of students.
		Chronic absenteeism rates		
		Dropout rates		
		Graduation rates		
	School Climate	**Suspension rates**	**Student surveys show a higher level of engagement and interest in their education when in Linked Learning pathways, as well as greater acquisition of 21st century skills and confidence in their ability to succeed.**[10][11] Even students identified as "at risk" and assumed to be less likely to succeed consistently outperform their peers when enrolled in Linked Learning pathways.	• Ensure that at risk students have access to LL programs, and that they are not only for high performing students. • Develop and utilize transitional supports, including 'summer bridge', mentoring, and tutoring programs to ensure all students succeed in pathways. • Develop student and staff surveys to inform continuous improvement. • Provide clear college and career preparation curricula. • Develop personalized supports to address academic, personal and socio-emotional needs of students. • Include the number of behavioral referrals in reporting and develop pathway enrollment as an intervention strategy.
		Expulsion rates		
		Other measures *(incl. student surveys, parent surveys, teacher/staff surveys, and behavioral referrals)*		

Endnotes

[1] Available at: http://www.connectedcalifornia.org/direct/files/blog/WCCUSD%20Graduate%20ProfileD1_22_13.pdf.

[2] Available at: http://connectedcalifornia.org/direct/files/resources/RevED_CACRF%20paper_final%20txt_v4.pdf.

[3] Available at: http://www.cityofpasadena.net/Department.aspx?theme=Olive&pageid=6442471080.

[4] Available at: https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/distributive-leadership-district-reform-model-taking-linked-learning-scale.pdf.

[5] Avalable at: http://www.lbschools.net/Main_Offices/Deputy_Superintendent/EARCC/Local_Control/quality_improve.cfm.

[6] Kemple, J. (2008). *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Work, Education, and Transitions to Adulthood.* Retrieved 01/28/2014 from: http://www.mdrc.org/publication/career-academies-long-term-impacts-work-education-and-transitions-adulthood.

[7] SRI International (2012). *California Linked Learning District Initiative Evaluation.* Retrieved 01/28/2014 from: http://www.irvine.org/images/stories/pdf/grantmaking/year3linkedlearningevaluationreportoct2012.pdf.

[8] Saunders, M., Rogers, J., and Terriquez, V. (2013). *Exploring the Educational, Labor Market, and Civic Trajectories of Young Adults who Attended Linked Learning Pathways: Survey and Interview Findings.* Los Angeles: UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. Retrieved 01/28/2014 from: http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/201306_LLYouthTrajectories.pdf.

[9] Dayton, C., Hamilton Hester, C., and Stern, D. (2011) *Profile of the California Partnership Academies.* Berkeley: UC Berkeley. Retrieved 01/28/2014 from: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/cpareport09.asp.

[10] See number 2, above.

[11] Lafors, J. and McGlawn, T. (2013). *Expanding Access, Creating Options: How Linked Learning Pathways Can Mitigate Barriers to College and Career Access in Schools and Districts.* Oakland: The Education Trust-West. Retrieved 01/28/2014 from: http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Expanding%20Access%20Creating%20Options%20Report.pdf.

About the Linked Learning Alliance

The Linked Learning Alliance is a statewide coalition of education, industry, and community organizations dedicated to improving California's high schools and preparing students for success in college, career, and life.

Established in May 2008, the Linked Learning Alliance aims to build a collective voice and coordinate efforts to expand access to Linked Learning in California – and approach to high school that integrates rigorous academics with real-world learning opportunities in fields such as engineering, health care, performing arts and law.