

# FactSheet December 2013

## Linked Learning *SCOPE Case Study: Porterville*

*The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is the current context in which all California education decisions will be made. The LCFF is equity focused and includes a strong accountability emphasis, expressed in its requirement that districts develop Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) with goals on a range of outcomes. Linked Learning is a particularly well-suited approach to help districts meet these goals for their diverse student populations.*

The Linked Learning approach to high school reform is based on the principle of equity. The fundamental goal is increasing postsecondary opportunities for all students by integrating rigorous A-G academics with career-themed instruction and work-based learning. The approach provides relevant and motivating education experiences for high school students, connecting learning to real-world situations and problems through a range of career-oriented pathways. Although the approach is relatively new, initial student outcomes are promising. The successful design, implementation and support of Linked Learning requires a strong commitment to the approach and thoughtful and intensive collaboration among school, district and community stakeholders.

This fact sheet summarizes the findings reported in a case study conducted by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), *Linked Learning in Porterville: Creating Capacity for Innovation and Change through Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement*. The evaluation case study was informed by interviews with district, site, and community leaders conducted between September 2009 and September 2011, as well as observations of learning and professional development activities, review of essential documents and informal communications with participants in the Initiative's District Leadership Series.

The case study findings focus on the role district leadership should take in implementing Linked Learning. The authors describe how the district created a successful

and sustainable Linked Learning approach by integrating multiple reform approaches, communicating an unwavering vision for reform, engaging stakeholders to build ownership and building professional capacity.

*Key to the successful implementation of education reform is the articulation of a clear purpose and vision, which are not only understood by the team that is implementing the reform, but, more critically, by those who are experiencing it.*

—Porterville SCOPE article

## Findings

### Integrating multiple reform approaches to create Linked Learning

- » Porterville Unified School District (PUSD) leaders showed an initial interest in exploring the possibility of small learning communities, leading district leaders to attend the National Academy Foundation (NAF) conference, where they became captivated with the pathways concept of integrating rigorous academics with career technical education materials.
- » PUSD became a pilot district for the NAF's Academy of Engineering initiative.
- » PUSD worked with ConnectEd in the development of curriculum for their new academy.
- » The district initially adopted the Linked Learning approach to provide an outline and structure for satisfying the requirements of the NAF's pilot program.
- » Linked Learning emerged as the primary reform approach for college and career readiness in Porterville in 2008 when PUSD finished construction

of Harmony Magnet Academy using a Small High School Construction Grant from the NAF.

- » Based on positive student outcomes related to the Linked Learning approach, PUSD eventually extended the pathways approach to all district high schools.

### Communicating an unwavering vision for reform

- » It was important to communicate the Linked Learning vision in order to achieve a high level of support.
- » District leaders crafted a communications strategy aimed at students, parents, teachers and schools.
- » The three strategic messages included: (1) multiple pathways are for every student, (2) multiple pathways enable every student to be prepared for college and career and (3) Linked Learning is a long-term district priority.
- » The communication sent a clear signal that Linked Learning would be a long-term district investment.

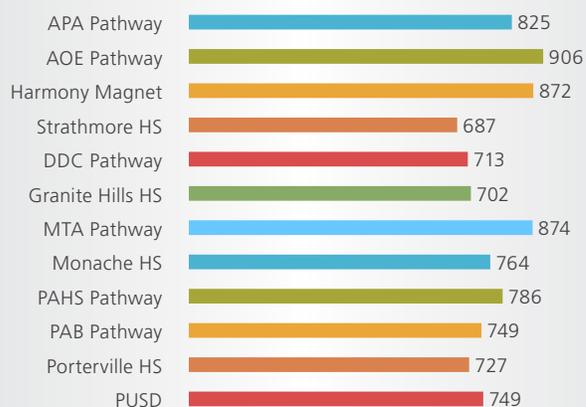
### Engaging stakeholders and building ownership

- » The board set Linked Learning as the unwavering primary direction for reform.
- » PUSD staff made numerous presentations, each tailored to a specific audience of stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, civic clubs, business leaders, higher education, etc).
- » The creation of advisory boards for every pathway was instrumental in broadening and deepening community ownership of Linked Learning across the district.

### Building capacity to support the Linked Learning approach

- » Structural changes were made at the central office to drive support and buy-in for Linked Learning.
- » PUSD hired two career-based learning coordinators to develop and support business partner relationships.
- » Strong administrators were placed at struggling sites in order to improve success.
- » The district worked to build teacher buy-in and recruit committed teachers.
- » The governance team worked with teachers to support a shift from a six to a seven-period school

### Growth API comparison of PUSD high schools and pathways (2010-11)



day, aiding in the planning and instruction of career-related electives and internships.

- » District staff engaged school staff in shaping the vision, design and curriculum of the pathways.
- » PUSD took full advantage of leadership capacity building opportunities offered by ConnectEd and SCOPE .

### For further information

Sample board policy and administrative regulation BP/AP 6178 – Career Technical Education

“Linked Learning” supports college and career readiness, August 2012 Policy News <http://bit.ly/18KalwU>

CSBA joins work to link students with college and career opportunities, CSBA blog post, June 20, 2013 <http://bit.ly/15RtDDd>

Urban districts look to Linked Learning partnerships as a way to promote equity, CSBA blog post, December 16, 2013 <http://bit.ly/19q8yrT>

Executive Committee sees successful Linked Learning programs in action, CSBA blog post, June 25, 2013 <http://bit.ly/1fSIGmL>

Golden Bell Award winners for the 2013 Career Technical Education category, CSBA website <http://bit.ly/1ai3zYu>