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Exploring Alternative High School and Community College Partnerships

CLP Career Ladders Project
EQUAL MEASURE

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About Career Ladders Project

The Career Ladders Project (CLP) works to improve college and career outcomes for youth and adults and to close education and employment equity gaps. CLP works with community colleges—and their K-12, university, community, and workforce partners—to redesign education and workforce systems. Over the last 15 years CLP has led innovative and large-scale initiatives to improve postsecondary outcomes for students of color and for low-income students. As initiatives mature, CLP works with system leaders and policy makers to scale effective practices and to implement systemic policy changes that can better support evidence-based approaches. CLP developed the Career Advancement Academy (CAA)[1] framework to provide more structured educational experiences for students facing multiple barriers to postsecondary education, and worked with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to launch the initiative statewide.

Early on, CLP forged a public/private partnership with the CCCCO and California philanthropic organizations—including the James Irvine Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, and the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative—to support capacity building and coordination for the overall CAA initiative. It has played a critical role in advancing this initiative by supporting colleges to implement CAAs, building a statewide community of practice, documenting the work, and working closely with the evaluators to improve it.

About Equal Measure

Equal Measure is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization that works with foundations, nonprofit organizations, and public entities to advance social change. For more than 30 years, Equal Measure has partnered with organizations like these working on complex, often messy, social issues to help create more powerful, equitable, and enduring systems and positive outcomes. To have a more direct impact with clients, Equal Measure offers five service lines—program design, evaluation, capacity building, technical assistance, and communications. Through these services, Equal Measure helps its clients clarify program goals, support implementation, engage in learning and plan improvement, conduct mixed-method developmental evaluations, frame narratives to have the strongest impact, and share what it has learned with the field. Whether it's improving access to college education and careers, expanding access to healthy foods, or building opportunities for financial empowerment, Equal Measure helps its clients make communities stronger, healthier, more equitable, and more inclusive.

Equal Measure has served as evaluation partner for the Career Advancement Academies since 2012. Over the past four years, the Equal Measure evaluation has included a summative assessment of the CAAs' impact on students, and an investigation into the likelihood of, and factors contributing to, the sustainability of the CAAs.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, California has made important investments to aid public high schools and community colleges to improve students' transitions to and through postsecondary education, with a specific emphasis on traditionally underrepresented students. The California community colleges have embarked on several such initiatives, including the Basic Skills Initiative, the Basic Skills Student Outcomes and Transformation Program, the Student Success and Support Program, the Student Equity Program, and the California Career Technical Education Pathways Initiative. Most recently, they have launched a system-wide institutional redesign effort, the California Community Colleges Guided Pathways, which aims to provide clear, well-structured, and supported pathways into and through college for all students, at scale.

Similarly, the California Department of Education's California Career Pathways Trust, the restructuring of adult education, and California's implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act are all working to demonstrate effective practices that better align systems to prepare young people for college and the workplace. In California, "alternative school" refers to a school that provides a nontraditional educational setting for students who are at risk because they have dropped out, are pregnant or parenting, exhibit behavior issues, or need a different schedule to accommodate outside work.[2] More recently, the state has been in the process of developing new methods to hold alternative high schools accountable, and they are expected to be adopted for inclusion in the 2018 California School Dashboard. This will allow alternative schools to highlight their progress in meeting the multiple measures in the new accountability system.[3] Recent policy changes in the K–12 system, such as the Local Control Funding Formula[4] and the adoption of Local Control Accountability Plans,[5] also have aimed to provide more equitable funding and accountability structures to support students.

While these investments are critical in supporting students' educational and career success, the needs of opportunity youth[6] —young people ages 16–24 who have been pushed out, have dropped out, or are disconnected from education or careers—and the needs of alternative school students, families, and staff, largely remain absent from these reform efforts.

There are more than 800,000 opportunity youth in the state of California, including a disproportionate number of young men of color.[7] Alternative schools served almost 300,000 mostly high school juniors and seniors in 2013–14, and about 12 percent of all California seniors finished 12th grade at an alternative school.[8] Students in alternative schools are more likely to be students of color, English-language learners, and from low-income families.[9] Even though public alternative high schools are set up to help students who are not thriving in traditional schools, or who are at risk of not graduating because they haven't passed or completed enough courses, often because of high absentee rates, these schools still account for many of the dropouts in the state. This suggests that the current structures are still not working for the students they are designed to support.[10] If educators and institutions hope to increase the numbers of all students who move on to and succeed in college, we must continue to learn more about effective practices tailored to supporting alternative school students as part of these reforms.

Research has shown us what can—and has—worked for effective college transitions for opportunity youth and students in alternative high schools.[11] The practices in current reforms—incorporating early college credit, improved assessment and placement, restructured course sequences that create a clear pathway for students, experiential learning, and transitional counseling—hold the promise of greatly improved college transition and success for all students. If designed and implemented well, these practices and programs can support effective transitions for students who may have once been opportunity youth or are at risk of becoming opportunity youth.

Overview of the Issue Brief

This Issue Brief provides a candid look at the practices and operational realities of supporting opportunity youth and alternative high school students in preparation for college and the workplace.[12] The intent of this Brief is twofold:

1) To present a conceptual framework to help practitioners, administrators, and others understand what constitutes high-quality transitions from alternative high school to community college (Section 1); and

2) To elevate emerging practices and common implementation considerations for efforts designed to meet the unique skills and needs of alternative high school students as they transition between alternative high schools into community college and careers (Section 2).

The content of this Brief is based on the proceedings of a day-long community of practice meeting held in May 2017, "Exploring and Expanding Alternative High School and Community College Partnerships." Nearly 50 practitioners from California community colleges, high schools, and community-based organizations came together to learn about and receive feedback on emerging practices and to exchange implementation ideas. Facilitated by the CLP and organized as a "world café"[13] style peer-to-peer exchange, the meeting generated important lessons and areas for ongoing learning, which are presented later in this Brief.

In addition to the insights gathered during the meeting, the implementation realities presented in this Brief draw from a literature review as well as 18 in-depth interviews with alternative high school and community college leaders, and community partners, who represent newly established partnerships or multiyear collaborations of alternative high school and community colleges.

Hopefully, this Brief spurs a deeper conversation among those who are vested in the educational and career success of the 800,000 opportunity youth in California and the 300,000 students enrolled in nearly 1,000 alternative schools. It is also hoped that this Brief will nurture a sustained effort among practitioners, teachers, faculty, administrators, and leaders across California who are committed to working through the complex collaborative solutions for fostering academic success for opportunity youth and alternative high school students.

> "Look at what is already phenomenal at your college or at your high school. Figure out a way to bundle it together or figure out a way to map it out clearly so that students can understand it. It's a matter of leveraging what already exists."

Section 1

What are the elements of best practices for high-quality transitions from alternative high school to community college?

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that was developed to guide the community of practice discussions and the in-depth practitioner interviews. (See Appendix A for the full list of interviewees.) Conceived in the context of partnerships between alternative high schools and community colleges, this framework outlines best practices[14] that are supported by research. It also builds on previously published models[15] — including the Back on Track model developed by Jobs for the Future, the Loss Momentum Framework developed by Completion by Design, and the Career Advancement Academies implemented throughout California—that codify the types of supports that students need as they prepare for, transition to, and complete their post-secondary education. This framework is a work in progress, and it is expected to evolve as more is learned about the best practices and programmatic supports required for the educational and career success of opportunity and alternative high school youth.

The framework consists of three phases: creating momentum and preparing for the move from alternative high schools (or community settings for opportunity youth) into community college, supporting the tran-sition through postsecondary bridging, and maintaining momentum to complete community college.

Within each of these phases, there are five design elements that need to be present to best support students. These elements are academic preparation and instruction; strategies for college and career success; strategies for building connections and strengthening social capital; wrap-around, counseling, and stabilization supports; and strategies for career exposure and preparation.

Although the five design elements are common across the three phases, their implementation may look quite different. Figure 1 includes examples of how these design elements look in practice. **Most of these approaches require a strong partnership between the alternative high school and community college.** In addition, many of the wrap-around, counseling, and stabilization supports and career exposure design elements require partnerships outside of the educational sector—including health, legal aid, and social services providers, as well as workforce and employment partners—that create a complex but critical structure necessary for youth success.

FIGURE 1 | Best Practices for an Alternative High School through Community College Continuum.

		PHASES		
		Creating Momentum: Enriched Preparation	**Supporting Transitions: Postsecondary Bridging**	**Maintaining Momentum: Completion Supports**
DESIGN ELEMENTS	**Rigorous academic preparation, curriculum, and instruction**	• Contextualized teaching and learning • GED programs • Culturally relevant pedagogy	• Dual enrollment • Bridge programs • Alternative assessment and placement	• Contextualized teaching and learning • Academic catch-up, technology supplemental instruction
	Strategies for college and career success	• Aspirations/mindsets • College exposure • Noncognitive-skills development	• Aspirations/mindsets • College exposure • Noncognitive skills development • Bridge programs	• "Just-in-time" supports and intrusive advising/ counseling
	Strategies for building connections and strengthening social capital	• Cohort models • Mentors	• Cohort models • Mentors • Civic engagement	• Cohort models and study groups • Dedicated counselors
	Wrap-around, counseling, and stabilization supports	• Personalized guidance and support • Life skills • Life supports (housing, food, transportation, physical and mental health, legal)	• Personalized guidance and support • Life skills • Life supports (housing, food, transportation, physical and mental health, legal)	• Personalized guidance and support • Life skills • Life supports (housing, food, transportation, physical and mental health, legal) • Emergency aid (financial and life stabilization)
	Strategies for career exposure and preparation	• Integration of academics with career-based learning and supportive services (e.g., Linked Learning*)	• Internships • Paid work experience	• Internships • Paid work experience • Career pathways

*http://www.linkedlearning.org/en/

Section 2

What does it take to put this framework of best practices into action?

To begin to answer this question, interviewees and community of practice participants were asked to review the framework and address design elements that they have begun to implement and the operational realities of putting those elements into practice. The goal was to first see where practitioners and administrators start. Presented with such a robust and complex framework, how would they identify the areas of early focus and traction and the design elements that are underdeveloped? Secondly, the aim was to gain a stronger understanding of the organizational, structural, and capacity requirements for implementing select practices within the design elements, recognizing that this was just the start of an exploratory conversation.

The following four practices or design elements dominated the community of practice discussion and interviews:

1. dual enrollment;
2. instruction and curriculum design;
3. wrap-around and stabilization supports, and
4. career exposure and preparation.

The discussion that follows articulates their importance for opportunity youth as well as the practical considerations for their implementation.

help youth
education will

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Dual enrollment enables students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously and is a tool used by many alternative high schools across California. Through dual enrollment, students prepare for the college work and environment, potentially reducing the cost of their college education and the need for remedial courses. Additionally, dual enrollment can help students "see themselves as college bound" and view themselves as change agents, able to positively affect their own lives as well as the lives of their families and community. As one interviewee noted, "[College experiences gained through dual enrollment] really connect youth to a bigger purpose of their education."

During the community of practice, the value of dual enrollment programs was described by participants as not just having academic and credit accrual benefits but also, and perhaps more importantly, as being "identity builder[s]" for youth from under-resourced communities, and as "one step in developing students as learners, scholars and college-goers."

Community of practice participants and interviewees made the following suggestions to ensure high-quality dual enrollment experiences for students:

Establish processes to monitor student progress and embed early warning and timely withdrawal procedures to protect students' academic transcripts. Monitoring students' progress and providing support to ensure that they do not fail the course are also important, because, unlike in high school, in college an F grade stays permanently on the transcript. Alternative high school staff ensure that a student who enrolls in a college level class avoids a failing grade. For example, at Baden High School in South San Francisco, CA, high school counselors and instructors regularly discuss students' progress with college instructors and support staff. These conversations position both the high school and the college to better assist any student who needs extra support. This level of monitoring requires additional communication processes and infrastructure between the high school and community college administrators and instructors. Establishing these processes before enrollment starts is a critical step in establishing a dual enrollment program.

Engage high school counselors, administrators, peers, teachers, and instructors in articulating college expectations for students. To avoid behavior or attendance issues, it is important to reinforce what the expectations in college are and how college policies for student conduct and discipline differ from high school policies. In well-functioning dual enrollment programs, it is a good practice to have a multi-person effort to help youth understand the "switch" in expectation and disposition that students have to make when they attend college. One administrator of an alternative high school noted, "When you're in college, we tell them that it's different: you are responsible for your education and showing an interest in learning." This messaging is articulated by most of the adults who are in contact with students taking college courses.

Get to know your youth and instructors to facilitate a careful student-instructor-subject match. As interviewees noted, some college instructors are more open and understanding about having high school students in classes and some are not. Thus, placement of students in a college course should be carefully considered. On the other hand, high school teachers may be less supportive of dual enrollment when the college subject matter is too similar to that taught in the high school. Making sure that the dual enrollment courses offered are different enough from high school offerings can offset some of this tension. Offering classes outside of high school hours can also alleviate this sense of competition (see the next paragraph). And, perhaps most importantly, interviewees noted that dual enrollment is a highly individual matter, and therefore knowing the student, his or her aspirations, and the prospective instructor are essential to making the right student-instructor-subject match.

Identify creative ways to address the technical challenges related to aligning high school and community college calendars. Many of the challenges raised by interviewees and participants focused on the mundane barriers of scheduling and ensuring that students can access community college classes when they are offered. Creative solutions include having students take dual enrollment classes outside of high school time—in summers, evenings, and during breaks; offering classes before or after the school day so that they are not competing with high school classes; and having several alternative high schools partner and pool students so they can fill one full high school/community college dual enrollment course.

Finishing High School and Beginning College Simultaneously

Gateway to College at Shasta College, in Redding, CA, a scholarship-based dual enrollment program, is a partnership between the college and Pioneer Continuation High School of the Shasta Union High School District. The Shasta College program, which is part of the Gateway to College National Network that is in its fifth year of operation, offers students who are behind in credits the opportunity to complete their high school diploma and take college courses that count toward certificates or associate degrees. As of summer 2017, the program had more than 150 graduates.

During the program, students spend the entire day at Shasta College taking high school classes (delivered by high school teachers) and college courses (taught by college faculty). Support for the program comes from three sources: the school district, Shasta College, and local Rotary Clubs. To be accepted into the program, students complete an application and participate in an interview. The scholarships they receive cover fees, books, and supplies. With their student ID, they can get free bus transportation and, if eligible, receive free or reduced meals on campus. Program staff make sure the students' basic needs are taken care of and, if needed, link students to resources available on campus, through the school district, or in the community. Working closely with students, program staff provide emotional support and monitor students' attendance and progress in courses.

INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

All high school students should receive strong foundational skills and knowledge in their high school courses to prepare for a college education. A solid, well-rounded curriculum infuses a variety of activities into learning, including field trips, guest speakers, project-based learning, hands-on activities, blended learning, and course material that is relevant for students. All these elements help connect learning in the classroom with the outside world and careers. Helping students understand these connections increases their likelihood of becoming interested and engaged in their classes.

Community of practice participants and interviewees suggested implementing the following processes to ensure high-quality instruction and curriculum design:

Use culturally relevant pedagogy to engage students and keep them motivated. The goal of culturally relevant pedagogy should be to help students develop a critical consciousness about themselves, their families, communities, and society at large. This instructional approach helps youth feel more empowered to change their lives and make a difference in the world. It catalyzes students to develop a critical consciousness and to be able to offer a critique of the world around them, empowering students to use their education and their consciousness to bring about change in the status quo. Educators who have incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy have seen students undergo complete transformations, connecting their education to a much bigger purpose than just getting a job. As one instructor notes: "Students become reflective: Now I understand why I may be the first in my family that's actually looking to go to college. Now I understand that there may have been a reason why I don't like school. Now I'm able to be aware of my community and why there's so much violence in my community, but yet other communities are significantly different." This changed worldview can lead to greater educational engagement.

Find opportunities to incorporate soft skills into class instruction rather than as a stand-alone or an add-on elective. Educators incorporate activities in their classrooms that focus on non-cognitive skills and socio-emotional learning. Research points to the importance of modeling positive non-cognitive behaviors in the classroom, including encouraging discussions among students, being mindful when giving feedback, sharing stories of overcoming obstacles, and having a classroom that offers minimal distractions. Educators can support students in learning how to work through challenging situations as well as help students find ways to motivate themselves and become proud of their accomplishments. Faculty and teacher training on growth mindsets, developing soft skills, and developing other non-cognitive skills may be necessary, as these are professional development topics that often fall outside of educators' fields of study.

Integrate project-based learning and student portfolios rather than standard assessments to deepen skills development and strengthen student-educator connections. The use of project-based learning helps re-engage students by linking multiple courses and subjects to complete a project. High schools found that they could incorporate math, science, social studies, and language arts into engaging projects that helped students make real-world connections with school subjects. These projects are also group based, in which students work with peers to develop a project based on what they have learned. Additionally, alternative high schools that develop student portfolios can look at each individual student's work and assess what assignments the student does well in compared with what he or she struggles in. This allows teachers to become more strategic in designing their lessons and customizing instruction.

Understand local college expectations for incoming students and integrate these into classroom instruction as much as possible. This requires teachers and/or counselors to first identify and contact relevant college staff and set aside time for discussions about college expectations and to share course syllabi, particularly in math and English courses, which often require college placement tests or alternative assessments. In addition to gaining access to the course syllabi and understanding local college faculty expectations, teachers will need common planning periods to adjust high school course curricula and lesson plans as well as dedicated time for curriculum refinement.

The Value of Integrating Curriculum with Career and College Exploration

At Dewey Academy, the first continuation high school in Oakland, CA, the Career Technical Education teacher is also the art teacher, who partners with the science teacher to integrate more science and health content in all three classes. The College Readiness Specialist at Dewey Academy shared the following: "The delivery of core academics [that are] integrated with a curriculum of career and college exploration focused on the wide variety of careers in the fitness and health industry helps students understand the importance of personal, emotional, and social health. [They also] see the positive impact that health and fitness can have on their personal and college and career aspirations." Through this integrated approach, students receive repeated exposure to mutually reinforcing activities and instruction. For example, there is a separate health and fitness pathway class where guest speakers from the fire department, EMT, and health clinics visit the class, combined with student field trips to these partners. The same content is integrated into the science class and/or the biology class. For example, during a Career Technical Education class, EMT guest speakers demonstrated how to take a student's blood pressure, and the science teacher then discussed the science of blood pressure. Students also receive physical education credit through the pathway class, which fulfills a common requirement most students are lacking when they enter Dewey. This course structure offers students a nontraditional way to take physical education by spending time in the gym as well as learning about careers.

WRAP-AROUND AND STABILIZATION SUPPORTS

Students, particularly those at alternative high schools, face many challenges on their paths to degree completion, including transportation issues, high living expenses, housing instability and homelessness, financing education, and family issues that for some include going to college as a young parent. It is critical for instructors, teachers, and school leaders to truly understand and address the obstacles that alternative high school students must overcome to apply, attend, persist, and succeed in college.[16]

Community of practice participants and interviewees made the following suggestions to ensure high-quality wrap-around and stabilization services:

Design a comprehensive, customized, and responsive advising approach that includes academic counseling and access to stabilization services. Both high school counselors and community college counselors need a comprehensive understanding of the issues that opportunity youth and alternative high school students are facing, as well as time and the professional capacity to help students cope with challenges. Counseling in college tends to focus on academic aspects of development and helps students with decision making and problem solving related to their educational goals, course selection, degree requirements, placement testing, registration, and transfer information. These supports must be widened to address a variety of non-educational challenges, including health, housing, legal, family, and other socioeconomic needs. This in turn requires high school and college counselors to build and maintain a robust network of providers and support organizations that can meet the emerging and immediate needs of students as they arise. Furthermore, stabilization supports need to be institutionally embedded into the processes and structures of the college.

Build and utilize strong partnerships between high school and community college counselors to ensure seamless youth transition to postsecondary education partners. More frequent contact between community college and high school counselors will result in continuity of services for students. One interviewee said, "I think that more regular communication would be key. And perhaps having the community college counselor, or liaison, to come out quarterly to continuation schools, versus once a year." This regular contact would promote relationship building not only between counselors but also between high school students and community college counselors. High school counselors should also familiarize themselves with community college offerings and vice versa—ideally by building relationships with community college counselors to deepen their understanding of specific programs, including bridge programs, resources, and internships that could help their students. Community of practice participants suggested revising the descriptions of the counselor position to increase expectations for making postsecondary connections as a way to formalize these relationships and preserve dedicated time to fulfill the responsibility.[17]

How Counselors Use Technology to Strengthen Student Support

California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI), a nonprofit organization funded in part by the State of California, manages CaliforniaColleges.edu, a web-based platform with tools that support college and career planning for students in grades 6–12. This free portal is available to all students, parents, and educators across California. It includes comprehensive yet easy to understand information about financial aid and applications, an Expected Family Contribution Calculator, a Career Interest Profiler, and a College Search Tool. A helpful feature of this portal for counselors of opportunity youth, who may be in and out of the education system, is that students are assigned a unique identifier, and their transcripts, college and career education planning information, and other educational records are stored on this site. CaliforniaColleges.edu can facilitate dual enrollment and better placement of high school students, potentially eliminating the need for students, parents, and educators or school counselors to manually track students' paperwork. The portal can also track students' applications and provide colleges with students' academic histories to verify prerequisites, thus promoting access to and continuity of the students' educational records. CCGI partners with school districts and works directly with alternative high schools, which have been among the most enthusiastic users of CCGI, to help them embrace the use of the portal tools.

Wrap-around Supports for Youth Who Are Incarcerated or in the Juvenile Justice System

Project Change at the College of San Mateo (CSM) is the first comprehensive community college-funded program for court-involved and incarcerated youth in California. The program partners with several community-based organizations, including the San Mateo County Office of Education Court and Community Schools (Court Schools) and San Mateo County Probation. Project Change provides college programing for high school students and graduates, ages 16–18, inside juvenile hall and on campus at CSM. The Court Schools is thus able to work with the college to provide high school credit to students who take college-level courses while incarcerated. The program allows students to receive high school and college credit simultaneously for dual credit, which prepares them to take courses on the CSM campus and work toward completing their high school diploma.

Youth from the San Mateo County juvenile hall and community schools can enroll in Project Change to participate in its comprehensive, multiyear program, which offers preparation for college before coming to campus, support while taking college courses at CSM, and social support services. While still in the juvenile facilities, youth attend college readiness workshops and in-person or online college courses. Students receive hands-on support to help them enroll and persist in college and to eventually receive certificates, degrees, and transfer to CSM. Program staff help students with their personal challenges and partner with multiple nonprofit, government, and education partners to provide students with support services. Students in the program receive free tuition, transportation cards, food and book/material stipends, and support to obtain on-campus jobs. Project Change has a designated space on campus, shared with similar learning communities, where students can study, relax, and connect with peers. Students are matched with mentors, who are faculty and staff at the college, and meet with them weekly. In addition, students have various ways to connect with supportive adults and receive individualized guidance and coaching from faculty/staff mentors, a retention specialist and project director, mentors from Court Appointed Special Advocates, and/or a community-based partner. Lastly, students engage in leadership activities and events throughout the academic year, both on campus and in the community. These include speaking to youth at the juvenile hall about the opportunity to attend college, presenting about the program at conferences, and sharing their experience transitioning from juvenile hall to college; organizing student-led groups and activities on campus to raise awareness and solidarity around youth in the justice system and college, such as the Project Change Club; and hosting professional development activities for faculty, staff, and students.

CAREER EXPOSURE AND PREPARATION

Alternative high schools are using various strategies to engage students in school by getting them excited about different career pathways. When opportunities or resources to conduct career exploration classes are limited, alternative high schools have found creative ways to infuse career exploration into their weekly schedules.

Community of practice participants and interviewees suggested implementing the following practices to provide effective career exposure and preparation:

To ensure that students have positive career exploration experiences, start with their input and career interests. Students are more likely to become engaged in the career exploration opportunity if it connects to their interests. However, career exploration opportunities should also broaden those interests and open students' eyes to areas they may not have considered. The website mynextmove.org was cited as a great first step to exploring careers.

Provide ongoing guidance during internship opportunities. To make internship experiences meaningful and engaging, students need ongoing support from the onsite internship staff as well as high school staff and teachers. Internships can help students understand the local job market. For example, aligning industry sectors that are hiring with career areas the student is exploring can be an important step to helping students gain employment. As one administrator noted, "There have to be transferable skills, so that even if students learn a skill in a very specific part of industry, what they learn about how to gain those skills should be transferred to a different industry or sector if they change their mind."

Explore a variety of opportunities for career exposure, including in-person and virtual experiences. Field trips that engage employers and students in discussions about careers—and include employers sharing personal stories about their career paths—allow students to connect to the employer on a personal level. One community of practice participant noted her way of ensuring personal connections during field trips as follows: "[I] ask, 'Has anyone on staff [come] from a community college?' and 'Has anyone who was promoted come from an at-risk background?' and [I] even look at their board of directors and see where they have come up." Career presentations by program alumni can similarly demonstrate to students the possibilities available to them and allow for personal connections.

Organize well-structured job fairs to make students aware of many different career opportunities. High schools and community colleges can help students find work through job fairs and alumni connections. Job fairs can be structured to highlight new sectors and help students understand how different skills or roles are needed for traditional fields. For example, one school invites employers to conduct roundtables during a job fair and students rotate around and talk to various employers in groups. The students are prepped beforehand to ask questions and listen for answers that are meaningful to their career exploration.

Develop a process to consistently share information about career opportunities with the entire school. School staff who hold information about workforce experience or internship opportunities, and coordinate field trips or speakers, often may serve as gatekeepers to that knowledge. Information about these resources and opportunities should be available to all teachers, staff, and students. If multiple people manage different field trips, workforce experiences, and internship opportunities, it is helpful to have a system, such as a Googledoc form, that captures various opportunities and information. A few community of practice participants talked about their schools employing a work-based liaison, who provides community contacts and internships for students, invites guest speakers, and coordinates career and college visits. The work-based liaison often works closely with an industry sector advisory committee to ensure that employers develop new internship and engagement experiences.

Career Exploration

Ralph J. Bunche Academy, a continuation high school in Oakland, CA, has developed a Culinary and Hospitality Pathway in partnership with Laney College. Students in the pathway participate in the internship program, which requires them to work offsite two afternoons per week. Over the summer, students participate in pathway-aligned paid internships at Laney College.

SIATech California Charter Schools, which have several locations across the state, host two interactive Youth Leadership Summits annually to empower students to explore STEM careers, with a special focus on advanced transportation, renewable energy, healthcare, and information technology. The summits are held at a partner community college (like East LA City College or Skyline College) and consist of a panel discussion, breakout sessions, campus tours, a college and career fair, and lunch. Students learn about career options they may not have considered as well as how they can pursue their career goals close to home, at low cost, by attending their local community college. More than 300 students have attended the summits since spring 2016. Students from SIATech schools have visited NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the center for robotic exploration of the solar system. This field trip exposes students to a range of careers in advanced transportation.

At **Baden High School**, in South San Francisco, CA, six to eight students participate annually in a 12-week program with the local branch of the Humane Society. Students work with the animals twice per week, complete related reading and writing assignments, and meet regularly to discuss their work experience. Students also visit a veterinary technology program at a local technical college, demonstrating the link between educational and career-focused programs.

Baden High School also offers a six-week course twice a year, taught by instructors from the high school and Skyline College. It focuses on job search skills (job applications, resumes, cover letters) and introducing students to community college

FACTORS THAT STRENGTHEN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

The partnerships described throughout this Issue Brief often occur between alternative high schools, community colleges, and in several instances community-based nonprofit organizations and service providers. Interviewees and community of practice participants highlighted two factors that can strengthen the success of these partnerships.

Explicit alignment of mission and clarity about how the partnership advances organizational or institutional priorities: Every partner must be clear about how the collaboration will help advance their organizational mission and goal. At the most basic level, all partners must have a commitment to serve students from under-resourced communities, as opportunity and alternative youth have been chronically under-resourced and underrepresented in postsecondary education and the workforce. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) help establish and give structure to partnerships as well as outline the key expectations, outcomes, and resources required of the partnership.

Beyond making this basic commitment, each partner should articulate the direct organizational benefit to be gained from the partnership. For instance, the community college and alternative high school relationship creates a strong recruitment pipeline for the community college. Students who benefit from college readiness programs while still in high school are better positioned for success in college, which might lead to increased attendance, retention, and graduation rates—critical performance goals for postsecondary education partners. Similarly, high schools may see higher rates of students who were not on track to graduate leave the schools with diplomas or at least college credits, which creates positive academic measures for the high school. According to several interviewees, even the improved image that a partnership with community colleges created for alternative high schools is an important benefit. Postsecondary partnerships can increase visibility of the partners in the community and strengthen community ties.

A strong commitment from executive leadership and an internal commitment to "silo-busting": Leadership sets institutional priorities, develops a culture that allows for innovation and creativity, and eases access to resources—including dollars—to support staff's partnership ideas. Beyond buy-in from executive leadership, strong partnerships must have leadership support from multiple departments at the college and at the high school, including instructors across various disciplines, departmental administrators, counselors, and student support services. This cross-departmental, cross-instructional leadership within high schools and within colleges is important not just to build support for the program but also for implementation, so that once the partnership programs are underway students are successfully supported throughout the campus. As one interviewee noted, students can be directly affected by poor communication between departments, as well as by the lack of knowledge of college staff about different college services, programs, and procedures. For example, students who are trying to enroll in college may receive contradictory information from different staff or may be sent around from office to office to receive the information they need, which may lead to frustration and students abandoning enrollment.

Memoranda of Understanding: The Nuts and Bolts

MOUs are legally required, and there are specific requirements in the law for certain kinds of dual enrollment agreements between college districts and school districts.* They may include guidelines for using technology, sharing student data, and sustaining the program. MOUs are intended as living documents that can be modified to reflect changes in the partnership, programming, and resources. They are also meant to reflect learnings from implementation of the partnership and programs.

Top leadership support and MOUs are important elements of postsecondary partnerships. However, without program staff who can provide transition support and guide students, even the most thoughtfully designed programs and MOUs are difficult to implement.

"[MOUs] and those things [like resources, data] have to be worked out because they're the things that have to get done. But if they take up too much of your time and energy [when you are running the program], then you can't be effective with your kids. You want all that stuff just to be smooth, so that you can focus on what's really important." (Interviewee)

* For more guidance, please visit: http://www.careerladdersproject.org/areas-of-focus/pathways/ccccode/.

FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

The community of practice participants came away with a variety of "aha" moments, as well as more—and deeper—questions, setting the context for the next series of conversations and peer-to-peer exchanges. The following tables list the discussion items that resonated highly with participants and their remaining questions, with the hope that the community of practice and this Brief are only the beginning of these operational conversations.

Topics	Discussion Items of High Interest
Partnerships and Collaboration	• Opportunities exist for collaboration between local community colleges and local housing authorities. • Many community-based organizations and special programs, such as CAAs, offered at colleges work with the same demographics and share the same needs; there is much opportunity to collaborate beyond academia. • We have a lot of colleges to collaborate with! • There are so many tremendous programs around. My campus is already also doing great things, but we all too often work in silos.
Options for Connections to College	• There are a lot of creative options to provide connections to college! • Think about bridges for populations in creative ways. • Repackage and create new offerings to students.
Student Support	• Life supports, particularly housing, are a barrier to more than we think. Residential college is helping students. Community colleges need dorms. • Lack of reliable transportation is one of the largest barriers to any career and college activity planned for students, and often precludes partnerships and/or individual student participation. • Consider personalized learning and continuous support through meaningful mentorship; when students have a person whom they can trust and to whom they can ask questions, they are more likely to seek out services and stay on track. • We must always meet our students where they are, and not just where we believe they should be.
Resources and Programs	• Mynextmove.org is a resource to help students think about career and job options and descriptions. • Consider the possibility of six-week dual enrollment college courses.
Teacher Support and Training	• Teachers need support in developing contextualized curricula, including professional development opportunities. • The need to carefully select the instructors teaching college classes for opportunity youth cannot be emphasized enough. No matter how well a course is designed, it can be broken by a poor instructor.
Data Use	• Be aware of the challenges of tracking students from the K–12 system to the community colleges. • The lack of statewide longitudinal data makes it difficult for policymakers and providers to learn how well alternative students (or any student) progress through education and into the workforce.

Topic	Remaining Questions
Career Exploration	• It always feels like there is more to do with career exploration. How can this be fleshed out more? • How are community colleges integrating Career Technical Education/Student Success and Support Program/equity to support students with career exploration? • How can we better streamline/integrate career services with Career Technical Education programs and best practices and models for integrated career support? • What K–14 local and regional funding resources are available to support, develop, and sustain this work?
Upcoming Events and Learning Opportunities	• When are future meetings like this? • What are model programs? How do I visit? • How can we stay connected with each other? Are there upcoming community of practice sessions? Is there a group list-serve? • Are there any upcoming conferences/trainings centered around this work?
Starting and Building Partnerships	• How can we foster better relationships between colleges and counselors? • How can we coordinate partners at community colleges to use cohort models for alternative education students? • How can alternative high schools and community colleges work together with students in the middle? • What are the best practices to start the conversation on starting and building partnerships? • If we want to start a bridge program with an alternative high school, where do we start?
Dual Enrollment	• What is the ideal make-up of a team to initiate dual enrollment? Who are the critical participants? What is the degree of student voice? • When should we use concurrent enrollment versus dual enrollment? • Can the entry exams be introduced in high school? Can dual enrollment address barriers to passing entry exams?

APPENDIX A

Interviewee List

Nancy Berkey, Program Director, Gateway to College, Shasta College

Katie Bliss, Project Director, Project Change, College of San Mateo

Michael Coyne, Principal, Baden High School

Lorraine DeMello, Counselor and Instructor, Skyline College

Tessa Carmen De Roy, Executive Director, California College Guidance Initiative

Luis Escobar, Dean of Counseling, Advising and Matriculation, Skyline College

David Isenberg, Culinary Program Director, Ralph J. Bunche Academy

Donnell Mayberry, Assistant Principal, Ralph J. Bunche Academy

Jennifer Taylor-Mendoza, Interim Vice President of Instruction, Skyline College

Heather Oshiro, Counselor, Chabot College

Raechal Perez, College Readiness Specialist, Oakland Unified School District

Elsbeth Prigmore, Principal, Pioneer High School

Don Scatena, Director of Student Services and Principal of Middle College, San Mateo Union High School District

Hannah Smith, Implementation Manager, California College Guidance Initiative

Betsey Steele, Principal, Ralph J. Bunche Academy

Deidre Hill-Valdivia, Counselor, Special Education/Career Pathways, Brenkwitz Continuation High School

Alina Varona, Faculty Coordinator, Career Advancement Academy, Skyline College

Hermione Vela, Student Support Specialist, SIATech Charter Schools

ENDNOTES

[1] The CAAs were launched by the CCCCO in 2007 and are designed to enable underserved Californians—typically first in their families to attend college, low-income, or from communities of color—to enroll in higher education and adjust to emerging and evolving workforce and industry needs. Specifically, CAAs serve underprepared young adults (ages 18–30) whose low basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics shut them out of postsecondary education and high-wage jobs. CAAs support students through a holistic set of interventions to build the foundational skills needed to complete postsecondary education and enter careers.

[2] For more information, see https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/as/cefalternativeschl.asp.

[3] For more information, see www.caschooldashboard.org.

[4] For more information, see https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp.

[5] For more information, see https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lc/.

[6] More information about opportunity youth available at: http://forumfyi.org/files/my_brothers_keeper_oyn.pdf

[7] For more information, see http://caeconomy.org/reporting/entry/california-economy-hurt-by-rising-number-of-disconnected-youth

[8] Paul Warren, Accountability for California's Alternative Schools, Public Policy Institute of California, May 2016, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_516PWR.pdf.

[9] Legislative Analyst's Office, "Next Steps for Improving State Accountability for Alternative Schools."
California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), Sacramento, California, April 2015.

[10] Ruiz de Valasco, Jorge and Milbrey McLaughlin, "Raising the Bar, Building Capacity: Driving Improvement in California's Continuation High Schools," The California Alternative Education Research Project, May 2012, http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537702.pdf.

[11] Research on college readiness includes the following:
A. Gardenhire, O. Cerna, and A. Ivery, "Boosting College Success Among Men of Color," MDRC, Oakland, CA, 2016.
D. Harvey, "College Affordability: Promising State Policies and Practices," Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA, 2017.
B. Lee, "Getting Ready for California's College and Career Readiness Indicator," Council for a Strong America, Washington, D.C., 2017.
"Making Opportunities Work for Youth: Expanding Proven Pathways to College and Careers," Jobs for the Future, Oakland, CA, 2017.
J. Pharr-San, "Launching Early College Districtwide," Jobs for the Future, Washington D.C., 2012.
"Back on Track: Pathways through Postsecondary," Jobs for the Future, Washington D.C., 2016.
"Creating Pathways to Success for Opportunity Youth: Lessons from Three Massachusetts Communities," Rennie Center: Education Research and Policy, Boston, MA, 2016.
"Effective Non-Profit/Community College Practices to Serve Disconnected Youth/Young Adults to Inform SIATECH's Postsecondary Partnership." Memorandum 2016.

[12] Many of the lessons here can also be applied to traditional high school and community college partnerships. For example, high schools not classified as "alternative" may serve at-risk students and could benefit from better connections with community colleges.

[13] The "world café" approach is a style of workshop or meeting that enables authentic conversations and encourages the sharing of ideas in a relaxed, informal, and creative atmosphere. See http://therightquestions.org/the-world-cafe-workshop-facilitation-method-principles-and-etiquette/

[14] See the following: Education Systems Center and Advance Illinois, "Redefining the High School to College Transition in Illinois: State of the Field Review," 2015. Retrieved from:
http://www.niu.edu/ilhstocollege/docs/State-of-the-Field-Review.pdf;
Elisabeth Barnett and Katherine Hughes, "Community College and High School Partnerships, Community College Research Center, 2010. Retrieved from: https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/community-college-and-high-school-partnership.pdf;
T. Showalter and K. Spiker, "Promising Practices in Work-Based Learning for Youth," National Skills Coalition, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/10-4-NSC-YouthWorkBasedLearning_v4.pdf

[15] See the following: Jobs for the Future, "Back on Track: Pathways Through Postsecondary – Key Element and Operational Features," May 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/iniatiatives/files/3phasemodel052114_0.pdf
and Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, "Creating Pathways to Success for Opportunity Youth: Lessons from Three Massachusetts Communities," November 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.renniecenter.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/Creating%20Pathways%20to%20Success%20for%20Opportunity%20Youth%20-%20Lessons%20from%20Three%20Massachusetts%20Communities.pdf

[16] The need for supportive services does not end at high school. Colleges, like Skyline College, have had much success with SparkPoint, a one-stop financial education and financial coaching service center where clients bundle services and resources to achieve self-sufficiency and improved college access and completion. Economic mobility results from improved credit scores, savings, debt reduction, and increased income. See http://www.skylinecollege.edu/sparkpoint/.

[17] Under the guidance and support of CLP, the California Counseling Network provides a professional forum for collaboration and innovation among counselors and student support colleagues serving students in secondary and postsecondary career pathways. See http://www.career-laddersproject.org/communities-of-practice/cacn/.

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