The California Career Pathways Trust
Addressing the Need for Work-Based Learning

Thanks to the leadership of Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg and members of the Senate who participated in a Linked Learning-focused policy retreat earlier this year, the 2013-14 Budget signed by the Governor appropriates $250 million to establish the California Career Pathways Trust. The fund will provide competitive grants to districts to support career pathways programs, strengthen K-14 alignment, and build scaleable work-based learning infrastructure. While these funds are intended to support a variety of pathway development and improvement efforts, work-based learning holds the greatest potential to transform current educational practice in the state. Work-based learning prepares students for success in college and 21st century careers by connecting what they learn in the classroom to the real world, supporting improved student outcomes through more intentional relevance to the college, career and civic aspirations of students.

The State of Work-Based Learning
While vital to connecting academic and technical learning to the ‘real world’ and to building 21st century career readiness skills and competencies, the start-up capital and infrastructure needed to effectively implement a robust work-based learning program has been a barrier to student access to work-based learning opportunities. As such, work-based learning remains uncommon in traditional school settings.

It Isn’t for Lack of Demand. Where it occurs, most schools and districts rely on personal relationships between teachers and local employers. Few have the time, or dedicated staff, to develop and nurture employer relationships through outreach, recruitment and orientation, or to place and monitor students.1

Nor Is It for Lack of Supply. Many employers see the value of work-based learning for preparing the future workforce, but are hindered by liability costs and lack of coordination from school sites.2 Again, employer engagement and program coordination are time-consuming activities, and require trained staff with dedicated time to perform this work. The capacity can be developed, but it requires a substantial up-front investment – which is a challenge for many districts.

Linked Learning & the Common Core State Standards
Enhancing Content Mastery Through Work-Based Learning

As one of the four key components of Linked Learning, the capacity of districts and regions to provide work-based learning at scale to serve all students will be greatly impacted by the California Career Pathways Trust. Already, 63 districts and county offices of education across California are participating in the state Linked Learning Pilot Program, an initiative to develop and support systemic, district-wide and region-wide systems and policy for the delivery of Linked Learning. The need to connect all students to high quality work-based learning opportunities in these districts is great, but it can be achieved through investment in the necessary infrastructure.
Implications for Linked Learning

The California Career Pathways Trust provides a significant infusion of capital to develop sustainable work-based learning infrastructure, career pathway programs and regional partnerships aligned to the Linked Learning approach. Among other things, grants could support:

- Employer intermediaries and work-based learning specialists to broker school-business partnerships, provide professional development, and supervise students in work-based learning placements.
- The establishment of regional K-14 partnerships with business entities and community organizations to develop articulated pathways aligned to regional economic needs.
- The expansion of professional and program development opportunities for California Partnership Academies and Regional Occupational Programs.
- Additional support for industry sector initiatives through the California Community Colleges Economic & Workforce Development Program.

Endnotes


