

Please use these talking points to make the case for Linked Learning with employers, followed by best practices to engage and inspire them to share the Linked Learning story.

How to Talk About Linked Learning with Employers

Basic Definition

Linked Learning is a successful approach to education based on the idea that students work harder and dream bigger if their education is relevant to them. The Linked Learning approach integrates rigorous academics that meet college-ready standards with sequenced, high-quality career-technical education, work-based learning, and supports to help students stay on track. For Linked Learning students, education is organized around industry-sector themes. The industry theme is woven into lessons taught by teachers who collaborate across subject areas with input from working professionals, and reinforced by work-based learning with real employers. This makes learning more like the real world of work, and helps students answer the question, “Why do I need to know this?”

What Makes Linked Learning Different

- **It’s about college AND career.** Linked Learning is defined by a central commitment to college *and* career success for all students.
- **It’s an approach, not a program.** Linked Learning is not a program or a curriculum, but rather an integrated, systemic approach involving collaboration between high school and postsecondary educators, employers, and community leaders. Linked Learning is a strategy for transforming education and regional economic development. Implementing Linked Learning successfully can require systemic change at the classroom, school, district, and regional levels.
- **It’s for all students.** Linked Learning is the right fit for students of all achievement levels and aspirations, with an essential commitment to equity and a focus on improving postsecondary and career outcomes for all students, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Four Core Components

Students are provided with an educational experience that integrates:

- **Rigorous academics** that prepare students to take college courses and meet the admission standards of California’s public universities
- **Sequence of high-quality career-technical education courses** that deliver concrete knowledge and skills, emphasizing real-world applications of academic learning
- **Work-based learning in real-world workplaces** via job shadowing, apprenticeships, internships, and other professional skill-building opportunities
- **Comprehensive supports and services** that are embedded as central components of a program of study to ensure that all students stay on track and graduate ready to transition to the next phase of their education or career

Talking Points to Use With Employers

- Linked Learning is a successful approach to education based on the idea that students work harder and dream bigger if their education is relevant to them. Linked Learning integrates rigorous academics that meet college-ready standards with sequenced, high-quality career-technical education, work-based learning, and supports to help students stay on track.
- Linked Learning students attend pathways organized by industry-sector themes, such as engineering, health care, performing arts, energy, and law, ensuring that students graduate with skills applicable to career paths in one of California’s largest industries and the skills needed to succeed in college.
- The industry-sector themes are woven into lessons taught by teachers who collaborate across subject areas and incorporate input from industry professionals. This makes learning more like the real world of work, and helps students answer the question, “Why do I need to know this?”
- Linked Learning is helping to address California’s need to better prepare students to graduate from high school ready for college, and with skills needed to thrive in the workplace. Students engage in professional learning and skill-building through career-technical training in school and through work-based learning, such as job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships.
- With learning organized around a broad industry sector theme, students get exposure to a wide array of career options, and learn what professional and postsecondary training is needed to be successful in a career in that industry.
- Research shows that, compared with their peers, students in certified Linked Learning pathways earn more credits in the first three years of high school, report greater confidence in their life and career skills, and say they are experiencing more rigorous and relevant instruction. The data also show students who had low achievement scores in earlier grades make significant progress when they participate in Linked Learning.
- As a result of the mounting evidence of Linked Learning’s effectiveness, there has been exponential growth in recent years in the number of California school districts offering or planning to offer Linked Learning.
- The challenge now is to meet this rapidly expanding demand with the appropriate support and systems that incentivize and reward high-quality Linked Learning because Linked Learning delivers better outcomes for students when it is implemented with fidelity to the model.

Employer-Specific Messages

- California’s employers need a better educated workforce to meet current and future demands. Right now, not enough students are graduating from high school, and those who do often lack the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in college and career.
- Linked Learning pathways give students more exposure to California’s major industries, and a better understanding of the available jobs and career paths.

- The Linked Learning approach invites employers to partner with schools to ensure that both the academic and professional learning in and outside of the classroom are preparing students to succeed in a career within the pathway's field.
- The Linked Learning approach is growing exponentially across the state, and districts have or are planning to add more high school pathways in California's top 15 industry sectors. To support the growing number of students entering career-themed pathways, additional employers need to join current partners in offering work-based learning opportunities to student in their communities.
- Employers can invest in the future of their workforce by providing students in Linked Learning pathways with high-quality work-based learning opportunities such as job shadows, apprenticeships, or internships.
- In addition to offering opportunities directly to students, employers can also offer Linked Learning teachers externships and guidance. Educators teaching in pathways in your industry sector want to sharpen their understanding of the latest trends and innovations in your field so they can incorporate them into their lessons.
- Linked Learning educators work with students to set professional behavior expectations, and teachers and administrators work directly with employers to ensure students are well-prepared.

Messages for WIBs, Chambers, and Industry Groups

- California's employers need a more educated workforce to meet current and future demands. Right now, not enough students are graduating from high school, and those who do often lack the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in college and career.
- Employers can invest in the future of their workforce and expand the pipeline of qualified workers by providing students in Linked Learning pathways with high-quality work-based learning opportunities such as job shadows, apprenticeships, or internships.
- Linked Learning pathways in your district(s) are giving students more exposure to California's major industries, giving them a better understanding of the types of career paths and jobs available, and helping them develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college and the workplace.
- The Linked Learning approach is growing exponentially across the state, and districts have or are planning to add more high school pathways in California's top 15 industry sectors. Urge employers in your community to join current partners in helping high school students acquire the professional learning and skill-building they need to succeed in college and career.
- There is a continuum of ways employers can support students in your community. Current partners offer everything from job shadowing, apprenticeships, and even paid internships. Linked Learning partners work with employers to identify opportunities for students who are well suited to the needs and desires of each employer.
- Linked Learning educators work with students to set expectations on how to conduct themselves in professional settings, and teachers and administrators work directly with employers to ensure students have the skills needed to reach their individual goals.

- In addition to offering opportunities directly to students, employers can also support local schools by offering teachers externships and guidance. Linked Learning teachers want to sharpen their understanding of the latest trends and innovations in their pathway's industry theme so they can incorporate them into their lessons.

The Vision for the Future of Linked Learning

- Linked Learning has the potential to achieve the best outcomes for our students and for our state's economy. We seek to make Linked Learning a permanent, sustainable pillar of education across California, and beyond.
- The Linked Learning movement is owned by the field, with many partners working together to expand and improve high-quality Linked Learning opportunities for students.
- As a result of the mounting evidence of Linked Learning's effectiveness, the State of California has committed approximately \$2 billion to help schools and regions establish and expand Linked Learning pathways. This has resulted in exponential growth in the number of school districts across California that are offering or planning to offer Linked Learning. The field's challenge now is to meet this rapidly expanding demand with systems that support, incentivize, and reward quality Linked Learning so that students get the maximum benefit and full preparation for college, career, and life.

Best Practices: Communicating with Business Leaders

Why Speaking to Employers Is Important

Employers play a significant role in expanding Linked Learning opportunities through developing partnerships with schools, providing work-based learning opportunities, and ensuring that Linked Learning pathways are relevant to current economic needs.

Communicate with business leaders to strengthen work-based learning and to leverage their voices and perspectives in building support for Linked Learning.

It is critical to engage a variety of employers, industry leaders, corporations, and organizations to ensure that all of California's industry sectors are involved in expanding Linked Learning, and to give students choices among different Linked Learning pathways. In order to engage and inspire the passions of all students, Linked Learning needs to offer opportunities in different industry sectors and show students a full range of possibilities for their future.

Finally, the employer community is an essential partner in advocating for expanded Linked Learning opportunities. Employers lend a credible voice to the argument that Linked Learning will benefit California's workforce and economy. Employers involved in Linked Learning can attest to the difference Linked Learning makes in preparing students for success in college and career.

Things to Consider when Speaking with Employers

Expanded Linked Learning opportunities have the potential to benefit business leaders in a direct way. However, many businesses and corporations may be unfamiliar with working collaboratively and closely with schools.

As you prepare to speak with the business community, here are some tips to keep in mind:

Emphasize return on investment (ROI). Employers may not immediately recognize the importance of being involved in Linked Learning. Remember to emphasize the long-term economic benefits of the Linked Learning approach and how it can contribute to developing a productive future workforce in your community or region. Companies are results-oriented. Use your communications efforts to help employers see that Linked Learning can be a long-term investment in producing successful future employees or even customers. Explain why it makes sense for them to direct limited resources to being an advisory board member or a partner for a Linked Learning pathway.

Seeking engagement, not money. Many businesses expect nonprofits and other organizations to ask for money. When you conduct outreach to employers on behalf of Linked Learning, remember to be clear that businesses can contribute to Linked Learning in different ways. Successful Linked Learning pathways require the active participation and input of employers, industry groups, and unions in shaping and implementing those pathways. A good first step is for an employer or industry leader to serve on a pathway's advisory committee to help inform projects and other work. Employers and industry leaders also can help develop and implement work-based learning opportunities, internships, and externships. They can also support industry-themed projects and other worthwhile student experiences.

Be clear. When you speak with employers, be clear about why or how they are an ideal partner for a specific Linked Learning pathway. Let them know that their industry sector is valuable for Linked Learning students and that you want to build connections with professionals in their industry. Avoid

using educational abbreviations or jargon (“eduspeak”), and use terminology that non-educators would understand.

Be brief. Use your time wisely with business leaders, whether it is on the phone or in-person. Their time is in high-demand. Focus on a few core points to get your message across clearly and quickly. Later, when your outreach is successful, remember to be responsive and share materials and information as quickly as possible.

Build relationships. With employers, relationships count a lot. The most successful and long-term partnerships are built and nurtured over time. A truly successful partnership between employers and schools requires patience and continued effort, especially on the part of the school. Focus on building real, personal relationships with the business leaders you engage and make the most of your interactions by ensuring that they are positive. Use the **Linked Learning Guide to Hosting Visitors** for tips on hosting employers on-site at schools.

Start small. Don’t be afraid to start small. Whether that means starting with smaller asks—such as a follow up conversation or a visit to a Linked Learning school—or a small number of outreach targets, your outreach activity should be viewed as the first step in building a relationship that will lead to a more productive partnership. You may also want to start with outreach to smaller companies that have flexibility and a close relationship with the community. Winning the support of the business community and convincing them to play an active role in the expansion of Linked Learning can be accomplished over time. The hardest part is initiating those conversations and getting companies to take that first step.

Be persistent. Do not take “no” personally. Each company, organization, or group will have different priorities at different times. Sometimes working to expand Linked Learning will fit into those business plans, and other times, it will not. Try to follow as many new leads as possible so that you cast a wide net. Also, look for innovative ways to nurture existing relationships and move them further along to full partnerships.