

This document is a one-stop-shop for Linked Learning messaging. The first portion contains topline talking points that provide the key messages you need when discussing Linked Learning with any audience. The topline messages are then followed by secondary messages that are catered to more specific audiences. For example, you may want to highlight certain messages for policymakers and others for high school teachers.

Topline Messaging for All Audiences

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 powered by four integrated core components.** Students are provided with an educational experience that integrates:
 - Rigorous academics that prepare students to succeed in college.
 - Career-technical education courses in sequence, emphasizing real-world applications of academic learning.
 - Work-based learning that provides exposure to real-world workplaces and teaches the professional skills needed to thrive in a career.
 - Comprehensive supports and services to address the individual needs of all students, ensuring equity of access, opportunity, and success.
- **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

Linked Learning's power comes from the close integration of four core components:

- **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

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 and 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.
- Because of the mounting evidence of effectiveness of the Linked Learning approach, 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 opportunities to students in their community. The field's challenge now is to meet this rapidly expanding demand with systems and support that incentivize, recognize, and result in quality implementation.

General Talking Points for All Audiences

- 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 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 Linked Learning certified pathway students are less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate than similar students in traditional high school programs.¹ Also, students coming into Linked Learning with low achievement scores demonstrate greater academic success than similar students enrolled in traditional high schools.²
- Compared with their peers, Linked Learning students report greater confidence in their life and career skills, and say they are experiencing more rigorous, integrated, and relevant instruction.³
- Linked Learning students are earning more credits than similar peers in traditional high schools, which is critical for on-time graduation.⁴ English language learners earned 15 more credits than similar students in traditional high school programs, and African American students earned nearly double that—equaling more than an additional semester’s worth of credits.⁵
- Research also shows that Linked Learning students graduate with the skills and confidence to thrive in college and the workplace, and to contribute meaningfully to California’s economy and society.
- 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.

Telling the Linked Learning Story

Now you know all of the key messages to use when talking about Linked Learning. But, what is the most-effective way to present this important information? To keep your audience engaged, remember the following:

- **Share student stories.** Possibly the most compelling way to highlight the power of Linked Learning is to use student stories. Storytelling engages your audience emotionally, and personalizes the impact of Linked Learning. This also gives those you speak with who do not directly work with students powerful and memorable stories retell as well, further expanding the reach of the Linked Learning narrative.

¹ Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Park, C., Patel, D., Wolf, B., Astudillo, S., Harless, E., Ammah-Tagoe, N., McCracken, M. & Adelman, N. SRI International. (2015). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Sixth-year evaluation report.* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

² Ibid.

³ Guha, R., Caspary, K., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Arshan, N., Park, C., Tse, V., Astudillo, S., Black, A., & Adelman, N. (2014). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Fifth-year evaluation report.* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

⁴ Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Park, C., Patel, D., Wolf, B., Astudillo, S., Harless, E., Ammah-Tagoe, N., McCracken, M. & Adelman, N. SRI International. (2015). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Sixth-year evaluation report.* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

⁵ Ibid.

- **Push the data.** With the abundance of education reforms out there, demonstrating evidence of success is critically important. Linked Learning students are performing better than similar peers in traditional high schools. Shout the stats, numbers, and data points to the rooftops!
- **Emphasize what makes Linked Learning different.** It is the unique aspects that people will remember and be able to recall when presented with the breath of educational initiatives. Linked Learning isn't like all other CTE programs. The Linked Learning approach is special because it's defined by a central commitment to both college *and* career success for all students.
- **Always go back to the four core components.** It's easy to remember, encapsulates the primary elements that make this approach effective, and is a useful framework for walking audiences through concrete examples of what students experience.

Secondary Messaging for Specific Audiences

The following secondary messaging is catered to specific audiences. Whether you're addressing administrators, teachers, students, parents, community partners, employers industry leaders, policymakers, or higher education, you'll know which messages are the most important and effective for your particular audience. Also included are messages particular to Common Core.

Educators

Administrators and School Board Members

- Leadership and clear articulation of Linked Learning's vision and promise are essential for the success of the approach at the district and school level.
- It is important for teachers and administrators involved in Linked Learning to understand its full context and have the schedule structures in place that allow for the common planning and interdisciplinary collaboration. This gives Linked Learning its power, and allows students to take full advantage of the integration of the four core components.
- Teachers who understand the full context, and have the time to collaborate, are energized, engaged and enthusiastic. They see how the integration of the four core components enhance student learning, and motivate their students to be more engaged.
- The more teachers know about Linked Learning, the more they understand that it helps all students prepare for success in college and career, not just students who come into high school with a record of low achievement.
- The Linked Learning approach is an affordable and sustainable long-term investment in student success. Districts can use LCFF funds, Career Pathways Trust resources, CTE Incentive Grant funds, federal Perkins funds, and other state and federal fund sources to implement Linked Learning as a district-wide strategy for preparing all students for college and career.
- Linked Learning is flexible, adaptable, and can be tailored to the unique needs of most districts, schools, and communities. It can be delivered through a variety of models, including NAF Academies or California Partnership Academies, industry-themed small schools, or through a variety of pathways in large comprehensive high schools. Districts can implement Linked Learning as a systemic organizing principle for improving high school quality. Emerging regional-level work is aimed at extending Linked Learning into students' postsecondary experience.

- Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking and analysis, multi-subject integration, and real-world application provides a relevant and engaging way to learn and teach content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.
- Because partnerships with employers and industry are essential for Linked Learning pathways, district leaders play a key role in building support and maintaining successful relationships with business leaders.
- The White House recognized Linked Learning as a promising practice at the 2015 White House Summit on Next Generation High Schools.
- Over the past several years, there has been exponential growth in the number of school districts across California that are offering or planning to offer Linked Learning. To encourage and support quality Linked Learning implementation, the Linked Learning Alliance is developing quality assurance systems and supports that incentivize, recognize best practices and fidelity to the four core components.

Teachers

- Teachers want to develop students who are critical thinkers, lifelong learners and good citizens who are empowered, happy and able to thrive in the real world. Linked Learning supports all of these goals.
- Linked Learning is an interdisciplinary approach to education that stresses relevance to students through project-based learning in industry-themed pathways, to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and career.
- Students in Linked Learning learn core academic subjects meeting a-g requirements, as well as broadly applicable professional skills and soft skills, regardless of whether they ultimately pursue a career in a field that aligns to their high school industry theme.
- Linked Learning seeks to raise students' aspirations by making education relevant, and exposes them to a broader range of career opportunities, ultimately putting the choice of what to do after high school in their well-prepared hands. All students, including high-achieving students who have always planned to attend college, benefit from the relevant, project-based approach and industry themes of Linked Learning.
- Linked Learning teachers collaborate across disciplines and incorporate input from industry professionals in small cohorts. Teachers of academic subjects have opportunities to expand their knowledge by collaborating with CTE teachers and learning from industry professionals, while CTE teachers have the opportunity to share their expertise with their peer educators. The integration of core academic classes, a sequence of CTE course, and applied work-based learning outside of school helps reinforce and animate learning.
- Teachers work hard to prepare students for better opportunities after high school. Linked Learning enhances those efforts and makes teaching more collaborative. It also offers students a more cohesive, engaging experience that inspires them to work harder and further develop critical thinking skills.
- Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking and analysis, multi-subject integration, and real-world application provides a relevant and engaging way to learn and teach content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.

- The Linked Learning approach can be delivered through a variety of models, including NAF Academies or California Partnership Academies, industry-themed small schools, or through a variety of pathways in large, comprehensive high schools. Districts can implement Linked Learning as a systemic organizing principle for improving high school quality. Emerging regional-level work is aimed at extending Linked Learning into students' postsecondary experience.
- Over the past several years, there has been exponential growth in the number of school districts across California that are offering or planning to offer Linked Learning. To encourage and support quality Linked Learning implementation the Linked Learning Alliance is developing quality assurance systems and supports that incentivize, recognize best practices and fidelity to the four core components.
- Several resources and tools are available⁶ from the Linked Learning Alliance, ConnectEd, the National Academy Foundation, the Center for Power Public Schools and other organizations that can help teachers incorporate student-centered, project-based Linked Learning instruction that is aligned to career pathways.

Students

- Linked Learning is an approach to education that connects what you learn in the classroom with the real world, so you're not left wondering, "Why do I need to know this?"
- Linked Learning students get to choose a high school pathway based on a career field that interests you—healthcare, engineering, performing arts and law, just to name a few.
- In Linked Learning, students take the core academic subjects with career-focused electives. Your teachers weave your classes together through the career theme you're interested in. So you're not taking math for the sake of memorizing formulas, but you use those lessons to design a bridge or construct a stage. Or in English you not only learn to write about great literature, but you learn to write a closing argument for court, or develop a report for a public health department on ways to stop the spread of disease.
- In addition to professional learning in the classroom, Linked Learning students get exposure to the real-world via job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships before you even leave high school.
- Your Linked Learning education will help prepare you for whatever you decide to do after high school. Plus Linked Learning students are more likely than similar students in traditional high schools to be on track for graduation, and to qualify for admission to a four-year university. You will be better prepared for challenges you will face both in college and career, and you will have the skills and knowledge you need to seize opportunities that come your way.

Parents

- Students in Linked Learning are more likely to be on track for graduation, to be ready for college-level work, and to qualify for admission to a four-year university. And, it helps students see the connection between education and life, answering the question, "Why do I need to know this?"
- This approach helps your child hone in on his or her interests and explore a potential career path. When students enjoy what they are learning and are engaged in high school, they are more focused, more likely to succeed academically, and more likely to have enhanced self-confidence.

⁶ Whenever this talking point is used, direct the audience to the available resources online, or include hyperlinks.

- Through Linked Learning, students learn core academic and technical subjects needed for success in college, and gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence that will prepare them to thrive in a fulfilling career.
- Linked Learning opens doors to more opportunities for your child after high school. By gaining real-world experience and skills in California's top industries, Linked Learning students know what degree or advanced training is needed to succeed in their chosen career path, and how to pursue their career choice.
- Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking, integration of core subjects, and real-world application provides a relevant and engaging way to learn content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.

Employers

- 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, a better understanding of the available jobs and career paths and help them develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.
- 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 added, or are planning to add, more high school pathways in California's 15 high-growth industry sectors. To support the growing number of students entering career-themed pathways, additional employers need to join current employer partners in offering work-based learning opportunities to students in their communities.
- Employers can invest in the future of their workforce by providing Linked Learning students with high-quality work-based learning opportunities in a variety of industries and sectors.
- There is a continuum of ways to give students some exposure to and experience in your industry, ranging from spending just an hour in a classroom to employing a student intern in your workplace. Your participation helps high school students acquire knowledge about your profession and build skills that will help them pursue their own career.
- In addition to offering opportunities directly to students, employers can also help by offering Linked Learning teachers externships and guidance. Educators teaching in Linked Learning schools want to sharpen their understanding of the latest trends and innovations in your field so they can incorporate them into their lessons. Teachers also welcome input and guidance on innovative ways to incorporate current elements in your field into school projects.
- Before entering your workplace Linked Learning educators work with students to set expectations on how to conduct themselves in professional settings. Teachers and administrators work directly with employers to ensure students understand and have the skills to reach goals set for each student in their work-based learning experience.

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 their future workforce and expand the pipeline of qualified workers by providing students in Linked Learning pathways with high-quality work-based learning opportunities in a variety of industries and sectors.
- Linked Learning pathways in your community are connecting students to major industries, giving them a better understanding of career path options, and helping them develop the skills and knowledge they will need to pursue their career goals, in college and in the workplace.
- The Linked Learning approach is growing exponentially across the state, and many districts have or are planning to add more Linked Learning pathways, each relating to one of California’s top 15 industry sectors. To support the growing number of Linked Learning students in career-themed pathways, new employers need to be encouraged to join current employer partners in offering work-based learning opportunities to students in your community.
- There is a continuum of ways employers can support students in your community. Employers can speak to a classroom, invite students to a job shadow, provide apprenticeships, and even provide paid internships. Linked Learning schools work with employers to identify opportunities for students who are building appropriate industry knowledge so they can contribute in the workplace while they learn.
- Before entering the workplace, 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 stay sharp on the latest trends and innovations in their pathway’s industry theme so they can make sure that what their students learn matches the expectations of industry professionals. Linked Learning teachers welcome input and guidance on ways to incorporate industry and professional perspectives into their teaching and projects they assign to students.
- Invite employers in your community to join you in strengthening your workforce pipeline by helping high school students acquire professional learning and skill-building they need to succeed in college and career.

Policymakers

State Policymakers

- By creating a workforce that is better equipped to succeed in postsecondary education and handle the jobs of the future, Linked Learning makes California more competitive and benefits its businesses, tax base, and economy.
- Linked Learning is defined by a central commitment to college *and* career success for all students, which our state critically needs.
- So far the state of California has committed approximately \$2 billion to help schools and regions establish and expand Linked Learning pathways, including:

- AB 790, the California Linked Learning Pilot Program
- SB 1070, the California Career Technical Education Pathway Program
- California Career Pathways Trust
- CTE Incentive Grant program
- Research shows that students in certified Linked Learning pathways are making greater gains in being prepared for college and a career.
- Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking and analysis, integration of college preparatory academics and hands-on technical training provides a relevant and engaging way to learn and teach content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.
- Linked Learning is an approach, not a program. It can be offered through a variety of models, including NAF Academies or California Partnership Academies, industry-themed small schools, or through a variety of pathways in large comprehensive high schools. Districts can implement Linked Learning as a systemic organizing principle for improving high school quality. Emerging regional-level work is aimed at extending Linked Learning into students' postsecondary experience. The Linked Learning Alliance is not a charter management company.

Local Policymakers

- Linked Learning gives students college preparatory coursework and real-world work-based learning experiences in their communities—helping to prepare the future workforce of the region and strengthen the local economy.
- The Linked Learning approach is an affordable and sustainable long-term investment in student success. Studies have found that upfront investment in Linked Learning leads to benefits for the economy and taxpayers that far exceed the cost.
- While Linked Learning can benefit from additional resources, the districts already practicing Linked Learning prove that successful implementation can be achieved by reallocating existing resources.
- As a result of the mounting evidence of Linked Learning's effectiveness, the state legislature has committed approximately \$2 billion to help schools and regions establish and expand Linked Learning pathways.
- Research shows that students in certified Linked Learning high school pathways are making greater gains in college and career preparation.
- Because students get the most benefit from Linked Learning when it is implemented with fidelity, local community leaders should support districts' efforts to seek Linked Learning certification.
- Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking and integration of college preparatory academics and hands-on technical training provides a relevant and engaging way to learn and teach content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.
- Linked Learning is an approach, not a program. It can be delivered through a variety of models, including NAF Academies or California Partnership Academies, industry-themed small schools, or through a variety of pathways in large comprehensive high schools. Districts can implement Linked Learning as a systemic organizing principle for improving high school quality. Emerging regional-level work is aimed at extending Linked Learning into students' postsecondary experience.

Higher Education

- Linked Learning equips high school students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in postsecondary education. They are more-prepared for college-level courses and less-likely to need remediation than peers in traditional high schools. Once a student enters remediation, they are far less-likely to ultimately earn a postsecondary credential or degree, making it imperative to properly prepare students for college-level work.⁷
- Many Linked Learning students have already earned some college credit by the time they graduate high school through dual enrollment, AP/IB curriculum, or credit-by-exam.
- The thematic focus of each Linked Learning pathway, combined with its college-preparatory academics, gives Linked Learning students a clearer sense of what they want to study in college and what career they want to pursue afterward.
- Students in Linked Learning take core academic subjects meeting a-g requirements, a sequence of challenging career technical education courses, and learn broadly applicable real-world or soft skills, like collaborating in a group, working with adults, and the responsibilities that come with professional work environments, like time-management.
- K-12 and postsecondary have a shared responsibility to ensure student success. When students enjoy learning and are engaged, they are more focused, more likely to succeed academically, and more likely to have more confidence in their chosen career path.
- Research shows that students today—more than ever—learn by doing and Linked Learning provides hands-on experiences that keep students engaged and present so they not only learn, but fully retain the skills and knowledge they acquire.
- Faculty should be encouraged to incorporate the principals of Linked Learning, including hands-on, project-based learning in their curriculum. With the wave of change across K-12, especially with the emphasis in Common Core on applied learning, it is the perfect time for postsecondary to reexamine how to maximize college students' learning.
- The bridge between K-12 and higher education needs to be as seamless as possible. The CSUs are piloting freshman programming that eases the transition from high school to college with project-based learning that incorporates principals of Linked Learning.
- Some regions are working to align Linked Learning pathways that start in high school and extend into postsecondary in order to streamline and economize efforts to create clear paths for students interested in continuing studies in the same industry sector.
- State funding for postsecondary is strapped, and probably will be for the foreseeable future. If community colleges and CSUs collaborate with local districts, they can better serve students, extend capacity and reduce stress on resources by developing paths that get students in the right seats the first time.
- The core elements of Linked Learning align with many California Community College K-14/16 career pathway initiatives and funding sources, such as CTE Transitions, SB1070 and Perkins. This supports the integration and expansion of Linked Learning principles into the community college environment, resulting in more seamless pathway experiences for students.

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures. Reforming Remedial Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/improving-college-completion-reforming-remedial.aspx>

- Many teaching programs on CSU campuses incorporate a focus on Linked Learning principles and best practices.

Common Core and Linked Learning

- To ensure that all students are prepared for college and career success after graduation, the California Common Core State Standards set clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in math and English language arts.
- California is among the more than 40 states that have voluntarily adopted the Common Core standards with the goal of preparing students to succeed in today's economy.
- Linked Learning is an approach used by many California schools to help students meet these new, higher standards. Linked Learning reinforces the shift from memorizing facts and figures to developing a deeper understanding of subject matter, critical thinking, and problem solving.
- Common Core is the “what,” Linked Learning is the “how.” In other words, Linked Learning's focus on critical thinking, integration of academic and technical courses, and real-world application provides a relevant and engaging way to learn and teach content that meets Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards.