

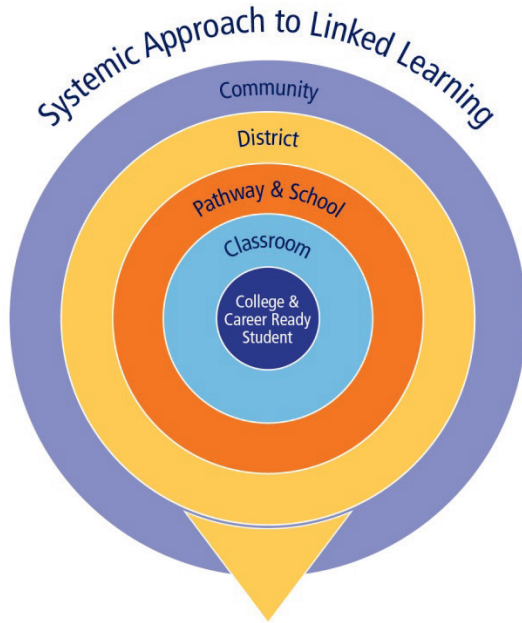
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PHASE

Needs and Capacity Assessment for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways



ConnectEd’s Library of Frameworks and Guides

ConnectEd and Linked Learning partner organizations have developed a library of tools and resources to help districts plan and implement a system of Linked Learning pathways. This diagram provides visual reference for optimal use of the tools.



This *Needs and Capacity Assessment* is for district leaders, their industry and community partners, and for site administrators.

For more information about ConnectEd’s library, visit: www.ConnectEdCalifornia.org/publications.

STUDENT

College and Career Readiness: What Do We Mean?

The aim of this framework is to clarify the definition of “college and career readiness” and to produce a document that synthesizes varying perspectives based on a holistic view of student needs in view of long range educational, economic, and societal trends. In addition to reviewing the relevant literature, we consulted with educators and experts in education reform, career technical education, employment and training, cognitive science, and student assessment, across a broad spectrum—each illuminating a critical piece of the overall picture.

CLASSROOM

Learning, Teaching and Leading Framework

The Linked Learning *Learning, Teaching and Leading Framework* (“Framework”) defines key characteristics of student and adult learning and teaching practice within Linked Learning pathways. It illustrates how these behaviors and actions might be observed both inside and beyond the classroom.

PATHWAY & SCHOOL

Pathway Quality Review Essential Elements

The Essential Elements promote a shared vision of equitable, high-quality Linked Learning pathways to improve student outcomes. They are used to certify pathway quality, rigor, and fidelity, as well as to support continuous improvement of pathways through a self-assessment and action planning process that recognizes measurable stages of progress toward certification, sustainability, and exemplary practice.

Building a Linked Learning Pathway—A Guide for Transforming High Schools for College and Career Success

This high-level guide provides coaches, district leaders, and pathway teams an understanding of the overall process of designing and implementing pathways that will continue to improve over time and become high-quality learning environments for students. A more robust online guide and toolkit is available through ConnectEd Studios.

Online Guide and Toolkit

DISTRICT

District Framework for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways

The Five Critical Conditions that make up this Framework are intended to deepen and clarify the district’s thinking about the infrastructure needed to support the design, implementation, and sustainability of a system of quality pathways. To that end, the conditions describe the outcomes of the system-building work of the district and its partners.

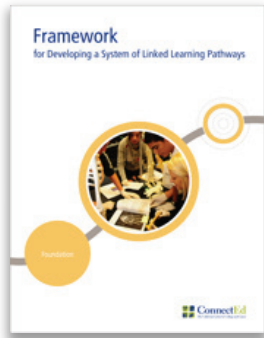
Leading High School Transformation for College and Career Success—A Guide for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways

This high-level guide provides district leaders and their community partners a sense of the phases, timeline, and leadership roles necessary to design, plan, and implement a system of high-quality Linked Learning pathways. For implementers, a more robust online guide and toolkit is available through ConnectEd Studios.

Online Guide and Toolkit

ConnectEd Library of Tools: District Level

ConnectEd has developed tools to serve both pathway sites and districts developing systems of Linked Learning pathways. The tools described below are those designed to help districts. Visit our website for descriptions of pathway tools and other resources: www.ConnectEdCalifornia.org.



Foundation

Framework for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways

For school districts and communities aiming to develop a system of Linked Learning pathways, this publication provides the knowledge base needed to understand the infrastructure for supporting such a system. The Critical Conditions that make up the Framework describe the outcomes of the system-building work (the “what”). The Framework also serves as the organizational structure for the associated tools described below.

Planning Phase



Needs and Capacity Assessment

During the planning phase, this tool guides the school district and community partners through a process to (a) establish a set of desired outcomes; (b) conduct a comprehensive assessment of its current strengths and capacity; and (c) complete a gap analysis between the two. Gap analysis results help guide development of the multi-year implementation plan.



Implementation Plan Template

To complete the planning phase, a school district and its partners must develop a comprehensive, multi-year implementation plan. The Template helps districts to define action steps, timeline, resources needed, person responsible, and evidence of success—all based on the needs, capacity, and outcomes identified with the *Needs and Capacity Assessment*.

Implementation Phase



Rubric to Assess Development of a System of Pathways

Once the district begins implementing its plan, this Rubric will help the district leadership team and community partners to assess their progress annually, with the expectation that the self-assessment results will help them refine their implementation plans.

Needs and Capacity Assessment

When planning to develop a system of Linked Learning pathways it is important to acknowledge that every school district and its surrounding community has a substantial foundation upon which to build—model programs, skilled staff, supporting policies, base funding, infrastructure, and more. To take advantage of existing assets and build upon those strengths, an early step in a planning process includes a comprehensive assessment of the district’s and community’s current capacity and future needs related to designing, implementing, and sustaining a system of Linked Learning pathways.

The needs and capacity assessment process typically takes several months, includes participation from a broad range of district and school staff and community partners, and is guided by an external coach who facilitates an inclusive, thoughtful, and reflective process. The results of the needs and capacity assessment inform the creation of a multi-year *Implementation Plan*, which is, in essence, based on a gap analysis between the current status and capacity and the desired outcomes the district is trying to achieve.

Using this Needs and Capacity Assessment

Critical Condition: This needs and capacity assessment uses the critical conditions described in the *Framework for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways* to guide school districts and their community partners as they conduct a comprehensive assessment. For each critical condition, the *Framework* outlines many components requiring attention when building a system of equitable and accessible pathway options for students.

The blank columns in this guide can be used to record and organize the information that is part of the comprehensive assessment.

Desired Outcome: Describe the outcome you hope to see by the end of an initial 3–5 year implementation phase. What would success look like? What is realistic to accomplish in this time period?

Current Status: After reviewing documents, interviewing district staff and partners, and conducting other forms of investigation and analysis, the district and community partners should determine and describe:

- (a) **Assets and capacity** currently in place in the district and broader community to address each critical condition. What exists? What progress has been made to date? What staff expertise, district resources, community support, and other forms of capacity can the district access or leverage to reach the desired outcomes for each of the critical conditions?
- (b) **What is needed** for growth is determined by conducting a gap analysis between the desired outcome and the assets and capacity. Which strategies, processes, structures, norms, policies, plans, resources, technical assistance, and/or conditions are needed to move from here (current status) to there (desired outcome)? How can the district and community build capacity? What barriers must be removed? What existing practices or policies can the district change or abandon? These need statements will become the starting point for developing a multi-year implementation plan.

Priority: Once the analysis of all the conditions is completed, the final step is to go back through the assessment and set priorities. The forced choice of High/Medium/Low will help with this process. This priority setting will help the district and its community partners identify the most strategic, high leverage actions.

D1. Leadership Commitment and Accountability

Leadership

In most school districts and communities, existing pathways have developed organically in a programmatic way, but not as part of a systemic approach. In order to plan and adopt a system of quality pathways, district and school leaders, the business community, local postsecondary institutions, labor unions, and community and parent groups commit to a shared vision and dedicate the necessary resources to put the vision into practice and sustain it.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D1.1 Shared Vision and Commitment				
D1.2 Communication and Messaging				
D1.3 Distributed Leadership				
D1.4 Board Support and Strategic Alignment				

Pathway Formation

The district and community should engage in a comprehensive and thoughtful process of selecting the broad industry sectors in which to create, expand, and improve a number of high-quality pathways in order to serve a target majority of students. In doing so, the district and its partners should be committed to high-quality implementation that addresses issues of equity, access, student choice, and transportation.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D1.5 Pathway Expansion				
D1.6 Pathway Quality and Continuous Improvement				

Accountability

With limited resources, districts are increasingly expected to justify their financial investments by demonstrating that they have a direct impact on student outcomes. Without systems in place to collect and examine student-level data and evaluate the benefits of pathway participation against a set of success indicators, districts will find it hard to be accountable to their multiple constituencies.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D1.7 District Success Indicators				
D1.8 Student-Level Data				
D1.9 Evaluation and Accountability				

D2. Support for High-Quality Learning and Teaching

Instruction and the Program of Study

Each of the district’s pathways should have in place a well-defined multi-year program of study that describes the student experience and consists of academic core courses, technical courses, a series of work-based learning experiences, and student supports—all intentionally aligned to ensure that students meet the expected district, pathway, and course-level learning outcomes. To a great extent, pathways are designed and implemented by teachers, with support from administrators and counselors. The only way to ensure high-quality implementation is to dedicate substantial resources to build the capacity of the teachers, counselors, and administrators who are responsible for doing the work.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D2.1 Support to Improve Instruction				
D2.2 Systems of Intervention and Acceleration				
D2.3 Infrastructure to Support Quality Work-Based Learning (WBL)				
D2.4 Balanced Assessment and Accountability				

School Schedules

With the standard 6-period day schedule offered at many high schools, it is challenging for students enrolled in pathways to complete a college preparatory academic core, a technical sequence or cluster of courses, and other graduation requirements. The need for supplemental instruction and/or the desire of students to pursue other interests only place further demands on time. Furthermore, multi-disciplinary projects and work-based learning activities often require longer periods of time than the standard 50-minute class period allows. For these reasons, it is necessary for districts to examine more flexible schedules and creative uses of time.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D2.5 Schedules to Support Pathway Quality				

D3. Student Equity, Access, and Choice

Policies and Practices That Assure Access By design, pathways should appeal to and engage any student regardless of his or her prior academic achievement, language proficiency, or postsecondary aspirations. No matter what pathway areas of focus and delivery models have been established, students in the district have equal access to any pathway of interest.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D3.1 Practices That Promote Equity and Rigor				
D3.2 Policies that Ensure Access and Choice				
D3.3 Student Recruitment and Pathway Selection				

Middle School Preparation If students are expected to select a pathway at the end of their 8th-grade year, they should be able to do so in an informed way. Students can only do this if they have been exposed to career opportunities in a variety of industry sectors and know their high school pathway options. As important, students must be academically prepared to succeed in rigorous pathway programs of study and be assisted in making the transition from middle school to high school pathways.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D3.4 K-8 Career Exploration				
D3.5 Academic Preparation in Middle School				

D4. Sustained Partnerships

Postsecondary Articulation

As with the transition from middle school to high school pathways, students graduating from pathways should enjoy a seamless transition to postsecondary education and training options. These transitions may be facilitated in several ways.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D4.1 Postsecondary Partnerships				
D4.2 Student Support Services				
D4.3 Concurrent Enrollment Options				

Community Participation

Linked Learning is also a strategy for preparing the future workforce, growing the regional economy, and improving conditions for those who live in the region. This is facilitated by leveraging the support of employers, civic and community leaders in establishing and sustaining Linked Learning pathways.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D4.4 Master Plan for Sustainable Workforce Competitiveness				
D4.5 Community Engagement				

D5. Operational Alignment

Human Resources Human Resource policies and practices should support the unique instructional and leadership needs of pathways. To accomplish this objective, districts may need to renegotiate union agreements, implement waiver processes, consider practices related to reassigning and/or “bumping” teachers, articulate pathway staffing needs and expectations to university pre-service programs, establish internal leadership development programs, and pay attention to changing professional development needs.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D5.1 Recruitment and Hiring Practices				
D5.2 Evaluating Teachers and Administrators				
D5.3 Retaining Qualified Pathway Teachers				

Physical Infrastructure Facilities should be designed to accommodate the teaching and learning needs of pathway programs of study. To accomplish this objective, districts may need to reconfigure or reassign existing space, plan for expansion, and/or consider sharing facilities with other educational or community organizations. Similarly, equipment should be available to accommodate pathway teaching and learning needs..

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D5.4. Facilities and Equipment				

Funding Pathways may have start-up costs (and sometimes ongoing costs) above and beyond the maintenance costs of traditional high school education programs. As such, funding needs should be evaluated and plans put into place to support those needs.

Condition	Desired Outcome	Current Status		Priority Low/Medium/High
		Assets/Capacity	Needs/Gaps	
D5.5. Leveraging Existing and Developing New Resources				
D5.6 Sustained Fiscal Stability				



Needs and Capacity Assessment

for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways

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