

PREPARING YOUTH FOR WORK AND CAREER SUCCESS IS THE RIGHT ROLE FOR EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

By Bill Fennessy

Preparing youth for work and career is now rapidly becoming an integral part in preparing youth with the skills they will need in school and life. This is clearly supported by the most current research such as RTI International's *"Employability Skills Framework"*, as well as the *"Foundations For Young Adult Success, A Developmental Framework"* from the University of Chicago. (You can view brief presentations about these frameworks by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).) In addition and very importantly to the Expanded Learning Field, preparing youth for work and career clearly aligns with what should now be the very familiar *"LIAS Learning Principles"*, *"Youth Development Framework"*, and the *"California Standards for Expanded Learning Programs"*.

All youth regardless of their age can begin expanding their ideas of what they might do as adults. Coupling those ideas with the experience of related work in the real world brings the important relevance which results in greater engagement in their work at school. This is clearly embodied by California's [Linked Learning](#) approach to education, which has now demonstrated clear evidence of effectiveness as students in Linked Learning pathways have shown substantially positive shifts in credits accumulated, attendance, A-G completion, and reduced drop-out rates. The result of this data has spawned an exponential growth in the numbers of schools and school districts that are now offering or planning to use the Linked Learning approach.

Recent and intentional changes made by the CDE Afterschool Division has made allowable work-based learning as a potential ASES and ASSET's grant foci. These changes well position the Expanded Learning field to do more than just put work-based learning components into their programs, it actually encourages the field to collaborate in building work-based learning platforms from which to support many new programming opportunities and engage many other partners in this important work.

THE WHY – ECONOMIC CHANGE IS DRIVING A NEW EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

Each historical era creates a system of education that addresses its needs. In our case it is the Information Age that is, and will present our current system of education with new sets of needs. These new sets of needs have resulted in a current educational revolution which is very similar to educational revolution caused by the previous Industrial Age.

In the 1800's the educational revolution of the Industrial Age was economically driven by the radical shift from family centric production to the manufacturing and industrial organization. In this process, the home, the workplace, community life, and the church lost

many of their earlier functions in the educational system. The school then became the central institution in education, to the extent that most in our society today still believes that education equals schooling.

The system of education in the Industrial Age focused mainly on the integrative aspects of education. At a national level, it facilitated the integration of people within their vocational and professional groups at a period of time where wealth generation was based on expansion of production to satisfy areas of need for large segments of the population. Because these vocational and professional groups were significant and stable, formal education became seen as an input in a system of production.

Towards the second half of the 1900's, the educational system had stabilized and was really quite well aligned with the requirements of the Industrial Age, which of course then supported the belief that advancement equaled parallel expansion in production and education.

The stability of our current Industrial Age generated educational system has already started to disappear, as we are in the early stages of a very similar economically driven educational revolution. This is due to a rapid and radical shift in both the industrial and business models of the new Information Age, as production now occurs in global networks and ecosystems where innovation is the key for both cost advantage and expansion of market.

During the beginning of this overlap in the shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, there has already developed a clear a skills gap in our country's workforce that has resulted in unemployment, unfilled jobs domestically, and jobs heading overseas. Therefore this country's economic success, standard of living, and our democracy itself is relying on our system of education to prepare our students for work and career success, so we as a nation will be able to compete and therefore be economically successful in the Information Age.

THE WHAT – EXPANDED LEARNING, COMMON CORE, AND NOW LINKED LEARNING

The State of California has already begun to address this new educational revolution in various ways. The creation of Expanded Learning Programs, and the adoption of Common Core Standards are two examples of solutions and their respective vehicles of change in which the State has already made and continues to make a significant financial investment. Currently the State is making a more than significant 2 billion dollar commitment to invest in "Linked Learning" as an additional solution and vehicle of change to support the new and important changes in educational focus. Linked Learning provides a strategy for transforming educational and regional economic development through the creation of career pathways that will fill jobs in specific industry sectors that are located in that specific region. This is expected to help facilitate systematic change in classrooms, schools, districts, and regional offices of education.

It is very important to note that Linked Learning is for ALL students and clearly supports equity. It 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 low income backgrounds. This happens through the creation of additional opportunities for students to discover new aspirations, and graduate with the skills and knowledge they need to advance in college AND career. It also inspires students who may never have imagined going to college to excel in high school, graduate, and succeed in college, career and life.

Linked Learning is an approach. It is not a program or a curriculum, but rather an integrated and systematic approach involving collaboration between high school and postsecondary educators, employers, and community leaders. This intentionally collaborative effort means that 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. However it should be noted that while there are districts and consortia that receive direct funding from The California Career Pathways Trust, which is the fiscal agent for the Linked Learning Alliance, because Linked Learning is an approach it is not determined by, or reliant on, that specific funding stream to be a Linked Learning program.

THE HOW – Expanded Learning Programs Already Have A Place In Linked Learning

The Linked Learning movement is powered by four integrated core components, considered the “Four Pillars of Linked Learning”. The first two pillars are designed to be supported by the Instructional Day. However the remaining two pillars are where Expanded Learning Programs clearly have many points of integration that can provide a great opportunity to make an impactful contribution. This is exactly why we should quickly become, and I strongly suggest MUST become, a significant part of the Linked Learning field, as it will be key in keeping Expanded Learning Programs relevant and sustainable.

Pillar #1 is “*Rigorous Academics*”, which are to prepare students to take college courses and meet the admission standards of California’s universities. This is also intended to maximize articulation between high school and postsecondary programs of study and facilitate and accelerate completion of postsecondary credentials, certificates, and degrees. This work has been and is the role of districts, administrators, and teachers.

Pillar #2 is “*Technical Skills and Training*”, which are a sequence of high quality career technical education courses that deliver concrete knowledge and skills, while emphasizing real world applications of academic learning. This work has been and is the role of districts, administrators, teachers, and Career Technical Education instructors

So now let’s talk about the remaining two pillars and how Expanded Learning programs can clearly contribute as part of the Linked Learning field.

Pillar #3 is “*Work-Based Learning*”, which consists of activities and experiences that provide students with greater potential career awareness through guest speakers, field trips, and career related mentoring, as well as learning in real world work places via job-shadowing, work experience, internships, and other professional skill building opportunities. This is a Linked Learning pillar where Expanded Learning Programs should definitely be involved. Traditionally Work-Based Learning has suffered from a lack of the

start-up capital and infrastructure needed to effectively implement a robust program, which has been the biggest barrier to student access to work-based learning opportunities. This explains why to date, work based learning programs have remained uncommon in traditional school settings. However this is not for a lack of demand. Where it has occurred, most districts and schools have relied on personal relationships between teachers and local employers. However few have the time or dedicated staff, to develop and nurture the employer relationships through outreach, recruitment, and orientation, let alone to place and monitor students. There is also no supply shortage of employers that see the value of work-based learning for preparing the future workforce, but are hindered mostly by a lack of coordination from school sites.

ASES K-8th grade programs and ASSETs 9th-12th grade programs are well positioned to be a significant resource in providing the supports and opportunities for Work-Based Learning especially in light of the traditional challenges that were just pointed out.

ASES programs potentially have a very significant role in the Work-Based Learning process. This can be accomplished through helping students discover their individual passions, and then coupling those passions with exposure to careers that would most likely serve to feed that passion. These very important and fundamental steps that if completed before entry into high school can help students and parents choose the best career pathway available to support the student as early as the 9th grade.

ASSETs programs by design are well suited to serve many different roles and in many different modalities of Work-Based Learning. First and foremost ASSETs programs are intended to support underserved youth to be successful in their college AND career journeys. Therefore it is an expected role to collaborate with the Instructional Day to provide coherent programming that now adds career supports for continued student success.

In addition, ASSETs programs are 21st Century Community Learning Centers, so there is a definite responsibility to engage many community partners and in this case business and industry partners specifically. As mentioned previously there has been a historic disconnect or divide between schools and businesses or industries where work-based learning opportunities are concerned, so there is a great need for the intermediary support an ASSETs program could provide.

Examples of recognized Work-Based Learning activities that Expanded Learning programs can support are the following:

“Guest Speakers” Both ASES and ASSETs programs are quite capable of providing this work-based learning activity for their students. In this activity the Guest Speakers address students regarding their career, employment opportunities in their industry, and the academic preparation required which may include types and levels of postsecondary education.

“Field Trips” This may be made possible for ASES programs with outside supplemental funding sources, and ASSETs programs may use Base Grant, Equitable Access Grant, or outside supplemental funding to pay for these trips. On Field Trip activities students go out

to visit various businesses and industries to serve as an introduction to those businesses and industries themselves learn about their specific operations, opportunities within that business or industry, and the academic preparation required which may include types and levels of postsecondary education.

“Job Shadowing”, “Career Related Mentoring”, “Work Experience Education”, and “Internships” All four of these work-based learning activities, while completely doable, will probably require or need either District liability support or approval, and depending on the activity they may also require or need outside supplemental funding.

Pillar #4 is *“Personalized Supports”*, which would consist of comprehensive support services that are embedded as a central component of a program of study that address the unique needs of individual students, and includes academic and socio-emotional supports to ensure equity of access, opportunity, and success. The great news is that is exactly what well performing ASES and ASSETs programs already do. Expanded Learning Programs are in fact a prepared and completely natural fit to support this pillar of Linked Learning. The relationships and involvement with the entire school community, especially with our students, that is required to be a successful ASES or ASSETs program has positioned us both figuratively and actually as the hub that can provide the personalized support services indicated.

However the potential contribution that Expanded Learning Programs have to offer is still virtually unknown in the Linked Learning field at this still early stage. Therefore we all need to be proactive in getting the word out to our Site and District leadership, and begin developing and providing supportive Work-Based Learning programming.

About the Author

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Bill is also a [Temescal Associate](#). He has conducted a number of training sessions on high school afterschool and was a presenter at one of the recent [How Kids Learn](#) Conferences focused on *Preparing Youth For Work And Career Success*.