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Partnering For Equity and Student Success

How partners in the Santa Clarita Valley, supported by the California Career Pathways Trust, collaborated to enhance their use of data, improve tools for counselors, increase dual enrollment on carefully structured pathways, and lay the groundwork for new community-based learning opportunities

By Career Ladders Project

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The growth that emerged from the Santa Clarita Valley's work under the California Career Pathways Trust was due to the immense dedication of counselors, staff, and leaders at both the College of the Canyons (COC) and the William S. Hart Union High School District. Career Ladders Project is grateful for the opportunity to support this work and learn from it.

In particular, we extend thanks to Harriet Happel, dean of career and technical education and integrative learning at COC, and Dr. Mariane Doyle, career and technical education director at the Hart district. We could not have played our role as facilitators or completed this report without the significant contributions of time and effort by numerous additional faculty, staff, administrators, and students, including Liz Shaker, a member of the counseling faculty at COC; Kari Soffa, director of outreach and school relations at COC; Nadia Cotti, career and college readiness supervisor at the Hart district; Sherry Cardenas, a guidance counselor at the Hart district; Holli Kalaleh, a career and college readiness specialist at the Hart district; and Jasmine Ruys, associate vice president for enrollment services at COC.

INTRODUCTION

Over four years, in an equity-driven collaboration funded by the California Career Pathways Trust (CCPT) and facilitated by [Career Ladders Project \(CLP\)](#), the Santa Clarita Community College District (which comprises the two campuses of [College of the Canyons \(COC\)](#)) and the [William S. Hart Union High School District \(Hart district\)](#) deepened their partnership, strengthened their career pathways, and moved closer to offering seamless transitions for students entering college.

This report explores the results of the partnership: how it worked; its goals; what set it apart from others across California; what professional development the partners offered for faculty, staff, and counselors in both districts; and how this work produced change in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Results of the partnership:

- Information about community college enrollment became central to counseling in both districts.
- Data about local employment now informs pathway development and career counseling.
- Counselors at both districts gained a better understanding of one another's work.
- Tools for counselors to support students exploring their options have improved.
- Dual enrollment in a pathway structure has increased.
- Work-based and community-based learning opportunities are being created.
- The districts continue to collaborate on counseling and pathway development.

Taken together, these results amount to a more cohesive approach to postsecondary education and career planning — in other words, to a culture shift. A firm commitment from leaders at both districts to support years of carefully planned hard work has meant that the Santa Clarita Valley as a whole benefits. Students, families, counselors, and the community had long shared the false assumption that attending a four-year college right after high school was the best option for everyone — and that most students in the area did this. Now, people across the Santa Clarita Valley recognize that attending the College of the Canyons can provide a competitive advantage on the path toward certificates, degrees, and career advancement.

Participants in all aspects of the CCPT work say it accelerated noticeably after a workshop in 2017 on local data about dual enrollment, advanced placement (AP) testing, and college enrollment. When participants, from counselors to vice presidents, anonymously compared the benefits of AP classes and dual enrollment, they came to a collective realization that white and Asian students were disproportionately likely to benefit from these programs, which smooth the transition to college. They also realized that nearly half of local high school graduates attend community college right after graduation and both districts could better support these students in their transition to college. They resolved to close racial, economic, and other achievement gaps and serve both college and high school students more effectively.

The partnership's commitment evolved to employ the following strategies:

- Using data about local students to inform both districts' student support services.
- Grounding pathway development and career advising in local labor market information.
- Being more inclusive in programming and student supports.
- Striving to increase dual enrollment as one means of smoothing the transition to college.

The culture shift that resulted from this partnership promises to improve upward mobility for thousands of local students.

Section One: Overview of the Project

A. The California Career Pathway Trust

Starting in 2014, with funding from the California Career Pathway Trust, regional consortia across the state worked to create or expand pathways for students in high school through postsecondary education and careers. The goals were to increase students' completion rates, build their skills, and support career advancement. The consortia included leaders from community colleges, K-12 districts, local businesses, and industry groups. The trust disbursed nearly \$500 million to these consortia in two rounds of competitive multiyear grants that ended in 2018 and 2019.

Many consortia made significant changes and advances, including laying the groundwork for redesign and improvements that continue today. Reporting in October

2018 on outcomes of the CCPT, [JFF found](#) that the grants offered essential motivation to work on career pathways and built interest in them. But JFF concluded that the CCPT time frame was too short and that the appearance of other similar programs reduced the CCPTs' momentum and impact. JFF also found that state agencies overseeing the work remained siloed, which limited collaboration at the regional level in some cases. In a second report on ways to sustain the work of CCPTs, [JFF noted](#) the importance of trust among partners and found that the majority of CCPT consortia did not achieve their three main objectives — to change regional mindsets about career technical education, establish communication among all stakeholders, and build regional infrastructure.

B. Santa Clarita Valley's work under the CCPT grant

The work in the Santa Clarita Valley, funded in the second round of the CCPT grantmaking, stands out as a successful exception to the statewide pattern. It was a collaboration of the William S. Hart Union High School District, which includes middle, high, and continuation schools, with the Santa Clarita Community College District, which includes the two campuses of the College of the Canyons. This CCPT partnership began in 2015 and concluded in June 2019.

The two districts have a longstanding collaborative relationship, and their work always benefits from being one-to-one, involving one whole school district and one whole community college district. In urban and suburban communities across California, K-12 districts may work with several community colleges, which in turn often belong to multiple districts, and community colleges may work with multiple K-12 districts.

A cross-functional team of administrators, counselors, and other leaders and staff from College of the Canyons, the Hart district, and several high schools joined forces to apply for the CCPT grant and form an executive team to lead the work. As required by the grant, the consortium also identified and began deploying funding from within the two districts' budgets to sustain the changes that resulted from their work.

Most tangibly, the CCPT grant work in the Santa Clarita Valley had four goals:

- Develop career pathways for students in ninth grade through community college across the districts.
- Implement career pathways that align with local jobs in sectors that are growing or emerging.
- Engage more of the region's students in career planning, and guide them to pathways that support their interests and goals.
- Sustain the changes, and ensure all students continue to benefit.

Santa Clarita's CCPT work evolved over the years. Overall, it included:

- Monthly executive team meetings.
- Quarterly professional development opportunities for counselors, including the introduction of college enrollment and completion data and local labor market information.
- Incorporating data into program creation and into continuing decision-making.
- Mapping four career pathways as a pilot, and using that model to map programs and pathways offered in schools across the Hart district.
- Rethinking the role of experiential learning, especially as labor markets change, including forming new joint committees of both districts with business representatives and piloting a new work-based learning approach.



C. The role of Career Ladders Project and the sources for this report

This report is based on a variety of records and documents created during four years of work by the Santa Clarita Valley partners and by Career Ladders Project; on CLP's own experiences facilitating meetings and coaching the partners; and on interviews with members of the CCPT executive team from both districts and with students who participated in 2019 in the community-based learning pilot at College of the Canyons.

CLP helped the partners build relationships and mutual trust, determine their areas of focus, and begin planning. CLP

facilitated monthly meetings of the executive committee and numerous quarterly workshops and professional development events, including a week-long career pathway mapping event, and CLP coached team members on meeting facilitation. CLP also offered workshops on pathway mapping and other professional development topics. Throughout this project, CLP has offered a sympathetic ear (and sometimes a shoulder to cry on) to the educators who have dedicated themselves to shifting their institutions to focus on the student experience and equity.

Section Two: High Points and Outcomes of CCPT in the Santa Clarita Valley

A. High points of Santa Clarita Valley's CCPT work

In the first two years of the project, 2015-2017, facilitated by CLP, the consortium partners identified and produced needed resources, coordinated mapping efforts, and met monthly to update the maps and ensure progress continued. They started by identifying partners in this work: counselors and teaching faculty at the two districts; deputy sector navigators; members of the business community; and administrators in both districts. They led workshops with instructional faculty from both districts to map, align, and identify gaps in pathways and curriculum. They met monthly with pathway teams and administrators to identify areas for development and support, and to share best practices in work-based learning and dual enrollment.

Aiming to create four model pathways, the consortium did the following:

1. Offered professional development for teaching faculty about components of a career pathway.
2. Facilitated conversations between the community college and the Santa Clarita Valley's high schools.
3. Offered professional development for counselors about building career pathways.
4. Coached participants to develop and map their own career pathways.



Harriet Happel

“Remember why we’re doing this: It’s because we want our students to succeed; we want all our students to have access, and we want to be building a workforce that employers are willing to hire. It’s about access, equity, and success.”

— Harriet Happel, dean of Career and Technical Education, College of the Canyons

During this period, members of the individual career pathway teams developed a rapport and common understandings of one another’s institutional challenges, bureaucracies, and systems. CLP created agendas and facilitated meetups of collaborators on individual career pathways. In these meetings, the large career pathway maps became a focal point as the collaborators annotated them with sticky notes about necessary edits and changes in programs. CLP then updated the maps and recommended next steps to the executive team. This process created a consistent and productive exchange of information and ideas, and it allowed the executive team to understand the needs of each career pathway and provide timely solutions. It also meant that, at larger professional development events, the many participants in the Santa Clarita Valley’s mapping process could share their progress and focus on learning about promising practices across California and then use this information to further update their maps.

A “learning summit” in December 2017 was a turning point. The day began with a discussion of national data on college enrollment and completion. The group then reviewed similar data on graduates of the area’s six high schools and alternative schools (please see the box on the following page). A frank but anonymous discussion of the local data, supported by a real-time online feedback tool, took everything into higher gear. Participants responded to a series of questions anonymously, online, using their phones or laptops, and the results were shared instantly on a screen in the room.

Members of the executive team say they and others across the district saw clearly, together, that students in various demographic groups were not participating equally in academic and career advancement opportunities. In general, Asian American and white students were overrepresented, and Latinx and African American students and members of other traditionally underserved groups were underrepresented. That recognition spurred discussion

about how both districts could be equitable and could more effectively support students as they discover their interests and investigate their best options.

Participants talked about how they could strengthen existing counseling and support services and develop career pathways that would better align with job opportunities in the area, smooth the transition to college, and better support students exploring their postsecondary education and career options. This led to a shared, equity-driven understanding of how increasing dual enrollment, improving articulation, increasing access to AP, and clarifying career technical education opportunities, combined, can improve upward mobility for all students in Santa Clarita Valley.

A workshop in February 2018 focused on student learning outcomes and how to meet the state’s workforce needs within five years. College of the Canyons administrators presented the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) “Vision for Success,” which sets dramatic goals for equity and upward mobility. Briefly, the CCCCCO’s goals are to:

- Increase the share of students who reach their goals and the share who transfer to University of California or California State University campuses.
- Reduce the number of units students accumulate.
- Increase the share of career technical education students who get jobs in their fields of study.
- Reduce gaps in all the above measures by race, family income, and other characteristics of underrepresented groups by 40% in five years (and close them in 10 years).
- Reduce regional gaps in the above measures.

Participants learned about setting criteria for student learning, aligning those criteria with Guided Pathways, and developing rubrics to evaluate student progress toward those outcomes.

Another turning point came in March 2018, with the presentation of local and regional labor market information. Participants considered how they could use it in guiding students along the region’s four updated pathways (advanced

manufacturing, computer networking, construction technologies, and professional and public services), and they discussed what data would be useful to share with students and their families to help students focus on economic success and mobility. In addition to job outlook data from the federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) and the [California Career Zone](#), there are helpful regional sources like California's [Employment Development Department](#), the [CCCCO Strong Workforce Partnership](#), and the [CalPLUS LaunchPad](#), which offers yearly data on jobs, wages, and other outcomes reported by California community college students who pursued specific programs and pathways.

Additional workshops covered:

- College of the Canyons's plan for work-based learning.
- Managing information (using CATEMA, the CCC system's web platform for managing CTE course information) for better "articulation," the process for students to get college credit for courses they take during high school.

- Improving articulation agreements by understanding the core competencies students must have to be successful in the workplace and labor market — and by clarifying desired outcomes and standardizing course assessments.

In a week of pathway mapping in October 2018, led by CLP, more than 70 faculty members from College of the Canyons and the Hart district collaborated to create or update the Santa Clarita Valley's pilot pathways. With particular attention to automation across the American economy, participants discussed how education will need to change to prepare students for the world of work. Work-based learning, a key strategy for exposing students to all sorts of demands they'll face in the world of work and for providing technical skills training, will increasingly be woven into the region's career pathways. Together, the participants aimed for pathways that (1) accelerate student progress, (2) build on students' previous accomplishments and are "stackable," and (3) allow students to step in and out of college and employment.

College enrollment in Santa Clarita Valley

The local data that workshop participants reviewed in December 2017 showed that white and Asian American students were disproportionately likely to take advanced placement tests and that smaller than expected shares of dual enrollees were Latinx and other students of color in 2016-2017.

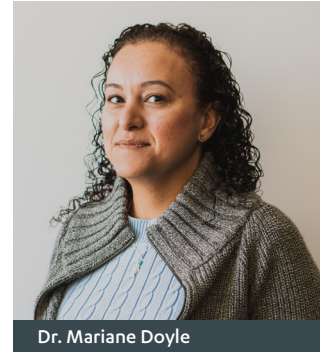
- Of all Hart students, 38% were white, 39% were Latinx, 6% were Asian or Asian American, 4% were Filipino, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 4% were African American (Source: College of the Canyons). But ...
- Of dually enrolled Hart students, 39% were white, 28% were Latinx, 20% were Asian or Asian American, 12% were Filipino, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and 4% were African American. And...
- Of Hart students taking AP tests, 42% were white, 27% were Latinx, 21% were Asian or Asian American, 3% were African American, and 7% were of two or more races or ethnicities.

Critically, workshop participants also learned that nearly two-thirds of Santa Clarita Valley high school graduates eventually attend community college.

- About 42% of Hart district high school graduates go straight to College of the Canyons, and 5% go to other community colleges (based on 2014-2015 data)
- Just 5.4% to 7.6% of local high school graduates in 2013 to 2016 went straight to a UC from the Santa Clarita Valley.
- About 60% of Hart graduates study at College of the Canyons at some point (Source: "Ad Hoc Report").

B. Outcomes of Santa Clarita Valley’s CCPT work

Members of the Santa Clarita CCPT consortium’s executive committee said the districts’ joint history was helpful. Dr. Mariane Doyle, director of career technical and adult services for the Hart district, noting a tradition of mutual respect among education leaders across the Santa Clarita Valley, highlighted the structural impact of CCPT. The grant required the districts to form a regional consortium, it supported the consortium with funding, and it enabled the involvement of CLP as thought partners and facilitators. “We would have gotten there, but not as quickly,” Doyle said. “Having an outside person alongside enabled the conversation to move forward, and it provided very busy, harried people the support they needed to get the work done.”



Dr. Mariane Doyle

Executive committee members said their joint efforts under the CCPT grant led to five significant changes:

1. **Effective use of data** about local employment and data about local community college enrollment, putting this information at the center of counseling at all levels.
2. **Streamlined collaboration** on pathway development and career counseling, and improved understanding by counselors at both campuses of one another’s work.
3. **Improved tools** such as pathway maps, data, and a common language among counselors, enabling counselors to better support students.
4. **Increased dual enrollment**, more intentionally aligned with career pathways.
5. **New potential for work-based learning.**

1. Effective use of data

Several CCPT participants said they had seen school-specific and regional information about college enrollment and employment before the learning summit in December 2017. But hearing the data from an outside facilitator like CLP and using the data to support an equity-driven analysis of dual enrollment, AP participation in the Hart district, and career preparation made it easier to create a common understanding and move forward.

The discussion of how to align career pathways, make counseling and other student supports more effective, and improve transitions to college and career technical education created a collective sense of urgency that day about equity. It

gave the participants an important impetus to improve career pathway maps and align their programs. And it led counselors across the Santa Clarita Valley to broaden their focus from four-year colleges to include — and support — the options that it turned out most students were pursuing. Now, instead of feeling stigmatized for attending community college, students are more likely to be proud of it and, importantly, to be on a structured pathway that helps them reach their goals faster and at lower cost.

It’s not just that they have more data, participants said, but that everyone uses it more. The labor market information — and the professional development about it — validated

changes in how counselors advise students and how they speak about the region’s career pathways. Now, students better understand what’s required to enter a pathway, making access more equitable. And they have more relevant and equitable support to complete the transition to college and stay on a pathway. And that is expected to lead to success for more students from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

“The more we can bring students into the workplace, the more opportunity they have to be part of their communities and understand how to give back and how to participate in democracy, and that also helps improve equity.”

— Dr. Patty Robinson, faculty director of Civic and Community Engagement Initiatives at College of the Canyons

2. Streamlined collaboration between the districts on pathways

There had been some concurrent enrollment and early versions of the career pathways in the Santa Clarita Valley. But CCPT executive committee members said the districts would not have moved as effectively or as fast to make them more equitable if not for the CCPT funding and the facilitation and relationship-building that it enabled. Kari Soffa, director of outreach and school relations at College of the Canyons, said the process of creating and polishing the career pathways, learning more about the student experience, and collaborating to make improvements helped to build bridges among student services staff in the many schools and offices in both districts.



Kari Soffa

Continuing collaboration between the districts on pathway development and career counseling has led them to plan more joint activities. These include a joint career fair (which draws more potential employers than would duplicative events put on separately by each district) and joint industry advisory meetings with business contacts. Career pathways are positive choices for students. And, now that counselors in both districts have a clear picture of how to support students' decision-making about courses, career pathways including the Guided Pathways redesign — paralleled at all California community colleges — are more effective.

3. Improved tools for counselors

Counselors and administrators involved in Santa Clarita Valley's CCPT work said career pathways maps have improved the services students receive. "We were asking students to be in pathways," Soffa said. "But the counselors who were supposed to be helping students didn't know what their options were. Now we're having career conversations so they know why they're going to college. That's empowering students." Now, Soffa said, "Students know that if they take these classes in dual enrollment [while in high school] and then take this class and this class at COC, there's a certification, and they're on a COC pathway to further education and career advancement."

"We have to be realistic about where student progress on a pathway starts," said former counselor Nadia Cotti, career and college readiness supervisor.

"It starts with us pushing the button to get the kid into that class. So, regardless of the strength of the curriculum, or the strength of the teacher, or the strength of the program, that student has to end up in that class. If counselors understand it better, then they are able to guide students to access those opportunities."



Nadia Cotti

Sherry Cardenas, a counselor at Golden Valley High School and a member of the executive team, appreciates that counselors were included from the beginning in Santa Clarita's CCPT work. "This group was really intentional about creating the champion circle so that any professional development that we were creating, we worked with counselors and support staff to co-create it."



Sherry Cardenas

In-depth, joint professional development also ensured that the districts use a common language to talk about counseling and options for the region's students and work together to pursue equity. "The biggest barrier to a first-generation college student is having the belief and the confidence that they can even go to college," said Happel. "And maps help give them and their parents the confidence that there really is a viable way for them to do something that's not been done in that family before. At the end of the day, it really is about equity."

Work-based learning pilot pierces wall between worlds of academics and work

In providing students with opportunities for project-based learning at local employers, College of the Canyons (COC) is making internships and other work-based learning more equitable, and it is training instructors in more innovative pedagogy.

Well beyond the common approaches of sending K-12 students on field trips or requiring them to fulfill service hours, offering this kind of experiential learning for credit is more substantive and avoids age restrictions that often arise with unpaid internships. It also helps students acquire the communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills and develop the work-based creativity that distinguish humans from machines.

Working with two major local employers, NASA's Jet Propulsion Labs (JPL) and the City of Santa Clarita, students interviewed in May 2019 designed, built, and launched prototype rocket payloads, and they proposed strategies for recharging local aquifers.

The courses, piloted in 2018-2019 by COC, put industry and government agencies in the role of "co-educators" at a point when they can most effectively offer students both practical knowledge and current, marketable skills that they'll need to succeed at work.

"Addressing problems that a city faces helps students discover their voice and begin to take ownership as members of the community," said Dean Harriet Happel.

Using these real-world challenges and engaging students for solutions raised students' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Clifford Alvarez said the course raised his expectations of himself: "I didn't think I was smart enough before."

"You're like, 'Wow, I did that,' and then, 'OK, what's next?'" said Coulson Aguirre, who was especially grateful that, in addition to providing experience, his work with JPL fit with his need to work to help support his family.

Students also learned and applied technical skills in a context that connected with a career. "It gave me more stability and new skills — and hope, a reality check that I shouldn't be afraid to pursue my dreams," said Caroline Trujillo, 23, who expected to earn an associate degree in 2020 and hopes to become an electrical engineer.



Students Caroline Trujillo and Kimmi Le



Students Coulson Aguirre, Clifford Alvarez, and Arthur Berberyan

And the region's California State University campus, in Northridge, has taken note. Faculty and staff from CSUN are enthusiastic members of a group working with COC to scale work-based learning across the region in 2019-2020, and take it to the K-12 level the following year.

"Unpaid internships present a serious equity issue, but all education leads to a career because everyone eventually needs to find a job," Happel said. "So the question is how we integrate reality into the curriculum."

4. Increased dual enrollment

More of the region's students are now receiving early college credits as a result of the work, through improvements in articulation (college credit for high school classes) and through dual enrollment (when high school students take college courses). CCPT leaders said this increase stems

directly from the work to clarify and align career pathways. The number of Hart high school students dually enrolled at College of the Canyons rose 52% from 2014 to 2018 (from 886 to 1,348).

5. New potential for community-based learning

As an outgrowth of this work, COC piloted a new approach to workplace learning, replacing unpaid internships and other inequitable structures with community-based courses. The plan for 2019-2020 includes increasing its breadth and capacity "so it trickles down to K-12," said Happel. The 2018-2019 pilot included courses that College of the Canyons offered in cooperation with NASA's Jet Propulsion Labs and with the City of Santa Clarita (please see the box on the previous page). In 2019-2020, College of the Canyons' MakerSpace will also include a graphic design and media lab where students who are developing their graphic design and

media skills can learn at the same time about managing a sole proprietorship as a freelancer.

Dr. Patty Robinson, faculty director of civic and community engagement initiatives at COC, noted significant side benefits from work-based learning: "The more we can bring students into the workplace, the more opportunity they have to be part of their communities and understand how to give back and how to participate in democracy, and that also helps improve equity."

Section Three: Lessons for the Field From the Santa Clarita CCPT

The success of the Santa Clarita consortium offers clear lessons for other college-to-K-12 partnerships developing and implementing pathways. Here's what participants recommend:

- Understand students' course-taking patterns and where they actually enroll in college: With accurate, local data, everyone in the community can collaborate to offer students the best possible counseling, courses, and other opportunities.
- Review and apply data on the local labor market: When counselors and the community have accurate data about local jobs, they can create more suitable pathways and more effectively set students up for career advancement.
- Co-create professional development materials with members of the intended audience: They'll know best what will be effective, and they'll know about work rules that require some on campus to use their time differently from others.
- Deploy a truly cross-functional team with a cross-functional subset to serve as leadership: Santa Clarita's

intentionally crafted team ensured that project meetings were consistent and relationships were strong. The structure also helped the partners to clarify who would focus on which part of the project, from transition services to work-based learning.

- Nurture strong relationships: "The relationships have been the top priority, and everything falls under that," said Happel. That includes relationships with businesses and the community, and it requires good communication all around.
- Continue intentional communication and professional development in order to sustain change: Cementing the changes will require clear communication about how the districts work together, what they do, and why.

"You have to keep reminding people of the reason why we're doing this," Happel said. "It's because we want our students to succeed; we want all our students to have access, and we want to be building a workforce that employers are willing to hire. It's about access, equity, and success."

CONCLUSION

The collaboration between William S. Hart Union High School District and Santa Clarita Community College District shows what a deep and committed partnership can accomplish. It designed career pathways that span and connect high school and college, it included data and input from local businesses, it increased communication between the two districts and created tools that facilitate direct collaboration between districts, and it produced professional development for instructors.

The combined result is a set of career pathways that are relevant for both students and the community and that include more focused and intentional support for students. The partnership's grant-funded work also led to an increase in dual enrollment and to creation of a promising community-based learning program slated to reach across the district in 2019-2020 and then into the region's K-12 schools. This work has shifted how the community at large views community college. Now community members increasingly understand that the college offers an economical and advantageous way to earn credentials or transition to a four-year institution.

The partners developed a way of continuing to work together that includes basing decisions on data and collaborating around professional development and tools. They built a structure to support both of those threads. And they each have a deeper understanding of their partner institution's parameters, timelines, requirements, and aspirations.



Career Ladders Project collaborates with community colleges and their partners to build capacity for equity-minded redesign. We research, demonstrate, and elevate promising practices. And, based on our work, we offer policy recommendations to help advance student-centered reform.

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