



October 2016

Building Bridges to College and Careers Through Public Education and Workforce System Collaboration:

Lessons from California's Youth Manufacturing Skills Pilot

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Project

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2013, the California Workforce Development Board (State Board) granted funds to four partnerships of local workforce development boards (Local Boards) and educational providers to design and implement innovative pilot programs that “bridge” 18-24 year olds to careers in advanced manufacturing. The grants leveraged the strengths of the public education and workforce systems to equip underrepresented youth with industry skills, credentials, and hands-on work experience, developing the future workforce vital to our State’s economic growth. This brief describes effective practices tested by these bridge programs and the State Board that address the needs of industry and of students. It also summarizes emergent policy recommendations to strengthen and expand bridge opportunities for California’s youth.

California Community Colleges have been at the forefront of national efforts to improve college access and foster student advancement along pathways into high-demand careers. Bridge programs funded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) such as the Career Advancement Academies (CAAs)¹ have demonstrated the effectiveness of models that incorporate several key elements:

- Targeted recruitment and enrollment of low-income youth with barriers to college success
- Cohort-based learning communities
- Contextualized basic skills curriculum
- Career technical training, incorporating work readiness and career guidance
- Academic and personal support services
- Connections to career pathway education and employment
- Active engagement of employers in program design and support
- Leverage of funding and other resources from the colleges, Local Boards and community organizations

Through the Youth Manufacturing Skills Pilot (YMSP), the State Board proposed to build upon and elevate promising models such as the CAAs to a heightened

level of collaboration between the State’s public education and workforce systems. The intentional leveraging of these systems’ resources, capacities and expertise may hold the key to scaling and sustaining bridge programs, building a training pipeline vital to the future of growth industries such as advanced manufacturing.

Lessons for Local Boards and Educational Providers

The four sites selected by the State Board to participate in the YMSP² provide examples of deep and sustained Local Board-community college and – K12 district bridge partnerships, demonstrated by their collaborative recruitment, co- case management, employer engagement, curriculum development, and braiding of funding. Through a Community of Practice supported by the State Board and the Career Ladders Project³, participants in the pilot shared, documented and discussed the following lessons for practitioners.

Ready the region for collaboration. Successful bridge program implementation depended upon structures for on-going communication, coordination of services, data-sharing, trouble-shooting and program improvement. YMSP partners aligned intentionally around regional labor market and job-seeker need, employer engagement priorities, and sector strategies to identify common goals. They then put in place shared tools, forms, project management structures, communication norms, and meeting schedules necessary to deliver on their common vision.

Collaborate on student recruitment and selection.

Finding the best fit between a large population of high-need youth and a rigorous, sector-specific career training program was no easy task. YMSP partners worked in tandem to define program criteria, message

2 The State Board granted YMSP funds to: Alameda County Workforce Development Board/Laney College; San Bernardino Workforce Development Board/Chaffee and San Bernardino Valley Colleges and TET (a community-based, non-profit educational provider); South Bay Workforce Development Board/El Camino College; and Stanislaus County Alliance Worknet/Modesto Junior College/Ceres High School.

3 The Career Ladders Project (<http://www.careerladdersproject.org>) works state-wide to provide educational and career advancement opportunities for Californians through research, policy initiatives, and strategic assistance to employer, education and workforce development partners.

1 <http://www.careerladdersproject.org/caa4/>

opportunities in advanced manufacturing, and spread the word about the bridge. College faculty visited the Local Boards' One-Stop Career Centers to co-lead orientations. Local Boards rallied community-based youth services contractors to identify and screen candidates, and worked with employers to select appropriate industry-recognized skills assessment tools, such as WorkKeys. Local Board partners assumed responsibility for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) eligibility screening and enrollment, while Local Boards and educational providers together identified options for youth not selected for the program, including other Local Board-contracted Youth Services and Adult Education programs.

Tap industry connections to co-design curriculum.

Local Boards and educational providers bring to the table different industry partnerships and capacities to convene employers. Because strong bridge programs must identify workplace competencies, design work-based learning opportunities, and prioritize national certifications through varied means of industry engagement, the State Board encouraged YMSP partners to creatively tap relationships cultivated by both systems to involve standing advisory bodies, faculty connections, internship sites and professional volunteer mentors in designing and implementing the bridge. As training needs were identified, the Local Boards and educators worked together to develop a responsive program. Existing high school and community college curricula were adapted to incorporate core competencies of top concern to employers. Short, intensive survey courses were developed to allow young students to explore their interests and learn about pathways to credentials and careers. In one case, the college designed a short-term, not-for-credit, customized training program informed by local employers, and will incorporate credit-by-exam to accelerate progress toward credential attainment. At another site, workplace readiness content was delivered by the Local Board, sequenced with academic and technical education delivered by the college. Each of the sites responded to employer demand by integrating a national industry-recognized certification into program instruc-

tion.⁴ Colleges played a critical role in ensuring that students received college credit for bridge participation and/or were launched on a credit-bearing career training pathway offering stackable credentials.

Strengthen work-based learning through Local Board participation.

Bridge students benefited from a continuum of work-based learning opportunities that linked them directly to industry professionals and workplaces. YMSP sites involved their Local Boards' Youth Councils in recruiting employers to hire youth interns, in one case structuring cohort-based internships with direct ties to classroom instruction. Intern preparation and retention support were provided by college faculty and Local Board-funded counselors alike, so that issues were addressed early on with an eye to both student and business needs. The Local Boards also helped to problem-solve and facilitate communication and partnership among companies, unions and educators, for example by assuming liability for interns as employer-of-record. As employer relationships with the bridge programs deepen, Local Board and college partners will work together to facilitate faculty externships, so that connections between classroom and work-based learning may be strengthened.

Build a co-case management model of student support.

Both the State Board and the California Community Colleges recognize the need for wrap-around services to foster successful training and employment outcomes; yet both the education and workforce development systems are limited in their staff capacity and bandwidth to deliver comprehensive counseling and supports. The YMSP sites looked creatively at ways to leverage the strengths of both systems and their case management personnel. The colleges provide campus navigation and enrollment assistance, and learning communities such as the CAAs employ coordinators to better connect students to college services and supports. On the Local Board side, counselors are resourced at the One-Stop Career Centers and under contracts with community-based

⁴ The YMSP sites integrated preparation for the NIMS (2 sites), NCCER and MSSC industry certifications.

What is a Community of Practice?

The Career Ladders Project (CLP) worked with the State Board to foster dialogue and learning among Local Boards, community colleges, and their partners over the life of the YMSP. Teams from each site participated in three in-person convenings, regular conference calls, individual check-in calls, and site visits, which incorporated

discussion with students, faculty, employers, counselors, community-based partners, and others critical to project implementation. CLP documented these activities, continuously synthesizing key themes and sharing lessons back to the sites and with the State Board. Designed not only to impart expertise but rather to tap the “wisdom in the

room,” Community of Practice activities fostered peer sharing, problem-solving and prioritization of issues to be addressed through policy and systems change. For the State Board and other State entities, this cost-effective means of lifting up lessons from the field provides invaluable data and insights to inform system improvement and field-building.

service providers. A strong feature of the YMSP sites is the collaboration of counselors representing these two systems, who worked together with the common goal of bridge student completion and success. The Local Boards’ case managers came to the college campus to meet with students and connect them to internships and employment resources. Community-based organizations were involved to address barriers and deliver culturally competent support services. College counselors maintained close communication with State Board-funded personnel and extended their presence to the internship sites. One college’s addition of peer mentors built up the support structure to motivate and inform students about the new experience of college. Looking ahead, one Local Board-college partnership aims to smooth the transition to apprenticeship for bridge program participants through coordinated case management, counseling and support services.

Braid funding for program delivery and sustainability. Flexible discretionary dollars from the State Board enabled YMSP sites to experiment with innovative models of collaborative service delivery for this high-priority population. With an eye toward future sustainability and expansion, the sites were encouraged to propose ways of leveraging multiple funding streams across systems, and approaches varied. One site chose not to co-enroll YMSP participants in WIA in order to spread resources over a larger population. Other sites creatively allocated in-school youth, out-of-

school youth, and adult WIA funds, and used WIA stipends for internships, Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for classroom training, and On-the-Job Training dollars for post-training job placements. The State Board’s YMSP grant dollars were used to pay for innovations such as peer mentors and worksite field trips, as well as for costs of student fees, uniforms and tools. Each of the sites identifies on-going need for flexible funds and looks to grant programs such as CAA, California Career Pathways Trust (CCPT), California Partnership Academies (CPA), and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) initiative. YMSP also stirred interest in identifying new and creative ways of braiding existing funding across the public education and workforce systems.

Recommendations for State Policy-Makers

The YMSP is a strategic investment by the State Board in collaborative training programs that bridge youth into priority industry sectors. By establishing a Community of Practice whereby grantees shared successes and challenges of bridge implementation, the State Board enabled the documentation of lessons for the field and recommendations for state-level policy and systems change. The Community of Practice identified five priority recommendations for State policy-makers such as the State Board and the CCCCCO.

- **Facilitate Local Board-community college partnerships to deliver in-demand training.** Recognition of community college programs on the Employment Training Provider List (ETPL) will facilitate the strategic use of the Local Boards' training resources to move young adults into high-demand, high-growth industry sectors. While California has stated its intent to list all approved community college programs automatically on the ETPL, guidance and streamlined systems are needed to realize this goal. Local Boards' purchase of cohort-based training may also be expanded, though competitive bid procurement policies can be a barrier to Local Board-college training co-design.

- **Clarify or simplify rules concerning blended or braided funding of community college course sections.** Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), public workforce and community college funds may be used to flexibly serve WIOA-enrolled and non-enrolled, in-school and out-of-school youth, individuals and established cohorts—but legal and practical guidance on these practices is needed. Other funding sources, such as CalWORKs and federal grants, may also be leveraged. Community colleges statewide are positioned to scale WIOA-supported bridge offerings of benefit to the highest-need students, and input from the field on innovative financing models may help inform future policy directives and cross-system contracting.

- **Help to identify national certifications recognized by California employers.** Local Boards and community colleges such as those involved in YMSP have developed models to support attainment of industry-recognized certifications; however, not all hold value in California. In manufacturing, for example, multiple certificates are available nationally, yet the majority of California employers do not require or encourage them among their employees. State- and regional-level data on acceptance of these certifications may help to inform the design of career pathway programs best-suited to California businesses and job-seekers. Furthermore, statewide employer engagement may foster agreement upon standards and credentials, help to align training offerings with these standards, and raise awareness of the roles Local Boards and community colleges can play in preparing credentialed workers. Streamlining the curriculum approval process will also facilitate the design



and delivery of training responsive to local and statewide needs and standards.

- **Incentivize Local Board/community college coordination of outreach, assessment, enrollment, and retention support for bridge participants.** YMSP sites have demonstrated the value of intentional coordination around the achievement of common career-related goals for youth. Similar lessons are emerging from the CCCCO's CAA demonstration sites. The State Board and the CCCCO have an opportunity to align policies and regulations to scale on-the-ground collaboration at the local and regional levels, and to engage employer champions in statewide marketing to raise awareness of training programs among potential students and businesses.

- **Explore ways to scale work-based learning opportunities.** Experience at the YMSP sites and across the state shows that available public work experience subsidies -- such as colleges' Cooperative Work Experience Education and Local Board and TANF Work Experience programs -- are not always used in strategic alignment with regional sector strategies or to further the goals of evidence-based approaches such as bridge programs. YMSP sites identified this as an area for further discovery and guidance on the effective braiding of funding streams. In addition, the State Board and other state partners may develop a common definition of and standards for work-based learning to encourage strategic alignment of investments and deeper employer involvement.

The State Board is positioned to contribute to growing national and state dialogue on the promise of collaborative solutions to our country's workforce development challenges. In the Midwest, the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative promoted the commitment of



senior state leadership to strengthening alignment and collaboration across the adult education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. Similarly, the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways (AQCP) has engaged ten states—including California—in defining a framework for aligned quality career pathway systems at the state and local levels, with criteria including a shared vision, collaborative leveraging of resources, implementation of supportive policies, and use of shared data and measures. In California, in addition to the CAAs, the \$500 million CCPT is incentivizing collaborative expansion of work-based instruction for high school and community college students; and these and pilots such as YMSP are demonstrating key principles and practices that complement and can inform statewide systems reform and investment.

The State Board's commitment to policy and systems change to encourage innovative workforce training pilots

may change the playing field in California while setting examples for state leaders across the nation. By issuing guidance around the allowable and strategic use of available public funding spanning education, workforce and other systems, the State Board may provide practitioners with direction on the most appropriate, targeted use of discretionary WIOA dollars for program innovation and responsiveness to industry. And by continuing to listen to stories and lessons from Local Board-education partnerships in the field, the State Board may contribute to a body of knowledge about bringing the strengths of our public systems to bear on young people's career success.

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The Career Ladders Project works with community colleges—and their K12, university, community, work-force and employer partners—to improve educational and career outcomes. We foster these improvements through research, policy change and strategic assistance to colleges and their partners.

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