

Case Study: Review of Student Success for 2009 Senior Cohort from a Linked Learning High School

Introduction

Research conducted for Linked Learning Academy graduates, and other related programs (such as Partnership Academies), provides convincing evidence that students who participate in these programs graduate from high school at higher rates, have generally taken the courses necessary for college (A-G, for example), and declare interest and intent on attending college. For this preliminary case study, we wanted to determine the extent to which a cohort from a successful Linked Learning Academy had actually achieved a measure of student success in college, as measured by retention in courses, persistence through two years of college, with grades and course-taking patterns that would prepare them for a career and/or transfer to a four year college.

Research Question

How did students, who graduated from a successful Linked Learning Academy, perform when they went to community college? What was their course-taking pattern? To what extent were they able to maintain the direction and momentum created in their Linked Learning Academy, toward success in college and career? What seemed to be barriers to student success? What might be some ways could both the high school and the college that received the students improve the students' success rates?

Methodology:

In its work, CLP has frequently adopted a “participatory action research” case study method, in order to engage practitioners in a reflective inquiry process. We identified a local high school which had recently been certified as meeting Linked Learning certification, which had previously been a California Partnership Academy, and which had excellent contact with their students, both in high school, and after high school. This Health Science and Medical Technology high school had about 250 students, and their graduating classes were about 60. Prior to graduation, they interviewed each student so that they could determine whether and where students planned to attend college. We then arranged for a transcript analysis of the graduating class of 2009, at the local community college, as well as the local CSU. We arranged an MOU that would allow the partner institutions to share the data for research purposes that would improve their ability to educate students. We tracked students through local two and four year colleges, recognizing that some students might have attended colleges beyond the scope of the local analysis, or had entered work or other non-academic settings after high school.

Findings

From the 60 students in the class of 2009, 54 met graduation requirements (CAHSEE plus credits completed in an A-G sequence). Because the school had an excellent college counselor, 48 of the students initiated applications to CSU (however, only 33 completed applications, and 15 were admitted). 17 said they would be attending a four year college; 33 stated they would be attending a community college, and 3 stated that would be going to work or Job Corps (2 did not declare).

We did not track those who attended UC, CSU beyond CSUEB, or private colleges, or those who attended a community college beyond the local ones, but we were able to locate 39 students who attended a Peralta community college, and 4 who attended CSUEB (by interview we know at least 2 others attended UC). Our primary interest was with those who attended the local community college system, and we found that:

- 72% placed into **remedial Math**; 69% into **remedial English**; 0 at transfer level in Math; 3 at transfer level in English
- 35 enrolled **part time at least one semester**
- 16 left after first year, 13 after second year: none received an AA, and **7 persisted beyond four semesters, meaning that they were still actively pursuing their college goal.**
- 30 **earned GP less than 2.0** (financial aid minimum)

The high school staff and the community college counselor, reviewed the data together, and shared their chagrin at the evidence from the data that there was much more to do, to ensure student success in college, beyond high school. They agreed with the following:

- Excellent high school graduation rate, and high quality teaching staff, with excellent student support, but **insufficient knowledge of college course content**, college systems, procedures, or career pathway design
- Frequent **placement in remedial courses**, and remedial courses evident for several semesters
- Attendance at multiple sites with **little contact with counselors** or student support services
- **Lots of withdrawals** and multiple efforts to pass courses, but successful students use Learning Center
- Limited college **teaming of academic and CTE courses** to improve relevance of college courses
- Students **had limited “social capital”** to navigate often impersonal college bureaucracy, since many were students who would not have even come to college had it not been for the support of the high school

Next Steps

The high school principal and key faculty, and the college counselor and a faculty team met to review the data and agreed to find ways to improve student success, especially for the 2012 cohort. Preliminary proposals were:

- regularly **share student level data** to more quickly adjust to needs of student cohorts
- work with students before they leave senior year, especially to **prepare for placement examinations**, and design instructional plans tailored to their interests and level of success in high school
- **create integrated and efficient pathways** for students to transition from secondary to postsecondary education
- develop **professional development opportunities for CTE and general education faculty** and counselors to collaborate around academies and programs of study

High school and community college faculty would meet together to review course content, expectations, placement examination content, as well as discuss 2012 cohort. The community college has offered to help prep students on the placement examination in the spring, to provide tours of allied health departments for students, and to offer spots in their summer bridge program to facilitate smoother transition to college in the fall.

CLP, in conjunction and with the support of this high school/community college partnership, has presented this small case study in three settings to date (a conference of community college faculty and administrators, a convening of Linked Learning partners, and a community college leadership cabinet), and it has been received with great interest. Others have acknowledged that the findings are not surprising, but that the courage of the high school and college presenters in confronting the data in this way was “amazing.” At the same time, CLP recognizes that this is a very limited and possibly unique single case study; therefore, it has sought out other sites where the sharing of student level transcript data could be replicated; two other sites have expressed interest and begun to collect and share their own data. The response has assured us that student level data analysis, shared among professionals in the spirit of thoughtful inquiry, has the ability to change and adapt practices on behalf of student success.