



Facilitating the School-to-Work-Transition: Advancing Work-Based Learning Experiences in the Oakland Unified School District

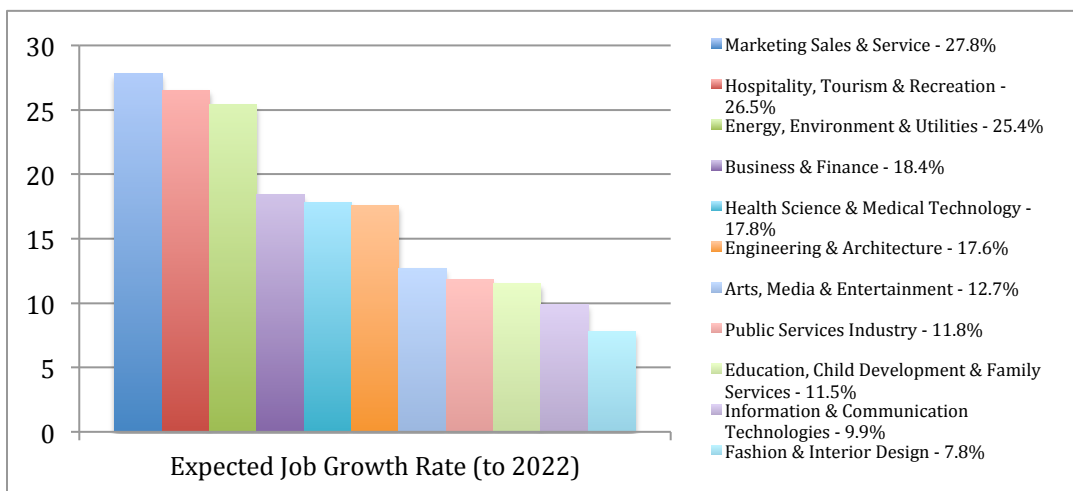
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ISSUE: Oakland Unified School District’s (OUSD) Linked Learning program is part of a broader, statewide initiative to ensure students’ transition from school to work. Already deemed a success for increasing high school graduation rates, questions remain over how best to improve and maximize students’ connection to employers. OUSD’s Exploring College Careers and Community Options (ECCCO) program is the primary conduit by which students are connected to work-based learning experiences. The passing of Measure N in 2014 persuaded OUSD officials to move toward a district-wide ECCCO program to increase the number of participating students, a shift that will necessitate more employers to participate and more high quality, high touch internships. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) seeks to know how their regional work and connections can best support OUSD Linked Learning and all students’ connection to employers.

METHODS: Data was collected through a ground-up approach: (1) interviews with OUSD officials; (2) 2013-2014 evaluations of employers who have previously provided internships; (3) regional job growth trends; and (4) a literature review of why employers participate in internship programs.

FINDINGS: An analysis of the economic and job growth trends of Alameda and San Francisco counties suggests that plenty of opportunities exist to increase connections with Bay Area employers. Job growth is expected to increase to 2040 in all of the industries that cover OUSD’s Linked Learning career pathways. The majority of employers who provided internships in 2013 and 2014 reported excellent experiences with the program, further suggesting that there is room to increase and improve internship experiences. The academic literature suggests that doing so will require a tailored approach by industry/career pathway.





LESSONS: Expanding WBL internship opportunities for students in OUSD’s Linked Learning program comes down to the match between the regional job market and students’ skills. As a regional entity, ABAG is uniquely positioned to support OUSD connections with employers. Because both the employment opportunities and OUSD’s career pathways are dynamic and made up of different parts, the strategy for making connections requires industry-career pathway specific approaches. In other words, OUSD would benefit from a more tailored approach reflective of a career services center at a professional graduate program

RECOMMENDATIONS: Prioritize employers that meet at least one of the following five characteristics: (1) previous participation; (2) have both altruistic and financial motivations; (3) have between 20 to 99 employees; (4) have a training department and staff; (5) have self-managed work teams. The ECCCO employer evaluations and literature review gave rise to this profile of employers most amenable to participating in the Linked Learning program. This list is meant to capture the themes found in the list of 11 specific factors as outlined in Table 1. Considering these factors should allow OUSD to prioritize its time and resources.

Profile of Employers Most Likely to Participate in Linked Learning								
Previous Participation	Low Labor Supply	High Business Growth	Low Competition	Altruistic & Financial Motivation	Size: 20-99 Employees	Dedicated Training Resources	Multiple Office Locations	Self-Managed Work Teams

Dedicate district staff members to specialize in a set of industries to streamline the employer onboarding process: Pairing industries to the relevant pathways and district staff will establish a specific point person who understands the intricacies of employer motivations and industry trends. Each staff member should also guide employers from the first step of the onboarding process to the last, and be responsible for maintaining relationships with the relevant teachers and career pathway leaders to ensure the integration between curriculum and work experiences. In short, the office should resemble a professional graduate school career center. This will allow for a flow of seamless and targeted strategies, which will help attract more companies and increase employer confidence in the program.

Survey employers and students on the breadth and quality of their work experience to allow for needed adjustment and improvement: Evaluations have the potential to offer an array of information for improving the program. Already, we know that the majority of employers have terrific experiences with OUSD interns, however, much more could still be learned to make improvements. Including questions in the employer evaluation regarding the process from start to finish as well as surveying the students to learn more about the quality of their work experiences will allow for needed adjustments.