



Strengthening Health Career Pipeline Diversity in Sacramento City Unified School District

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ISSUE

In its seventh year in South Sacramento with its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, The California Endowment (TCE) has committed to investing in healthy schools, homes, and neighborhoods, particularly to improve the life outcomes for boys and men of color. To strengthen this work, SCUSD and TCE have aligned to **increase enrollment, and particularly enrollment of young men of color**, in the district's two health pathways: Health Professions High School (HPS) and the Health and Medical Sciences Academy at Hiram W. Johnson High School (HJHS). These pathways expose students to the health and medical field through relevant, rigorous coursework and work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. This pathway model dovetails with broader policy issues of meeting the growth in demand, as well as increasing diverse representation, in the health workforce. **Overall, our project articulates best practices and factors that influence students' decisions to enroll in a pathway and identify how pathways could further support students' experiences.**



METHODS

(1) Literature review on educational trajectories of African American males and health workforce diversity; (2) interviews with school officials, partners, and experts in pathways/educational equity; and (3) focus groups and survey of HPS and HJHS students

FINDINGS

The partnerships and ability to apply hands-on activities in the overall academic experience is a significant asset. In the survey and focus groups, students reported that participating in WBL opportunities was one of the greatest benefits of being in a pathway. Students most often reported engaging in career awareness activities, namely field trips/site visits, guest speakers, and participation in health-related programs.

“There are big parts in health that are about managing a business or leading groups of people or training...and those are angles that are very appealing to young men... Students feel, “There’s a place for me here.”
– Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Stanford University

Interactive recruitment events are the most engaging ways to showcase pathway programs, but are time- and resource-intensive.

HPS staff and focus group participants noted that there is a lack of awareness of their school. This presents challenges when bringing in hosting

middle school students and their families to their campus, though this has been the most useful way to demonstrate what the pathway experience is truly like. At both HPS and HJHS, teachers are primarily responsible for recruitment. The time and resources invested in planning and engaging in events is significant.

Preparation and people matter in the decision to enroll in pathways. Survey results found that *an interest in a health career* was the most common reason that affected students' decisions to enroll (63% in HPHS, 84% in HJHS). HPHS students most commonly indicated that *parents* were the most influential people that guided their decision (69%), while HJHS students most often reported *teachers* as influential (54%). Siblings were also important in the decision-making process (28% for HPHS, 37% for HJHS).

*"The experiences that I have undergone have helped me **see all sides of the health profession**—not only nursing and [being a] doctor, but **other careers that are not very well-known but are incredibly interesting.**"*

- Student

Staff and students acknowledged that broadening students' knowledge of health careers has been one of the biggest accomplishments of the health pathways. This speaks to the work of the 2015 PLUS project with SCUSD, which emphasized partnerships with community-based organizations to address social determinants of health as a way to diversify WBL opportunities and concurrently amplify TCE's BHC work in prevention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Goals and Rationale	Potential Strategies
Pathway visibility. Students and staff, especially at HPHS, noted that the community is not fully aware of HPHS/pathways as an option.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distributing flyers to middle school parents after school ▪ Selling school merchandise in community areas other than schools (e.g., stores)
Data and evaluation capacity. Teachers commented on a lack of data on (1) effectiveness of recruitment strategies and (2) graduates' post-secondary pursuits (i.e., if they are working in healthcare or not).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asking parents/students to fill out feedback forms at info sessions and events ▪ Using Facebook and LinkedIn to create alumni pages/build out the alumni network ▪ Hosting alumni panels
Strategic and targeted messaging. Experts shared that cultural perceptions, such as the notion that the health professions (e.g., nurse) are not "manly" and/or traditionally trajectories for non-minority students, may also dissuade young men of color from joining.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convening teachers to discuss diversity in pathways and health workforce ▪ Deepening WBL opportunities in areas of health where students, and especially men, can exercise leadership and management (e.g., planning, quality improvement) ▪ Broadening extracurricular activities that allow men to feel connected to the school (e.g., sports)
Peer and professional mentoring. Most students (81% at HPHS, 74% at HJHS) said they have never had a mentor. Literature noted the particular need of mentors for men of color.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing formal mentorship programs with working professionals and/or college students studying health ▪ Building peer mentor model between freshmen/sophomores and juniors/seniors

Further Areas of Investigation

- Teacher and counselor capacity in addition to diversity/representation
- Opportunities to leverage resources across different pathway programs, including best practices, lessons learned, and material/capital resources
- Structures that hold schools and district accountable for equitable outcomes