Facilitating the School-to-Work Transition: Advancing Project-Based and Work-Based Learning Experiences in OUSD

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QUESTION: How can OUSD build students’ professional competencies and increase their work experiences with employers?

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

WHAT IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING? Project-based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method that guides students through the process of designing and implementing projects about social problems or phenomena grounded in their interests.

QUESTION What are promising models and structural and curricular conditions necessary for facilitating high quality project-based learning in OUSD? What are the challenges of launching an effective and authentic project-based learning program in a large school?

FINDINGS After interviewing multiple educational leaders in OUSD, the following conditions emerged as necessary for the facilitation of authentic PBL:

1) Daily planning time for teachers
2) Maximized collaboration opportunities for teachers
3) Maximized opportunities for students to choose project topics and methods
4) High teacher investment in the outcomes of student-driven projects
5) Low teacher turnover (to preserve institutional memory)

TRADEOFFS Proposing, designing, and implementing projects requires significant time, which may limit a teacher or school’s capacity to achieve other instructional goals during school hours. Additionally, some students respond more enthusiastically to PBL-infused curricula than others.

Oakland Technical High School: Classroom-based PBL “The Taking Action Project”

PBL focus: Civic engagement

Description: PBL incorporates civic engagement project in 9th grade Social Studies course, “California Studies”

Scalable insight? Whole school holds high expectations for PBL outcomes, and students rise to the occasion, as evidenced by their end-of-quarter exhibitions, during which students showcase projects and demonstrate competencies in public speaking, professionalism, and critical thinking.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

ISSUE OUSD plans to implement Linked Learning strategies district-wide, which will require greater connections with regional employers and more high-touch, high-quality internships.

METHODS The data were 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

Expected Job Growth Rate (to 2022)

Share of New Job (to 2022) by Career Pathway

METWEST High School: School Wide PBL

PBL focus: Social issues of personal interest

Description: PBL infuses the curricula across grades at MetWest. Every student engages in self-driven projects grounded in their internship experiences and personal interests.

Scalable insight? Whole school holds high expectations for PBL outcomes, and students rise to the occasion, as evidenced by their end-of-quarter exhibitions, during which students showcase projects and demonstrate competencies in public speaking, professionalism, and critical thinking.

RECOMMENDATIONS OUSD’s Linked Learning Office should encourage high schools in the district to implement the conditions required for authentic PBL facilitation. Implementing all of these conditions will take time, however. Educators seeking to initiate or supplement PBL programs more immediately should:

1) Use best practices currently taking place in OUSD, such as the 11th grade curriculum at MetWest High School, or the 9th grade “Taking Action Project” of Oakland Technical High School, as platforms
2) Consider participating in the district’s EDDA Initiative, which supports OUSD teachers in developing civic engagement curricula, or
3) Follow the curricula set forth by Y-PLAN, a model for youth civic engagement in city planning.

Client: Oakland Unified School District