



The Alliance for Excellent Education Presents

Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers

Friday, August 13, 2010 ♦ 8:30 am – 11:00 am
Washington Court Hotel, Ballroom II
525 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC

Briefing Summary

On Friday, August 13, nearly one hundred educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders gathered in Washington, DC to attend a briefing on the release of the Alliance for Excellent Education's newest policy brief, *The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers*. The publication and event were made possible through generous support from the James Irvine Foundation.

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance and former governor of West Virginia, began the conversation by highlighting some of the costs in failing to effectively prepare students for college and careers. These costs include an unacceptably high dropout rate, which results in both the nation and states like California losing millions of dollars in yearly investments, taxable wages, and spending. To overcome these challenges, more and more parents, teachers, employers, policymakers, and other Californians have come to support the Linked Learning approach to reforming the state's education system. Linked Learning integrates rigorous academics with a career and technical education theme, work-based learning, and supplemental services to ensure students succeed. Research demonstrates that this approach has helped raise high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and even future wages for participating students. Governor Wise also highlighted the need for preservice training and inservice professional development in providing for the types of systemic reform seen in Linked Learning.

Following Governor Wise's introduction, Lori Meyer, senior vice president at Collaborative Communications Group, moderated a panel of experts who discussed what it takes to ensure teachers succeed in the Linked Learning approach. Panelists for the event included Dr. Patrick Shields, director of the Center for Education Policy at SRI International; Dr. Nancy Farnan, director of the School of Teacher Education at San Diego State University; Ms. Pier Sun Ho, associate director of pathway and curriculum development at ConnectEd; and Ms. Erin Preston, digital art teacher at Kearny School of Digital Media and Design in San Diego. Ms. Christina McWilson, appropriations counsel for Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA), was the federal respondent for the event.

Dr. Shields presented first and outlined some of the challenges and necessary steps in preparing teachers to succeed in Linked Learning schools. He began with an overview of the problem, where far too many students in California dropped out and far too few completed what is known as “a–g” requirements—California standards students need to meet in order to gain admission into the University of California system. While significant for all students, these two problems disproportionately affect low-income and minority students. Unfortunately, these students are also most likely to be taught by teachers who are not highly qualified. In order to prepare all students for college and careers, teachers must have several competencies. Some of these competencies include: understanding philosophies and teaching skills of the school’s reform strategies; strong knowledge of the subject area and real-life application; and possessing additional expertise in areas outside of the classroom.

Dr. Farnan presented next and highlighted the work of San Diego State University and other credentialing institutions in preparing teachers for the challenges and opportunities in Linked Learning classrooms. While sharing a personal story of her son who had dropped out of high school, Dr. Farnan presented what twenty-first-century schools need to accomplish to truly prepare their students for success. In this same vein, she continued by explaining how the Linked Learning lens of teaching includes facilitating leadership roles for teachers, communicating and working with postsecondary schools and industry partners, integrating career and technical education with academic content, providing personalized teaching, and facilitating the development of twenty-first-century skills. Dr. Farnan emphasized that if education is to truly prepare students for success in college and careers, teacher credentialing institutions must be up to the challenge of preparing teachers with these skills.

Following Dr. Farnan’s presentation, Ms. Sun Ho provided a perspective on what it takes to train even the most experienced teachers to succeed in the Linked Learning environment. Ms. Sun Ho’s organization, ConnectEd, has been working to implement a district initiative that provides students with a menu of Linked Learning pathway options in California. She presented a vivid picture of what one might see happening in a Linked Learning school by providing examples of teachers working across disciplines to deliver content in interactive and interdisciplinary ways. This included an example of students in an architecture pathway who might apply geometry skills learned in math class to help build structures in parks and learned about affordable housing through readings required in English class. Ms. Sun Ho closed by stating that the common theme in Linked Learning schools is that students are provided with a coherent, engaging, rigorous, and relevant learning experience.

Ms. Preston—a first-year digital art teacher at the Kearny School of Digital Media and Design (DMD)—then provided the unique perspective of a teacher in a Linked Learning environment. Since Kearny’s one large failing comprehensive school, Kearny High School, was transformed into four smaller Linked Learning schools—including DMD—Ms. Preston reported that DMD has seen remarkable improvements in achievements, graduation rates, and overall school climate. Ms. Preston highlighted that her own training at San Diego State prepared her for the demands she faced at DMD including creating project-based lessons, teaching in interdisciplinary teams, and interacting with industry partners.

Following Ms. Preston, Ms. McWilson gave a federal perspective on how a strategy like Linked Learning can become a reality. Ms. McWilson emphasized that the problem is not necessarily that members of Congress do not care about education, but compared to other issues, they are not hearing their constituents calling them. She highlighted that bringing Linked Learning and other education issues to the forefront requires a level of grassroots engagement that has yet to materialize.

Following the presentations, panelists answered questions from the audience. Questions ranged from federal infrastructure to parent involvement. When asked about the kind of federal infrastructure needed to support the Linked Learning reform, Dr. Shields responded by saying that the federal government should be thinking more deeply about providing incentives and flexibility for districts and schools in providing students with Linked Learning options. When asked about the role parents play in supporting success at Linked Learning schools, panelists agreed that it is import to engage parents in planning the design of schools and work to meaningfully involve parents in ensuring students are fully participating in programs.

After the question and answer session, Governor Wise closed the event by reiterating the importance of personalizing and customizing education to meet students' needs. He thanked the individuals on the panel for their work in contributing to the unique and necessary elements of what it really takes to prepare students for college, careers, and citizenship success.