

Zargarpour, N., McConchie, J., & Feil, S. (2018). Pomona Regional Learning Collaborative: High-impact multi-segmental strategies for postsecondary attainment. [White paper]. *College Futures Foundation*.

Pomona Regional Learning Collaborative:

High-impact multi-segmental strategies for postsecondary attainment

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In the city of Pomona, 35% of adults do not graduate high school; only 15% complete college, and another 15% have some college.¹ Over 80% of Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) students are low-income and over 30% are English Language Learners. By senior year, students are less likely to believe they will attend a four-year college or be able to afford college². Only 37% of seniors complete A-G requirements (required by Cal State and UC schools), rendering a Cal State or UC school out of reach for most.³ Over the last decade, 63% of PUSD seniors attempted college directly after high school⁴, and over the last 3 years, only 58% did so. Unfortunately, most of those who attempted college didn't complete it – 18.5% completed college within four years and another 9% within five years⁵. At Mt. SAC, over 80% of PUSD students dropped out before earning a single credit.

These are striking numbers, especially when put into the context of what it means to earn a college degree. It is estimated that by 2020, about two thirds of all jobs will need workers who have at least some college education: 35% with a bachelor degree or higher, and 30% with associate degree or some college experience⁶. College graduates enjoy higher lifetime earnings, greater civic engagement, and healthier lifestyles⁷. High school students understand the importance of postsecondary education and report high aspirations for college: 90% of freshmen plan to attend and complete college⁸. Unfortunately, structural, social, and financial realities often get in the way of college access and success for the low-income population of Pomona.

¹ Data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012. American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Data obtained from PUSD records via National Student Clearinghouse.

⁵ Data obtained from CEC EDEVAL Lab Psychosocial Learning Survey Study (Zargarpour, 2016).

⁶ Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). Recovery: Projections of jobs and education requirements through 2020. *Georgetown University: Center on Education and the Workforce*.

⁷ Data obtained from College Board, 2010.

⁸ Data obtained from the CEC's Zargarpour Psychosocial Learning Survey Study (Zargarpour, 2016).

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This is not the case in the entire district, however, as certain programs and initiatives are achieving great success in getting students to and through college. Bright Prospect, for example, is an organization that focuses on getting low-income students within PUSD to and through college by providing counseling and support systems in high school and college. Participants in the program get into and persist in college at significantly higher rates than similar students that do not participate in the program. This and other programs like it suggest that students in the district have the capacity to achieve, but challenges within the system are making it difficult for them to do so.

To address these challenges, the Education, Development and Evaluation Lab (EDEVAL Lab) at the Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC) initiated the Pomona Regional Learning Collaborative (RLC or Collaborative) along with pipeline partners in the Pomona region, specifically, Pomona Unified School District and its local colleges -- Mt. San Antonio College, Cal-Poly Pomona, the University of La Verne, and Citrus College -- and local and state organizations that support the Pomona education pipeline, namely, Bright Prospect and Educational Results Partnership. The Regional Learning Collaborative is a framework for leveraging multi-segmental partnerships to achieve positive structural, systemic, academic, and social gains in the P-20 Education & Career Pipeline processes and outcomes.

RLC Story (Background, Development, Partners)

The EDEVAL Lab at Claremont Graduate University's Claremont Evaluation Center serves as the core support entity for the RLC. has been in a position over the past decade to notice both the unique challenges and strengths of the district. As an evaluation partner to many college access programs in the region, it has collected and reported data that suggests with the

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right structural and social supports, students within PUSD can successfully graduate from college. This is in alignment with the philosophical beliefs of the lab that every individual has unique capacities and contributions to make in the world, and that these can be unleashed through education.

Armed with these beliefs and the data to back it up, the lab set about to begin the Pomona Regional Learning Collaborative. It is regional because it relates to organizations in the local area. It is a learning collaborative because it was intended to be a joint educational endeavor with our partners. The goal was to implement transformative education based on empirical research, rigorous evaluation, and the collective effort of invested partners.

And so the lab tapped into relationships with key stakeholders in the educational system and called on high impact organizations within the area to form such a collaborative. Initially it was important to ensure that there was a shared vision. It quickly became apparent that the group, which consisted of representatives from PUSD, local colleges, and educational organizations, could rally around the goal of having 100% of PUSD students graduate college with a stackable career. Next, a needs assessment was performed to determine what initiatives were most pressing in order to move towards this goal.

Strategic Plan: 3-Pronged Approach (Pipeline Triangle)

The first strategic priority based on the needs assessment was to increase the amount of dual enrollment opportunities for students in the district. A report by the Community College Research Center demonstrates the advantages of dual enrollment, including how it affects students based on family income. After 6 years of matriculation of the students who didn't pursue dual enrollment, 52% of low income students compared to 39% of high income students

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ended up not enrolling in any institution of higher learning. In California the percentages are similar: 50% for low income and 36% for high income.

However, among students who attempted dual enrollment, the number of students who don't attempt higher learning is reduced: 32% for low income compared to 22% for high income. In California the numbers are 43% for low income and 28% for high income students. Based on this information, there is a clear benefit of dual enrollment in encouraging post-secondary education⁹.

A related but distinct strategic priority is vertical articulation. Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) has a large non-White population¹⁰. Across California, more than half of Black and Hispanic students in remedial math begin at three or more levels below. The more levels of developmental courses a student must go through, the less likely that student is to ever complete college English or Math¹¹. PUSD has been characterized by low rates of matriculation, persistence, and college graduation¹². Particularly, remediation has been a major obstacle for students. Over the last decade, 96% of the PUSD students who attended a local community college were identified as developmental. And of that group, 80% dropped out without earning a single credit¹³.

The final strategic priority to emerge from the needs assessment was the need for a more coherent peer mentoring system. Through its extensive work with PUSD and as a partner to

⁹ CCRC

¹⁰ Educational Results Partnership. (2017). *Pomona Unified*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Los-Angeles/Pomona-Unified>

¹¹ Whalen S. & Saracino J. (2017) *Smoothing the Pathways: Removing Roadblocks to Student Success*. [PowerPoint slides] College Futures Foundation

¹² Zargarpour, N (2015) *PUSD Promise of Excellence Strategic Plan*, Claremont Evaluation Center

¹³ Zargarpour, N., Meza, Fernando, M., Principe, M., & Black, S. (2017). *Multi-sector education partnerships for college and career attainment: Examples from Pomona, CA*.

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several PUSD youth-serving organizations, the EDEVAL Lab has found that academic support is best paired with psychosocial skills. Psychosocial skills—also known as non-cognitive, soft, or socioemotional skills—are skills that complement academic performance skills such as grit, growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and more. Peer mentoring programs directly address *both* academic support and psychosocial skills by building a trusting bond with a mentor who helps the mentee establish academic and personal goals, raises expectations about school and career, and models positive values and behaviors.

It was also important to the Collaborative that the strategic priorities complement and support each other. Dual enrollment is an important pathway toward vertical articulation, as it paves the way for a smoother transition to college. And conversely, vertical articulation is what allows for successful dual enrollment courses to be created and utilized. But even with such coherence, both dual enrollment and the transition to college are difficult. Thus students who are more equipped with the psychosocial skills to overcome such adversities are more likely to succeed. The three strategic priorities are equally important, and in many ways success in one area is predicated on success in the others.

Implementation

With these three strategic priorities in focus, the RLC has been working to build on existing structures when possible and create new structures as needed to ensure that students within the district have the tools needed to succeed. The main format for collaboration with the RLC is during the Convenings that take place once a quarter. These half-day gatherings are a chance to share data, learn about bright spots within the three priority areas, and workshop how to implement strategies agreed upon by the group. These Convenings are often preceded by pre-

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convening meetings, in which decision-makers within each of the priority areas come together to set goals for the Convening. This has proven to be a crucial aspect of the Collaborative, as it provides a narrow focus for these quarterly gatherings and allows for key stakeholders to come together regularly and make progress on shared goals.

There was already one section of dual enrollment running within the district before the RLC was formed, but it was geared mostly toward high-performing students at one of the wealthier schools in the district. This is often the case with dual enrollment courses, and this was a trend that the RLC was specifically trying to redirect. So through the pre-Convening and Convening meetings over the last year, the district has gone from one section to _____, with most of the new offerings being geared toward average-performing students.

Vertical articulation efforts have been focused on creating alignment between PUSD curriculum and that being taught at its most significant feeder college, Mt. San Antonio Community College. This has involved bringing together faculty members from the math and the English department at each institution in order to discuss how to align educational outcomes, as well as figuring out what classes or offerings are needed to ensure that students within PUSD move as quickly as possible into credit-bearing courses upon entering college at Mt. Sac or another local school. One main strategy that has recently been implemented at Mt. Sac, partially as a result of inspiration from the RLC, is the use of multiple measures as a means of determining which students qualify for credit-bearing courses. This is a strategy that has shown immense promise in other districts.

The Peer Mentoring is already up and running within the district. Mentors are selected from PUSD's feeder colleges and from similar demographic backgrounds, to provide relevant, real-world examples of college success with whom students can readily identify. These mentor-

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mentee relationships become a vehicle for imparting college knowledge and skills, financial knowledge and skills, and SEL/PSL competencies needed for college access and success. In addition, the mentors themselves also gain valuable training, knowledge, and experience and benefit from the program.

The first year of the program focused on developing the mentor training materials, creating and testing the research-based mentee coaching curriculum, establishing the processes and systems needed for program delivery (see process outcomes below), and implementing the program with the first set of mentors and mentees as a pilot. These developments will be used to guide program expansion in 2018-19 and future years. Each year, a new cohort of 7th graders will be added, while the previous cohorts will continue to receive mentoring as they advance through middle school, to high school, and beyond.

Nuances of Coordination

In addition to the strategic priorities, a major benefit of the collaborative has been the opportunity to consistent collaboration between representatives of PUSD, the local colleges, and various nonprofit organizations. This has allowed for increased learning about best practices and streamlined channels of communication. This is important when there are aspects of a particular strategic priority that require bridging the gap between various institutions. For example, when teachers teach dual enrollment classes, there must be consensus about who pays these teachers and how it counts against their salary and benefits. In addition, vertical articulation requires all institutions to consider their curriculum and find ways to ensure that it is consistent with other schools in the pipeline.

Much of this collaboration came in the form of the pre-Convening and Convening meetings that are regularly held throughout the year. The task of organizing and coordinating

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these meetings requires particular care, as there are many partners with busy schedules that must be coordinated. Then the meetings themselves often involved presentations relevant to the various strategic priorities, which means that these people have to be scheduled and prepared for their presentations.

Along the way, the EDEVAL Lab also served as the mediator when various conflicts arose within the collaborative. For example, at one point a critical partner nearly pulled out of the collaborative because of some broken lines of communication. As the facilitator of the RLC, the EDEVAL Lab was able to take ownership for missteps and ensure that all partners felt heard and were reminded of the common goal. This role has also helped to facilitate a culture of collaboration with the RLC, where each partner is fully invested and takes on a sense of ownership for the process. This is something that has grown over time as relationships have been built and goals have been achieved.

Role of Data

One critical element to the success of the RLC has been the role of data in the planning and decision-making processes. The expertise of the EDEVAL Lab in implementing stakeholder-driven evaluation plans has been critical in building an effective monitoring and evaluation framework for the RLC. This includes both tracking participation and progress within the RLC as well as assessing the effectiveness and strategies and initiatives that it puts into place. Underlying both of these processes is a commitment to relying on data in order to guide decisions.

In addition, the RLC has been vigilant about analyzing the existing data around the three strategic priority areas to ensure that the RLC institutes best practices within the field and is realistic about goals and expectations. Given the immense need and limited resources in the area,

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it is critical that all actions taken are high-impact and far-reaching. This commitment to maintaining a Data Switzerland – in which there are no agendas and the only focus is on what is best for students – ensures that the RLC stays committed to shared vision.

Partners and Experts

One of the main benefits of such a collaborative has been that each partner brings experience and resources to the table that help further the shared vision of the RLC. That is why it has been important from day 1 to bring in partners who have a history of success in areas related to the three strategic priorities. This has allowed for the RLC to highlight bright spots from previous experiences and learn how to implement similar strategies within PUSD and its feeder institutions. When the collaborative has reached a point where there seems to be a lack of knowledge around a particular strategy, the RLC has sought out partners who can add value and contribute ideas to move the work forward. This has been particularly evident in the inclusion of Statway within the RLC, as this organization has a history of success in implementing dual enrollment curriculum aimed at middle-achieving students.

These partners provide opportunities for enlightening presentations, site visits, and access to research that have contributed to significant progress within the RLC in a relatively short period of time. But one important aspect of these relationships that has always been a focus of the collaborative is to ensure that all partners are aligned with the shared vision and cohesive culture of the RLC. If an organization has significant knowledge or expertise but seems to be driven by a different agenda than that of the RLC - which is always to put the students first – the team knows that the first priority should always be to ensure that the collaborative remains a unified network.

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Broader Impact

While the main focus of the RLC is to positively impact the lives and trajectories of students within PUSD, it is also important to the collaborative that the knowledge that is gained from the work is shared so that others can benefit as well. Whether this be in the form of a white paper like this, a presentation at a conference, or a website filled with resources, it is important to get the word out.

Thus far, a main avenue for this has been presenting at conferences. What makes this collaborative particularly valuable is that while on their own many of the partners would not have the time or resources to put together a presentation, through the RLC there have been many opportunities to do so. These conferences both provide a platform for sharing successful strategies and create opportunities for networking that can also impact the work of the RLC. In addition, this work has created opportunities to contribute to the academic research around the three strategic priority areas, as a handful of publications are in progress based on the work of the RLC up to this point.

In the future, this model has the potential to be implemented in other areas throughout Southern California and beyond. There is opportunity for similar collaboration in parts of Orange County (particularly Oakview School District), the Inland Empire (with the Ontario-Montclair School District), and in San Diego (in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education). What makes these collaboratives even more relevant is that many funders are currently focused on contributing to these types of partnerships in order to ensure that their investments are having the broadest impact possible. Aside from the College Futures Foundation, which has generally funded such projects, organizations such as Complete College America, Lumina Foundation, and the W.M. Keck Foundation are funding similar work.

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“We love working with people who “get us.” When we work collaboratively we can inform what happens beyond our own communities. We can put aside personal organizations and allocate both responsibilities and strengths; which all come together to strengthen everyone’s communities.”

- Stephanie Baker, *Pomona Unified School District, Chief Academic Officer, Deputy Superintendent*

Learnings:

-Foundational understanding of the educational system, pipeline, and mediators along with recognizing/overcoming barriers

-The power of the group- Mutual effort and trust between the groups leads to informed and collective action

-Ownership- parties are invested and committed to the work of the RLC, which is shown through regular attendance, correspondence, PowerPoints presentation and resources offered

-Intrinsic Motivation- groups and individuals are motivated and invested in this vision of the RLC and the implementation of it’s work

-Smart Goals- tangible and effective plans for action that were achievable kept momentum moving forward and spirits high

-Student Success Indicators- Social Emotional Learning skills are vital to student success such as grit, resilience, emotional regulation, distress tolerance