

# Porterville Pathways remains in spotlight

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Porterville Unified School District's Pathways program was one of the success stories pointed out at a press conference highlighting Linked Learning last week in Sacramento.

Porterville Unified Superintendent John Snavely was one of those who spoke at the press conference to release a new report "Can California Compete? Reducing the Skills Gap and Building a Skilled Workforce through Linked Learning" by the national business leader organization, America's Edge, which found significant skills gaps in the Sacramento region and throughout the state.

Snavely said the meeting offered more direction and focus to linked learning that has proven so successful in Porterville.

"The whole relevance factor," he said of the Pathways Program and how it provides a connection between the student and what they are learning.

According to the report, nearly half (47 percent) of California jobs are in "middle skills" occupations – requiring education beyond a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree. The report estimates that only 38 percent of California workers have the skills to fill these positions, creating a nearly 10-percentage-point skills gap. When coupled with a shortage of workers with science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills, the business leaders voiced concern about California's competitive viability in a global marketplace.

Porterville offered three Pathways this past year and that will expand to nine next year. He said he and the PUSD board are sold on the approach, even if the district is not granted an extension on the grant that paid for the startup of the program. The report mentions the Business Academy at PHS and notes the success Porterville Unified has had in raising the grade point average of students in Pathways.

"We're funding it," he said, but added they are anticipating getting a two-year extension on the money from the James Irvine Foundation. That money, \$1 million, paid to set up the program and would allow the district to continue to expand offerings. The district will find out this month on the funding extension.

"The funding would be for two years, but we're committed to it with or without the funding," Snavely said.

He said the benefits of Pathways goes beyond the students.

"It benefits staff. They're more engaged and there are less attendance issues with staff," he said.

The report, said Snavely, points to the need for programs like Pathways.

Just six years ago, California was 14th in the United States in recent bachelor's degrees awarded in science and engineering. Today, the Golden State ranks 45th in the nation.

"California's education system is not keeping up with the education needs for today's and tomorrow's careers," said Brian Dowd, Valley area manager for Granite Construction. "As an employer seeking a highly talented workforce, I think it's important that young people understand what it takes to be career-ready. Exposing them to career options early and helping to direct their path is vital to building that workforce."

The business leaders called on state lawmakers to support Linked Learning, a high school-based education approach that helps equip students with the specific skills California businesses seek and which will fuel the state's economic recovery and long-term growth.

Opt-in Linked Learning programs — often referred to as "schools within schools" —

integrate rigorous academics with career-relevant technical education and incorporate hands-on experience with employers to prepare participating students for success in both postsecondary education and their future careers.

“America’s Edge is calling on the California Legislature to protect this funding,” said Ryan Loofbourrow of the Downtown Sacramento Partnership. “Through Linked Learning we can strengthen the state’s economic recovery, and help ensure that today’s students enter the workforce with the skills our businesses need.”

America’s Edge is a national non-profit business leader organization whose members work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children and youth.