TWO YEARS INTO CCPT
Many Challenges & Great Promise

California Career Pathways Trust Implementation Research Report Executive Summary
Milbrey McLaughlin, Valerie Lundy-Wagner, & Barry Groves

The California Career Pathways Trust, established in July 2014 by Assembly Bill 86, and administered by the California Department of Education, funds new regional consortia of K-12 educators, community colleges, and employers to establish career pathways designed to lead secondary students to a postsecondary credential or certification aligned with regional workforce needs. Other consortia partners include nonprofit and government agencies, community partners, four-year institutions, and local workforce boards. CCPT asks all consortia participants to think on a regional scale, rather than in the usual terms of their own organization, district, or community. This consortium-wide perspective, and the collaborative relationships envisioned among districts, postsecondary institutions, and employers, also require a new mindset about career and technical education (CTE) and a new way of operating for all CCPT participants.

The California legislature allocated approximately $500 million to finance two CCPT cohorts for the first three years of a five-year initiative, making it one of the largest career pathways investments across all states. This investment signals the state's understanding that preparing all of California's students for a 21st-century regional economy requires a fundamentally new way of thinking about how students prepare for and enter the workforce.

CCPT's work to date shows great promise. Much of the early work revolves around building systems and relationships foundational to the career pathway work ahead, to reframing educational opportunities in regional terms, to building supportive infrastructure, and to the sustainability of the CCPT investment. While the implementation challenges are considerable, consortia participants across the state point to many positive outcomes associated with this new way of thinking and working together.

RESEARCH FOCUS

This report focuses on year two of CCPT implementation and three central implementation tasks: changing mindsets about CTE, establishing communication among all stakeholders, and building regional infrastructure. Jobs for the Future conducted the research, which included interviewing participants at multiple levels in K-12, higher education, and workforce development or industry both by phone and in person; attending local and state-level CCPT meetings and convenings; and visiting three $15M consortia grantees. Researchers found similarities across the sites and participants: widespread support for the goals of CCPT coupled with common implementation challenges, which inform the seven key findings that follow.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

KEY FINDINGS

K-12 students and teachers benefit.

Principals and pathway coaches report that attendance is up and disciplinary issues are down. Students traditionally disengaged from school and at risk of dropping out appear to benefit from career pathways that expose them to opportunities in education and work. Teachers express enthusiasm for the community of practice approach adopted by many CCPT pathway initiatives.

CCPT produces stronger career pathways and CTE programs.

CCPT funds enabled consortia to build up existing CTE pathways by extending career exposure to middle school, initiating outreach for pathways in K-12 and community colleges, supporting new positions, designing new high school curricula and coursework meeting A-G requirements, and developing more connections between high schools and community colleges via dual enrollment and course articulation. CCPT funds, in conjunction with other CTE-related initiatives, improved the status of CTE and its potential to promote college and career readiness for secondary and postsecondary students.

Leadership at all levels and in all sectors underlies successful CCPT implementation.

CCPT reimagines college and career pathways in ways that engage all students and activate multiple leaders in each sector. Successful leaders:

▸ Acknowledge and confront outdated notions of vocational education and wrestle with developing a shared vision of CTE that includes employers, K-12, and postsecondary stakeholders.

▸ Encourage, support, and model collaboration at all levels, including facilitating internal meetings attentive to external partner needs and convening partners across historically siloed groups

to think creatively about whether or how to transform structures, incentives, and cultures that discourage collaboration.

▸ Engage employer leaders as active partners in designing career pathways that support students at multiple stages of their education, shifting their involvement from discrete relationships with local education institutions to systematic engagement with regional education and workforce systems, and serving as champions and ambassadors to their peers.

Systems change is required in order to dismantle the many structural barriers to implementing regional career pathways.

California's K-12 and postsecondary education systems largely operate independently of each other, and each of these systems exhibits its own structural barriers to internal and external collaboration. District, school, grade, and even subject matter often divide the K-12 system. In the postsecondary arena, the governance structure of the California Community College Chancellor's Office prioritizes local autonomy that has evolved in ways that unintentionally encourage competition for students and resources rather than collaboration for the purpose of maximizing student outcomes. While many examples of strong employer-education partnerships exist around the state, these relationships are typically brokered between individuals, and employers remain structurally and culturally separate from both K-12 and postsecondary systems. Breaking down these barriers will require intentional change to systems to create flexibility, reward internal and external collaboration at all levels, and revise policies that work at cross-purposes with the outcomes CCPT is designed to produce.

The flexibility of CCPT is both a strength and a source of implementation challenges.

CCPT was designed with few predetermined metrics, benchmarks, or reporting requirements. This flexibility expresses the fundamental belief that local actors are best equipped to design programs and broker relationships that work in their unique contexts. In order to design pathways that are responsive to local contexts, stakeholders must devote time and energy to answering fundamental questions about their goals, how to operationalize this work, and how their accomplishments will be measured before beginning implementation. With no mandate and little guidance for planning and prioritizing, stakeholders frequently underestimate the value of such efforts and launch work designed to address short-term programmatic needs but not the long-term, systemic issues at the core of the CCPT vision.

Intermediary support around all aspects of career pathways implementation is critical, and demand outstrips supply.

Creating career pathways requires a host of activities that consortia partners may not have capacity or expertise to perform, from aligning schedules and curricula, to identifying opportunities for work-based learning, to attentively engaging employers around the entire education pipeline and labor market demand. Although typically associated with work-based learning and employer engagement, intermediaries—individuals or organizations that can provide a wide range of expertise—play essential roles, brokering relationships and developing the systems necessary to implement career pathways. Consortia that have strong intermediary support consider it invaluable, but relatively few consortia have access to comprehensive and effective intermediary support. Successful implementation of CCPT (or related work) involves providing or expanding access to intermediaries.

Stakeholders understand data as critical to career pathways work, but find existing systems insufficient.

Collecting, using, and sharing data are central to CCPT implementation: understanding the needs of regional employers and designing relevant pathways requires labor market data; understanding the effectiveness of education pathways and pathways elements requires the use of student outcomes data; and sharing data between stakeholders facilitates the knowledge sharing and regional collaboration that CCPT envisions. But collecting and sharing data are central implementation challenges. CCPT doesn't define metrics and outcomes, producing confusion around which existing data can be useful, which new data to collect, and how to manage and analyze it all for regional career pathway improvement and evaluation. Stakeholders frequently work with multiple, often incompatible data systems, making both collecting and sharing data difficult. Beyond that, stakeholders are challenged in establishing meaningful data sharing capacity, systems, or infrastructure for long-term use within CCPT's five-year time horizon.

LOOKING AHEAD

Three broad implementation issues confront all Cohort 1 CCPT consortia as they enter year three.

▸ **Collaboration between districts and community colleges.** Districts struggle to align CTE coursework, develop dual enrollment opportunities, or find opportunities to meet with community college faculty and leaders around career pathway proposals.

▸ **Employer engagement.** CCPT's outcomes depend on the support and engagement of business leaders and regional employers. However, most consortia grapple with questions of how to achieve sustained, meaningful commitment from the business community; provide a coherent framework for K-12 and community college partnership with employers; and secure CCPT champions for their work.

▸ **Foster and support a regional infrastructure and perspective.** Consortia leaders agree that describing and enacting a regional perspective—building and funding a regional infrastructure to support CCPT—comprises both their biggest challenge and greatest opportunity.

Our ongoing research will explore these important issues. See the full report at www.jff.org/ccpt.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE