

knowledge brief

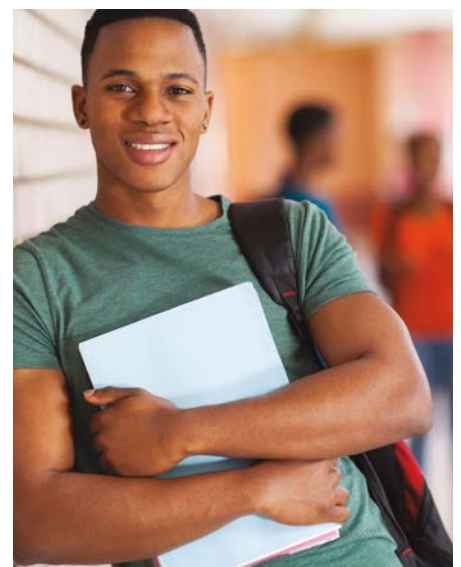
This document outlines how effectively integrated student supports build or scaffold student competencies in five broad domains of learning for college, career, and civic readiness.

Relevant supports are not limited to “services” or “programs” but extend to enabling resources and social conditions, including, for example, attention to school culture and climate issues, access to physical and behavioral health interventions, and the communicated beliefs and mindsets of all adults who work with youth. We begin to specify from the relevant reform literature, as well as from the experience of key Linked Learning intermediaries, an emerging definition of “integrated student supports” that (a) captures critical elements of effective implementation, (b) contributes to instructional capacity in schools, and (c) advances equitable access to learning opportunities within Linked Learning pathways.

Defining Integrated Student Supports for Linked Learning Pathways

PROMOTING EQUITABLE ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS BY DESIGN

Integrated student supports are conceived as an approach to identifying and addressing persistent disparities in student achievement in secondary schools. This approach depends upon the coordination of a seamless system of expanded learning opportunities and personalized interventions that address each student’s academic and non-academic barriers to learning. Within Linked Learning settings, integrated student supports aim to ensure that all students have an opportunity to master the learning demands of a rigorous academic curriculum, as well as the technical and workplace learning requirements of specific Linked Learning pathways.

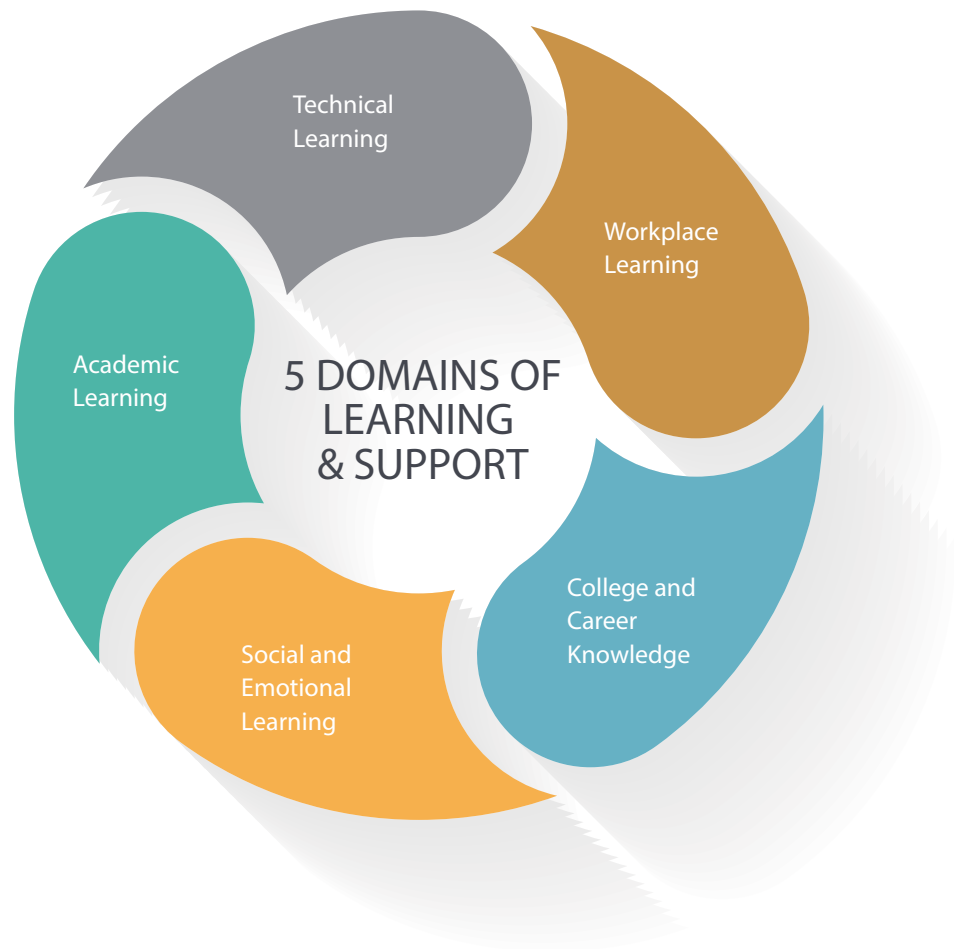


What is Linked Learning?

Linked Learning joins together rigorous academics, a challenging career or profession-themed curriculum, and an opportunity for students to apply classroom learning through work-based experiences or other real-world involvement in their communities. Additionally, Linked Learning incorporates a dual commitment to challenge prevailing patterns of stratification through universal access to a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and to graduate all students fully prepared for college, career, and civic engagement. This dual commitment to equal access and gap-closing implicates a fourth critical dimension of the Linked Learning approach: comprehensive and integrated student supports that meet all students where they are, scaffold their engagement with a standards-based curriculum, and address their learning and personal youth development needs.



What are the relevant domains of learning and support for Linked Learning Pathways?



High quality implementation and equitable access to Linked Learning opportunities begins with consideration of student learning goals. This is a critical step because a fruitful discussion about appropriate student supports—and about how to integrate them into the school experience—follows an understanding of what we expect these supports to achieve. We identified five domains of learning and support that are likely very familiar to educators who have been working steadily on the elaboration of Linked Learning pathways. In effect, we have focused on learning domains that

encompass competencies that students may need to be supported to achieve.

Supports for Academic Learning: ensure that all students, regardless of their prior academic background, possess the content knowledge and cognitive skills to graduate from high school with a level of academic competence that prepares them for postsecondary education.

Supports for Technical Learning: ensure that students master and can demonstrate the technical competencies and knowledge

necessary to successfully complete work-related tasks.

Supports for Workplace Learning:

provide students with tools to successfully engage in work-based learning experiences by advancing their knowledge of career opportunities, workplace etiquette, and job site expectations.

Supports to advance College and Career Knowledge:

enable students and their families to develop realistic expectations and an understanding of the long-term benefits associated with the completion of a college education and the demands of a specific career, as well as the college application process and financial aid opportunities.

Supports for Social and Emotional Learning:

foster the development of mindsets, social and emotional skills, and adaptive (virtuous) behaviors. These encompass intrapersonal qualities, such as self-management and growth mindset, as well as interpersonal qualities such as social awareness.

What do we mean by Integrated Student Supports?

Two kinds of integration appear, both in the relevant literature and from practitioner experience, to be associated with positive student learning outcomes. The first type of integration addresses the extent to which student supports are conceived, designed, and implemented to enable effective student engagement with the other three Linked Learning pathway components: academic mastery, technical knowledge, and workplace learning. We call this horizontal

integration across Linked Learning components.

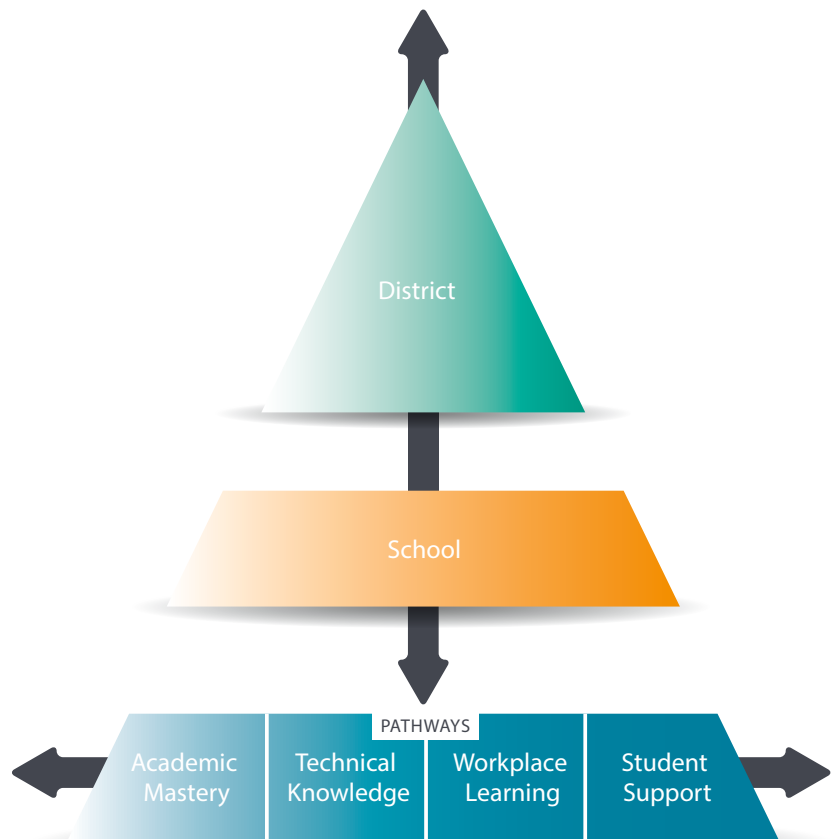
Equally important, vertical integration involves the alignment of student supports within a curricular pathway with school and district (or regional) strategies for achieving college, career, and civic readiness among all students. At the school level, this might relate to the integration of student supports with schoolwide efforts to connect with community-based resources, as for example through community school approaches, promise neighborhood strategies, or expanded learning partnerships. At the district level, this could relate to the alignment of student supports with districtwide strategies for the implementation of the Common Core curriculum,

or with initiatives for enhancing social and emotional learning among students across schools.

Why is integration important?

Many practitioners observe that horizontal integration of student supports with the other components of Linked Learning helps to make the educational experience coherent from the student perspective. Instead of a day characterized by unconnected experiences as students move from classroom to workplace to support services, students instead experience each of these components as logically and coherently designed to reinforce and advance the others.

TWO TYPES OF INTEGRATION



Likewise, the vertical integration of student supports with school and districtwide strategies for college, career, and civic readiness helps to build instructional capacity within the pathway by making the environment more coherent for teachers and other adults who work with students and by fostering the conditions necessary for adult collaboration, teamwork, and professional capacity building that are so essential to the Linked Learning approach.

Toward a Framework for implementing effective Integrated Student Supports

Our initial review of the relevant literature and practitioner experience suggests that there is no “silver bullet” for the effective implementation of high quality integrated student supports. Instead, practitioners emphasize the need to adapt research-based practices to the needs and conditions of diverse settings and changing student populations. Drawing on the work of Linked



Learning intermediary organizations and practitioners in emerging model settings, we hope to describe and define a generalizable set of processes and norms that help model sites to identify the unique needs of their students, adapt best practices from other sites to meet local needs, use data to gauge effectiveness, adjust their interventions to respond to

information gathered, and to keep learning and redesigning their approaches continually. We hope that such a framework can guide further inquiry and adaptive implementation in early adoption sites and serve as a basis for the development of actionable guidebooks or tools for the broader implementation of high quality integrated student supports.

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