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Bridging the Gaps through Cross-System Education Partnerships: Principles of Practice from Long Beach and the Salinas Valley

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A Series of Briefs from Bridging the Gap (BtG)

This brief is part of a series that also includes *Bridging the Gaps for Students in Long Beach: Cross-System Efforts to Institutionalize Dual Enrollment* and *Bridging the Gaps for Students in the Salinas Valley: Cross-System Efforts to Increase College Readiness*. The collaborations in Long Beach and the Salinas Valley were implemented through Bridging the Gap (BtG), an initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation.

In 2016, two cross-system education partnerships in California—in Long Beach and the Salinas Valley—joined Bridging the Gap (BtG), an initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation to smooth transitions for students from high school to postsecondary education. As the BtG initiative unfolded, policy reforms at the state and system levels began to transform curricular and assessment practices in the K-12 schools, basic skills and developmental education at the California Community Colleges (CCC), and remedial and general education at the California State University (CSU).[1] Due to these and other reforms within the systems, working across systems increasingly became an immediate and practical need for those seeking to improve student transitions from high school to postsecondary education. During BtG, the partners adapted to the reforms within their own systems and worked with those in the other systems to understand the impacts on their practices. Their efforts testify to the importance of and challenges inherent in working across systems to support students' educational and career goals from high school to and through college.

This brief describes five learnings, or principles of practice (see BtG Principles of Practice), drawn from the work of the Long Beach and Salinas Valley teams. The brief is intended for those interested in strengthening or developing a cross-system education partnership in their communities. Because cross-system work is so dependent on the context and history of partnering institutions, we illustrate the principles through examples of the partners' work, and we provide a series of questions (see Appendix A: Reflection Questions) for use in adapting

BtG Principles of Practice

1. Keep students, their educational goals, and related equity implications at the center
2. Share and use data to identify successes and barriers and to build engagement
3. Engage and support leaders at the top and in the middle
4. Work *across* institutions to improve connections and create coherence for students
5. Work *within* each institution to institutionalize and sustain the work

[1] The K-12 schools were continuing the implementation of new state standards and assessments and adapting to a new accountability system that includes a college and career readiness indicator. The CCCs were revamping basic skills education under AB 705 (Irwin, 2017) and implementing a Guided Pathways initiative, as well as several other reforms. The CSU was implementing Graduation Initiative 2025 and transforming development education and general education under the Chancellor's Office's Executive Orders 1100 and 1110.

the principles to different institutional and regional contexts. First, however, we introduce the initiative and its partners.

In seeking to improve transitions from high school to postsecondary education, the BtG initiative from the outset focused on **first-generation college students, students of color, and low-income students** in California, since these populations face substantial barriers in reaching their educational goals. The initiative adopted **a cross-system approach** within geographic regions to bring together local high schools, a community college, and a CSU campus. In a state that does not have a coordinating body or a statewide data system connecting high schools and postsecondary education, such partnerships can be the vehicles through which local educators identify student barriers across systems and take action to improve those issues at their own institutions.

To assist the cross-system teams and focus their work, BtG proposed **a set of practices** geared toward creating and maintaining student momentum from high school to postsecondary education (see Appendix B: BtG Priority Practices). The initiative called for **institutional and systemic changes** directed toward a shared responsibility for student success, rather than the adoption of programmatic or other approaches limited to small numbers of students. Aware of the challenges involved in creating systemic change along the education pipeline, BtG sought to create a **community of practice** (see Appendix C: BtG Community of Practice) in which educational leaders, working together across systems, could adjust plans and refine objectives as they worked within and across their institutions on common goals. To assist the Long Beach and Salinas Valley partners, BtG provided facilitation, documentation, and evaluative support (see BtG Support Providers).

The BtG Teams

The BtG partners in Long Beach and the Salinas Valley share many traits, including a strong commitment to improve education opportunities for underserved students and a desire to look beyond their institutions to improve student transitions across systems. The two teams also have substantial differences, due to the histories and context of their institutions and partnerships, which, in turn, bring different benefits and challenges to the work. The BtG team in Long Beach is part of a regional partnership formed three decades ago, whereas the broader regional partnership in Salinas is young. The Long Beach team includes one school district and covers an urban area that is relatively compact. The team in the Salinas Valley includes seven school districts spanning a rural river basin about 70 miles long and 10 miles wide. The Long Beach team is led by its California State University campus. Hartnell College (Hartnell), a community college, leads the Salinas Valley team.

BtG Support Providers

Facilitation and Support: Career Ladders Project
Documentation and Research: The Education Insights Center (EdInsights)
Developmental Evaluation: Engage R+D, Equal Measure, and Harder+Company

Bridging the Gap is an initiative of The James Irvine Foundation.

Long Beach partners.

The Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and California State University Long Beach (CSULB), began a formal collaboration called the Seamless Educational Partnership in the early 1990s, with a goal of increasing college readiness for high school students. The institutions doubled down on this collaboration by creating the Long Beach College Promise (the Promise) in 2008. Key goals of the Promise are to increase college readiness and to improve graduation rates among Long Beach students. The BtG team worked on a range of activities to improve college and career readiness (including dual enrollment and career exploration) and to develop a plan to implement a data warehouse to share data. The team worked to institutionalize a cohesive set of dual enrollment programs spanning high schools, LBCC, and CSULB.

Long Beach BtG Partners

California State University Long Beach (CSULB)
Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD)
Long Beach City College (LBCC)
City of Long Beach

Student demographics. About 77,400 students were enrolled at LBUSD in fall 2015, with 25,500 and 37,400 attending LBCC and CSULB, respectively (headcount enrollment). Over two-thirds of the K-12 students and about half of the postsecondary students were from low-income families. Latinx represented about 55% of those in the school district, 48% at the community college, and 37% at the university; both LBCC and CSULB are designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions. African Americans represented about 14% of K-12 enrollments, 15% at LBCC, and 4% at CSULB. LBCC estimates that about 30% of its students are the first in their families to attend college.

Salinas Valley BtG Partners

K-12 Partners

Alisal Union School District
Gonzales Unified School District
North Monterey County School District
Salinas City Elementary School District
Salinas Union High School District
Soledad Unified School District
South Monterey County Joint Union High School District

Postsecondary Partners

Hartnell College
Hartnell College Foundation
California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB)
Bright Futures Education Partnership (Bright Futures), at CSUMB

Salinas Valley partners.

In the Salinas Valley, the K-12 and postsecondary institutions had some history of collaborating with each other individually or in clusters, but BtG brought this cross-system partnership together for the first time throughout the valley. Anchored by the city of Salinas in the north, the Salinas Valley extends a few miles farther north and includes the town of Castroville and several agricultural towns 70 miles south to King City. Primary areas of

focus for the Salinas Valley BtG team included improving college readiness (e.g., expanding dual enrollment programs and aligning curricula across education systems) and increasing cross-institution data-sharing.

Student demographics. Compared with state averages, Salinas Valley residents have high rates of poverty and low levels of educational attainment. The K-12 and postsecondary students are predominantly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the vast majority are from homes where families speak English as a second language, and many are from migrant families. Hartnell enrolled about 17,600 students in fall 2016, and CSUMB enrolled about 17,000 (headcount enrollment). Both are Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI). About 62% of Hartnell's students identify themselves as Latinx and about 42% do so at CSUMB. Two-thirds of Hartnell's and over half of CSUMB's enrollments are by first-generation college students.

Principles of Practice in Action

The five principles of practice drawn from the work of the BtG teams (see BtG Principles of Practice on page 2) are consistent with a growing, but still emergent body of literature about cross-system education partnerships within geographic regions (see Appendix D: Literature Review). In the following pages, we present these learnings through examples from Long Beach and the Salinas Valley to highlight the extent to which partnership work is contextual and dependent on local challenges and breakthroughs. In illustrating the principles through the work of these BtG teams, we hope to support a better understanding of the range and depth of efforts needed to build effective student transitions and enduring pathways across disparate education systems. The principles of practice are based on interviews and surveys with instructors, staff, and administrators who participated in BtG, as well as on information gathered at BtG convenings (see Appendix E: Methodology).

(1) Keep students, their educational goals, and related equity implications at the center.

Both the Salinas Valley and the Long Beach BtG teams proposed similar areas of work involving college readiness to support closing opportunity and outcomes gaps. They focused their work on students of color and on low-income and first-generation college students. Their work emphasized similar programming, including dual enrollment and data sharing. Their approaches, however, were very different and evolved in different ways, based on their historical and regional contexts and the needs of their students and communities. In focusing on student needs, for example, the partners in the Salinas Valley committed early on to transform perceptions about the college potential of students, both at their own institutions and in the broader community. The Long Beach team, with its longer history in promoting college opportunities in its service area, took a more targeted approach—for example, by developing professional development for dual enrollment faculty as a way to improve faculty understanding of and pedagogy for high school students.

Listening to student voices. Both the Long Beach and Salinas Valley BtG teams gathered information about students' perspectives as part of their work. The Long Beach team also surveyed faculty who were teaching dual enrollment courses. In both regions, the voices of

students raised challenging questions for the BtG teams. In the Salinas Valley, for example, Hartnell and CSUMB asked us to find out about students' experiences with student supports during their first years on campus. Based on two sets of focus groups on each campus, we found that the students considered both academic tutoring and student advising to be crucial to reaching their postsecondary goals. Students described the former, however, as much more widely and easily accessible than the latter.

> *"The [learning center] was my backbone in helping me pass my class. Without it, I would have never passed math."*
>
> *—Student*
>
> *"I went into [the counseling office], and I probably wasted a year…It took a while for me to find the right person."*
>
> *—Student*

Students valued personal touches, including their connections with faculty, peers, and targeted support programs.

> *"They [TRIO staff] treat you like a family, too. But, beyond that, if you have any questions, you can email your counselor. They answer even sometimes on the weekends, and I think that's a big deal. They just go above and beyond."*
>
> *—Student*

Exploring the implications of the students' perspectives led to the following kinds of questions for the postsecondary institutions: What cost-effective models or practices can academic advising adapt from tutoring centers and targeted support programs on their own campuses? Can peer-to-peer models help connect more students with trusted advising information? How can colleges encourage more faculty to engage with more first-generation college students about academic and career choices?

Changing mindsets about students' potential. The Salinas Valley team realized that, in working to improve college readiness across K-12 and postsecondary institutions, it needed to broadly transform college-going expectations in the valley. The team members began with a series of guided conversations with education constituents (including high school teachers and counselors, and college and university faculty and staff) to unpack their beliefs about students' potential. They found many high school counselors to be resistant to college-level math placements, due to concerns about students' ability to succeed, and yet the colleges were providing supports for these students in the college-level classes. Based on these experiences, the partners invited counselors to the table to discuss Hartnell's new approaches. It also developed a broader communication campaign, including peer-to-peer messaging (for students and parents) about college readiness, through videos and other means.

"Some of the counselors admitted pretty openly that they thought not all students were college material, and it was their role to figure out who was in and who was out."

—Community interviewee

"We've worked on changing the way we do academic prep, because one of the things that I have pushed for, and we've put into our graduation initiative, is the recognition that academic preparation is about a great deal more than specific academic tools. That preparation has to be that we are ready for the students we serve, not just that they are ready for us."

—CSUMB interviewee

Engaging and educating parents. The Salinas Valley BtG team also adopted a grassroots approach—based on the "promotora" model—to arm parents in the community with information to share with other parents about the importance of college and about the specific requirements and opportunities along the way. This model, adapted from health care, trains community members to use their relationships and networks to educate their peers without having to become professionals. The BtG version of this model remains in its early stages in Salinas.

"The parents are learning a-g [college prep courses], they're learning dual enrollment, they're learning FAFSA, they're learning all these different things about college—and they're teaching their peers. Along with that there's also a youth team, and the youth team is also doing community organizing around higher ed and college readiness."

–Hartnell College interviewee

Professional development for faculty teaching dual enrollment. The Long Beach BtG team had already been building communitywide college readiness expectations through its long-standing Long Beach College Promise programs. But the Long Beach team recognized the need for specific institutional shifts to address the diverse needs of incoming students. One of its priorities, for example, was to examine and address the need for professional development for faculty who teach dual enrollment courses. In our interviews with high school and college administrators, faculty, and staff, many respondents said that dual enrollment can benefit postsecondary faculty by helping them gain a better understanding of the needs of high school students, which in turn can lead to pedagogical changes that benefit all first-year students.

"College faculty need to understand that, even though the course is a college level class, their students are still in high school. This requires a shift in thinking and a clearer sense of responsibility for their students."

—CSULB faculty

"[Dual enrollment] students are coming to recognize that, if they start college now, they have a higher probability of completing college later on, and that's what the statistics are saying: hey have a higher probability of success."

—LBCC interviewee

Supports to ensure students have what they need to be successful. The Long Beach BtG team also recognized the need to improve supports for students in dual enrollment courses. Long Beach provides a range of dual enrollment courses to address students' diverse interests, and most interviewees described this approach as a key strength. Several respondents also raised questions about who dual enrollment can best serve and how best to provide supports for all high school students, especially those who may not initially think of themselves as college students. The questions about supports included logistical issues involving the kinds, locations, and scheduling of academic or other supports. They also involved the need to inform faculty about the supports that are available. Nearly all faculty respondents said that connecting dual enrollment courses to pathway programs is beneficial, particularly for first-generation college students, because these programs connect individual courses to an overall academic plan. Faculty also said they would like partnering institutions to:

- address transportation challenges for students;
- facilitate better access to on-campus support services; and
- provide access to the college's online student portals.

(2) Share and use data to identify successes and barriers and to build engagement.

California does not have a central coordinating body for K-12 and postsecondary education or a longitudinal data system that can track students from high school into and through colleges and universities. This lack makes cross-system commitments to share data at the regional level especially important for those seeking to improve student pathways. Data can be particularly useful in helping to create a sense of urgency about the barriers that students face and in keeping the focus on students and their long-term education goals. Given this context, both BtG teams identified cross-system data sharing and use as crucial components of their work. Examining student data across institutions helped the partners gain new perspectives about the barriers that students face in transitioning from high school to college. The partners used the data to sharpen their own institutional efforts and to engage others in change efforts. In Long Beach, the team created a data warehouse to collect and share data regularly across institutions.

Examining cross-system data to identify problems and evaluate progress. Interviewees from the Salinas Valley team said that using and sharing data were crucial to their efforts to develop their partnership and establish a common set of practices that featured a structured approach to change. As part of its early processes, the team drew from qualitative data about student perceptions about academic and advising supports, as well as quantitative data to help identify barriers for students and to catalyze change efforts.

> *"We gathered data from a group of students, teachers, counselors, [and] administrators on their perception of what is helping or impeding our college readiness. That was really important to get that qualitative data to look at the different perceptions that we have within our stakeholder community."*
>
> *—K-12 interviewee*

Interviewees said that the partnership helped to solidify institutional practices around using qualitative and quantitative data. They also said, however, that their institutions were not as far along in using data to evaluate programs as part of a continuous improvement cycle. One of the team's goals is to develop a comprehensive cross-sector data system:

> *"That's a larger aspiration, but, in the short term, what we're trying to do, given the new rules for college placement, is just to get transcript information automated, so that it's not a matter of the student bringing the paper transcript, it's really the click of a button, so that when they apply for college, you have the appropriate data-sharing agreement to access that information."*
>
> *—Hartnell College interviewee*

***A cross-system data warehouse to support decision-making*.** The Long Beach BtG team had the benefit of long-term relationships with each of the institutional partners and with many of the individuals involved. As a result, many team members had already developed a history of trust in sharing data across institutions to apply for grants, understand student needs and challenges, and evaluate impacts. For example, when CSULB was developing a summer bridge program for high school students, the program manager contacted a trusted source at the school district who was able to provide access to students who met the criteria for the program.

The BtG team, however, sought to move beyond individual relationships and develop a plan to implement a data warehouse that would offer more powerful and consistent ways to share information about students across the education systems. The goal was to make student data available from each institution, so that the institutions could track student progress across systems, identify risk and success factors that impact student opportunities and outcomes, and provide student interventions and support to ensure students stay on track. With regard to the connection between the warehouse and dual enrollment, several interviewees emphasized the importance of: (1) having routine ways to track high school students enrolled in dual enrollment courses, and (2) being able to learn more about the relationship between enrolling in dual enrollment courses and other factors of college success, including degree completion.

To lay the groundwork for the data warehouse, the partners each agreed to an amendment to the Long Beach College Promise's memorandum of understanding regarding their commitment to share student-level data. In addition, the partners had to resolve technical challenges about how to merge data files from three different systems that use different coding and student identifiers. Currently, the system is in the process of merging the data files.

"What we've mentioned all along, and why the data warehouse is part of our Bridging the Gap effort, is [that] we have no institutional way of collecting this data for dual enrollment other than [through] our partnerships."

—LBUSD interviewee

(3) Engage and support leaders at the top and in the middle.

Both BtG teams emphasized the importance of drawing from a range of leadership roles and functions, both among institutional executives and those working directly with students, such as faculty/teachers, counselors/advisors, and department chairs. In both Long Beach and Salinas, middle leaders were empowered to make some decisions. A key challenge for executive leadership involved sustaining support amid leadership turnover. Challenges for middle leadership included finding time to engage in the work and building leadership skills.

Leaders in multiple roles and levels at each institution. In Salinas, the partners revived an annual summit and repurposed it around college transitions to engage broad groups of teachers, faculty, counselors, and administrators from all three systems in identifying and aligning the many college readiness and transition efforts underway. Challenges included understanding the impacts of recent policy change in each of the three systems, aligning the work with the Salinas Valley Promise, and supporting student success.

"What can we do as the partners to help you better prepare students, or what do you need from us in terms of curriculum guidance or alignment to better help in that transition? That's really the goal—to be seen as partners and to act as partners."

—Hartnell College interviewee

Interviewees in Long Beach said that champions of dual enrollment had come forward in each institution, and these leaders ranged from top administrators to faculty and staff working directly with students. They said that delegating authority to key individuals throughout each organization is important in sustaining cross-institutional efforts, due to the higher turnover of executive-level positions. For example, the superintendent of LBUSD has committed significant resources to dual enrollment, including funding the CSULB courses, but it is not clear what would happen under new management at the school district. As an example of middle leadership, faculty and staff from LBCC and CSULB have worked with school counselors and teachers to coordinate outreach efforts to ensure that students in dual enrollment courses are receiving adequate supports. Engagement of these middle leaders has been particularly important, the team said, in pushing forward the logistical and administrative discussions and coordination that are needed to create sustained change.

"If you want long-term conversations, then these have to be among more than just one or two institutions, they need to be cross-institutional...Then the

question is, 'Have the conversations been good enough, deep enough, strong enough to sustain past the grant period?' I believe that they have."

—LBUSD interviewee

BtG as a leadership experience. Salinas Valley interviewees said that one of the benefits of BtG itself was that it provided faculty, teachers, and others—that is, middle leaders—with useful leadership experiences. In building relationships, designing programs, and solving problems across institutions, those who work directly with students have an opportunity to see the ripple effects of their own decisions into the broader arena of institutional change. By engaging in addressing challenges across systems, these leaders also expand their own leadership skills and perspectives.

"Through Bridging the Gap, one of the unintended outcomes is just the relationship-building with the other districts in the area and really utilizing each other's strengths to build upon things that we need."

—K-12 interviewee

(4) Work *across* institutions to improve connections and create coherence for students.

In interviews, both BtG teams emphasized the importance of building relationships across education systems, coordinating communications activities, and otherwise developing a shared responsibility for improving connections and creating coherence for students. Cross-system work, they said, requires developing an understanding of the incentives and values of each institution and building a sense of trust in each institution's work with students. The collaborative efforts are time consuming (relationships happen at the speed of trust) and challenging (there are no cookie-cutter solutions). Establishing cross-system processes—for joint communication efforts, for example—can facilitate the work.

***Trusting the expertise and supporting the roles of all partners*.** In the Salinas Valley, many team members did not have a history of working together. They had to set up new processes for scheduling and facilitating meetings, and the distances across the rural partnership were challenging for in-person meetings. The newness of the cross-system partnership, however, brought energy to the work, and the partners' sense of commitment to their rural communities brought passion and engagement. This energy and passion, the partners said, helped them trust each other's commitment to students and to working toward common goals. This trust, over time, spurred them to understand each other's perspectives, including the incentives, policy levers, and challenges embedded in their institutional contexts. High school counselors, for example, sought to understand recent changes in state and system policies regarding developmental education at the community colleges and the CSU. Postsecondary institutions, for their part, were willing to listen to their K-12 colleagues, to examine their own practices, and to "move policies out of the way" that posed barriers to students' transitions from high school to college, according to a CSUMB interviewee.

"What I appreciate about Bridging the Gap is everybody really is passionate about the work. Their heart is in it, and there's no egos. It's all about our students and how…we make things better for them."

– K-12 interviewee

"This is a shared responsibility…We don't come in and say, 'These are the classes you offer.' We make recommendations, and then we see what works."

—Hartnell College interviewee

The importance of establishing cross-system processes. The Long Beach BtG team drew from committee structures that had already been set up by the Long Beach College Promise. Many of the team members, as they worked to refine their joint programming, already had experience with the practical challenges associated with working across systems. Interviewees said that establishing ongoing processes across institutions can help partners focus on student needs beyond their own institutions. For example, years ago, representatives from LBCC and CSULB established regular meetings with the school district to coordinate consistent messaging to students about the many dual enrollment options in Long Beach. Staff from the high schools are now represented prominently as well. This change led to better understanding about dual enrollment among high school counselors who provide information directly to students about the amount of homework expected in college courses, the benefits of participation, credit transfer, and logistical issues.

Addressing differences across systems. In Long Beach, the partners said they work to make sure that their approach to dual enrollment is coherent from the perspectives of students and parents. This has led to collaborative efforts to explain how their approaches differ, including to the courses offered, the language used by each institution (for example, credits versus units and counseling versus advising), scheduling, and locations. High school counselors and the postsecondary institutions coordinate marketing and recruitment strategies, including information nights at the high schools for students and parents, where both LBCC and CSULB representatives explain these dual enrollment options and differences.

"We have to be thinking about consistency in messaging to the students, because they are getting information from the K-12 district. They are also getting information from the colleges. [We need to] make sure there's continuity…so that students are receiving the right information at the right time, and it's consistent."

—LBCC interviewee

Yet, even with Long Beach's history of collaboration on dual enrollment, much work remains. Our interviews and surveys with faculty highlighted several cross-system and institutional policies they would like to see addressed:

- better alignment of schedules;
- policies and practices to ensure that credits will transfer automatically;
- compatibility of technology across institutions;
- criteria for student placement into dual enrollment courses;
- criteria for dropping out of dual enrollment courses; and
- scaffolding and sequencing of dual enrollment courses.

Commitment to use different incentive structures and policy levers to address student needs. In interviews and in BtG convenings, Long Beach team members said that working through challenges across systems requires a basic understanding of the incentive structures and policy levers at each institution, and a willingness to move forward, despite some constraints or barriers at one's own institution. At LBUSD, a key motivation for expanding dual enrollment is the fact that it is now included as an indicator of college and career readiness on the California School Dashboard. LBCC has a fiscal incentive to increase the number of its full-time equivalent (FTE) students, especially in smaller academic departments. At CSULB, the institutional motivations for providing dual enrollment classes are not as direct, but the value proposition includes supporting student preparation for the university, providing more equitable opportunities for students, and speeding time-to-degree for those who enroll with credits already earned (the last incentive is a focus of the CSU system's Graduation Initiative 2025). At each of the institutions, there are also barriers built into requirements for instructor qualifications, faculty time and workloads, competition for enrollments, transportation and course scheduling, administrative systems, and student support structures. The differences in incentive structures and policy levers also highlight the precariousness of institutional efforts to improve student transitions across systems.

In the face of these differences, interviewees said that relationships developed through the Long Beach College Promise had provided the groundwork for the BtG team to learn more about each institution's motivations and challenges in offering dual enrollment. This helped the team members focus on addressing student needs.

> *"I think dual enrollment works well, because there are efforts happening to work across systems and to develop protocols around the entire system, not just, 'Well, this is how we do it, and you guys need to do it our way.' It's, 'We need to help this student who's in your system, but has taken something in our system. So, how do we do that?'"*
>
> *—CSULB interviewee*

(5) Work *within* each institution to institutionalize and sustain the work.

Institutionalizing new processes that provide coherence across systems may be the most challenging aspect of this work, since it involves communicating the value of proposed innovations at a home institution, understanding programs and politics at that institution, and attending to the nuts and bolts of academic and administrative practices that affect student progress, such as pedagogy, professional development, enrollment management, curriculum

and program streamlining, budgets, and data management. The Salinas Valley team worked to institutionalize its work by starting small and building on early successes. As reported in previous sections, the Long Beach team used existing structures to solidify its work—for example, in communications, professional development, and data.

Starting small and building on early successes. To institutionalize their work, the Salinas Valley partners chose a structured, iterative approach. They started with relatively modest changes and addressed administrative, structural, and logistical challenges along the way before expanding. With regard to dual enrollment, for example, they began with a student success course that appeared to be the most straightforward one to implement and the most useful approach for large numbers of high school students. They made sure to promptly resolve the implementation challenges that arose at each institution, including enrollment processes, scheduling issues, and outreach to students and parents.

> *"We chose to go very slow, and I think that's what's making it successful. We started just with one dual enrollment class, made sure that everybody had the same one to set a foundation. I think we worked out all the little things that we weren't anticipating."*
>
> *—K-12 interviewee*

The partners' efforts to increase the number of students who complete the a-g sequence also started with a quick-win strategy: identifying students who are only a few courses short of completing their a-g sequence and ensuring that they enroll in those courses. Building from that momentum and from their outreach on educators' beliefs about students' potential, they are now looking at capacity and policy issues, including graduation requirements, to increase a-g enrollment and completion.

Building on existing structures and practices. In Long Beach, the BtG team inherited a series of cross-system practices, including dual enrollment and data sharing, that had been developed through the Long Beach College Promise, but that still need alignment and standardization at the respective institutions. In dual enrollment, for example, the Long Beach BtG team worked to create professional development opportunities for faculty, which may help to normalize dual enrollment as a central, rather than a peripheral, offering at LBCC and CSULB. In addition, Long Beach's work may provide learnings nationally, as well; there is very little in the literature on professional development for community college or university faculty teaching these courses. Similarly, the team's development of a cross-system data warehouse serves to institutionalize and standardize processes for data sharing and use at Long Beach's education institutions. The team's cross-system success in this area—from setting up a memorandum of understanding to resolving technical challenges—also serves as a bellwether for other regions interested in setting up similar agreements and systems. At the same time, the Long Beach partners are straightforward about the challenges that remain in trying to make sure that reforms are institutionalized in a cohesive manner that supports students throughout their experience.

> *"It's really trying to design with the end in mind and thinking about, 'Okay, if this goes away tomorrow, are we designing a structure that will last to support the effort, whatever the effort is?' For me, a lot of it is about [focus] and if it's treated like a short-term grant project, I don't see that systemic level work going to happen. If it's treated like, 'This work is a priority. We are going to structure it and then apply whatever can come to us along the way.' That effort has a better chance for taking hold and lasting."*
>
> *—LBUSD interviewee*

Sustaining cross-system work. Efforts to institutionalize cross-system coherence, as described above, may be the most important form of sustaining this work. In addition, the partnerships themselves can be leveraged to engage people and bring resources to the table. The Salinas Valley team is working to leverage its BtG partnership to bring support for an expanded vision of its work. For example, the partners received a Hispanic-Serving Institution grant through the U.S. Department of Education to further strengthen dual enrollment efforts.

> *"Sometimes, it's about reallocating resources. Sometimes, it's about figuring out how to leverage with each other. But it's about focusing and building this energy towards these goals."*
>
> *—Hartnell College interviewee*

In Long Beach, the educational institutions have leveraged their regional partnership for decades to build support for their cross-system work. In the process, they have come to recognize that, for this work to be sustained, each new initiative needs to feed into existing priorities—both for the partnership and for each of the institutions—that build coherence for students.

> *"There has to be this constant calibration around not always having to start over with every new…initiative that comes out that's helping us support these efforts."*
>
> *—LBCC interviewee*

Conclusion

This brief is unique in describing principles of practice drawn from examples in the work of two very different cross-system education partnerships in Long Beach and in the Salinas Valley. In engaging with each other through BtG, each institutional partner brought to the table its own set of historical contexts, resources, incentives, policy levers, and barriers to the collective goals and work plans. As BtG unfolded, the statewide K-12, CCC, and CSU systems implemented reforms that caused each of the partners to learn and to adapt their own practices, which in turn made working across systems a more immediate need for those seeking to improve student transitions from high school to postsecondary education.

As these changing conditions underscored the importance of partnering across institutions to address student needs, they also revealed the extent to which cross-system work involves much more than understanding and applying "best practices." Rather, working across systems requires keeping students and equity-related issues at the center, examining data, building trust, finding common ground, communicating well, understanding how change works across and within systems, and finding time to work together and solve problems—usually among faculty and staff who are overworked already and are not trained in leadership practices, communications, or institutional change strategies.

Given the extent to which context and networking are crucial in education partnerships, it may be that what makes any principles of practice useful is an awareness of the setbacks, challenges, relationships, and breakthroughs of the work that underpins them. With this in mind, we hope that the examples and reflection questions in this brief resonate with those engaged in their own partnership. We also hope that this brief encourages the development of cross-system efforts focused on systemic and enduring changes to help more students reach their long-term education and career goals.

Appendix A: Reflection Questions

The reflection questions below are intended to help educators as they seek to develop or strengthen their own regional cross-system partnerships. The questions are organized by the five principles outlined in the report and are meant to serve as a starting point for self-assessment of partnership goals, strategies, and challenges. Individual partnerships will likely have additional questions arise from this exercise.

(1) Keep Students, their Educational Goals, and Related Equity Implications at the Center

- Do we have a common vision across institutions for our partnership and for the specific tasks we are undertaking? What are our partnership goals? How do they relate to our own institutional goals? Do the partnership goals focus on students? Can we make the goals more student-centered? More equity-centered? Who is developing our goals?
- Which groups of students do the current or proposed activities of our partnership support? Are there additional groups of students that we should be trying to reach through our efforts? Will large numbers of students be able to access the proposed activities?
- Are there equity implications in terms of the students we are serving and are proposing to serve? For example, to what extent does this work help us become "student-ready" in supporting the closing of opportunity and outcomes gaps for students?
- Does our partnership have processes in place (such as surveys and focus groups) to listen to student feedback? For example, do we ask students about their perspectives on supports and programs that help them meet their educational goals (including current and potential offerings)?
- What expectations do different partnership stakeholders have for addressing the needs of students? Do we need to change the mindsets or expectations of any of the stakeholder groups regarding student capabilities and addressing student needs? If so, what strategies are we using to try to change mindsets?
- What processes does our partnership have in place to engage K-12 parents and K-16 faculty to help students meet their educational goals? What processes do we have to engage students in these efforts? Who else do we need to engage in our efforts to support students?

(2) Share and Use Data to Identify Successes and Barriers and to Build Engagement

- What long-term goals do we share for student success across our systems? What data do we need to collect or understand regarding whether we are meeting these goals?
- Do we have processes in place, and are we using data to identify, understand, and change opportunity gaps? Outcomes gaps?
- What data does each partner collect to help us understand student progress across our partnering institutions? What do these data tell us? Are the data timely?

- Are we using these data to inform changes in processes, procedures, and policies that can better support student success?
- Are faculty and staff using the data to inform program, curricular, and pedagogical changes that support equitable student outcomes?
- What are the key loss and momentum points within and across the continuum of students' educational experiences? Which groups of students are we losing at those points?
- What steps do we need to take to ensure access to data across our partnering institutions?
- What questions do we need to ask to ensure that our efforts and dollars spent on data do not outweigh the benefit?
- How accessible are our data? Are we sharing evidence-based information with students, parents, and community members?

(3) Engage and Support Leaders at the Top and in the Middle

- Who is at the table in our partnership efforts right now? Do our discussions include voices representative of our community and our students? Who needs to be at the table who is not currently here?
- Which individuals or organizations does our partnership need to engage? What strategies and which allies can help us reach out for that support?
- Does our partnership engage and support individuals at multiple levels (for example, campus/school/district leaders, mid-level administrators, teachers/faculty, and counselors) in the partnering institutions?
- Does our partnership engage and support individuals in different roles (for example, academic and student affairs) in the partnering institutions?
- Is our partnership structured in ways that can sustain the work if institutional leaders depart? Do team members on the ground have the authority to make decisions that will allow the work to continue to be a priority?
- What strategies or incentives can we put in place to help create the time and space for people to go beyond their regular work duties to participate in this work—individually and collectively?

(4) Work *across* Institutions to Improve Connections and Create Coherence for Students

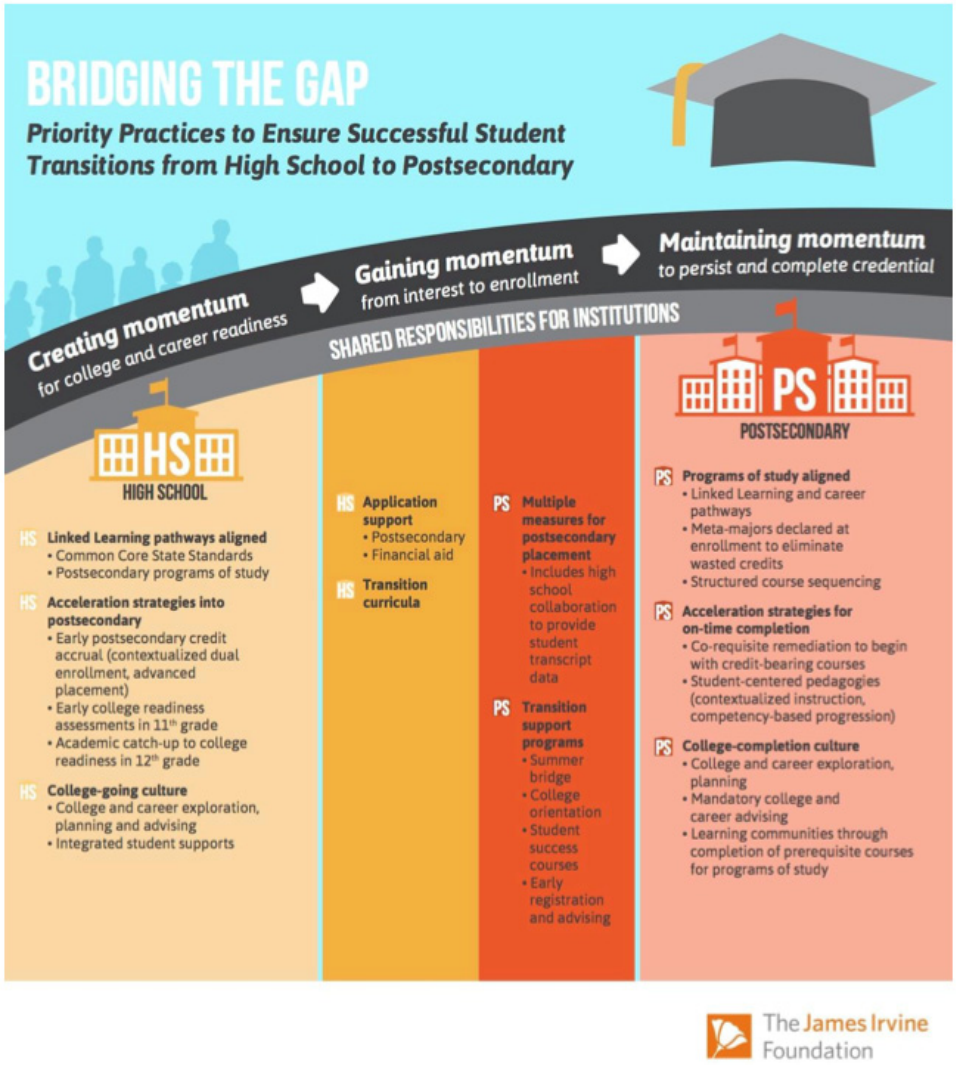
- What strategies do we have to ensure an awareness of and a commitment to a common vision across the partnership? Is our commitment to that vision aligned with support for the goals of each group of partners working on discrete tasks?
- How would I describe the culture of our partnership? In what ways is it based on a culture of trust? A culture of equity? A culture of evidence-based decisionmaking? A culture of assets-based supports? A culture of systemic reform? In what areas could each of these issues be developed or enhanced among partners?
- What processes are currently in place to encourage or engage in cross-system collaboration? What additional strategies could be established to facilitate this work?

- What are the motivations for each institution to engage in this partnership? What are the financial incentives and policy levers that can help drive participation in this work? How can we build on those incentives, policies, and other opportunities at our home institutions?
- What are the fiscal, policy, and other barriers to partnership at the different institutions? Are there different processes and procedures at the different institutions (different academic schedules, registration systems, terminology, etc.) that need to be addressed in order to allow the activities of the partnership to work more efficiently?
- What processes can our partnership put in place to build awareness of incentive structures and barriers within and across systems and institutions? How do our own institutional histories and contexts affect our abilities to partner effectively?

(5) Work *within* Each Institution to Institutionalize and Sustain the Work

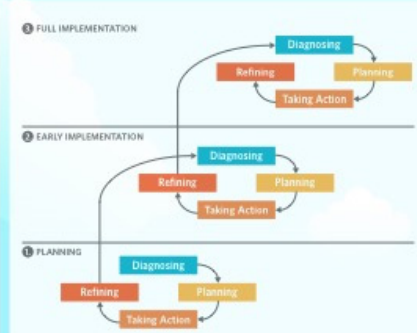
- How does the work of my partnership align with current tasks and priorities at my own institution? Are there potential conflicts between the work of the partnership and the goals and priorities of my institution? How can we address these conflicts?
- How can we build on existing structures and processes within each institution to incorporate the work of the partnership?
- Is initiative fatigue affecting the work at my institution? What steps do we need to take to ensure that partnership initiatives are treated as long-term priorities and not just as another short-term project?
- In facilitating and institutionalizing change, in what ways are we attending to routine, yet impactful, practices within each institution, such as enrollment management, curriculum and program streamlining, budgetary commitments, tenure track hiring, and data capabilities? How are we considering opportunity and outcomes gaps around these issues? How are we using evidence to inform these key decisions?
- How do our institutional incentives, barriers, histories, and contexts affect the sustainability of our partnership and collaborative programs? How can we leverage our partnership to sustain our work?

Appendix B: BtG Priority Practices



Appendix C: BtG Community of Practice

Bridging the Gap *Community of Practice*



The Bridging the Gap community of practice will bring sites and initiative partners together to support inquiry and learning. This community of practice will feature a core team in each site as well as cross-site activities to support three phases of the work: planning, early implementation, and full implementation.

Each phase has four dimensions: diagnosing, planning, taking action, and refining.

Career Ladders Project will facilitate and coordinate the community of practice. **EdInsights** will provide documentation to inform the community of practice — and to capture larger lessons for the field. **The James Irvine Foundation** will interact with, and support, initiative sites and partners throughout the process.

DIAGNOSING **Each site:** Decides on the inquiry that is needed in each phase and works collaboratively across K-16 systems to diagnose needs, challenges, and opportunities.	**PLANNING** **Each site:** Leads planning and identifies next steps; conducts deeper inquiry and course correction; connects to other initiatives and reform efforts.
Career Ladders Project: Helps identify topics for inquiry; leverages existing efforts to align with Bridging the Gap goals; helps participants focus strategically and collaboratively; provides assessment/mapping tools to support sites.	**Career Ladders Project:** Provides planning/design tools that support sites and enhance their core planning capacity; encourages sites in identifying and combining resources across initiatives to connect, advance, and scale the work.
EdInsights: Listens to conversations about needs, challenges, opportunities, and related issues; works with sites and partners to identify timely research and information.	**EdInsights:** Provides timely and actionable research to help sites and the broader field; conducts, co-conducts with sites, or supports sites with conducting student focus groups.
TAKING ACTION **Each site:** Leads implementation activities and shares progress, barriers, and emerging opportunities.	**REFINING** **Each site:** Listens and gains new information and insights to enhance planning and action.
Career Ladders Project: Works with sites to determine topics that warrant peer-to-peer exchange, especially to inform cross-site convenings.	**Career Ladders Project:** Listens to inform each new phase for the community of practice.
EdInsights: Conducts timely and actionable research addressing opportunities, barriers, and new ideas related to implementation.	**EdInsights:** Listens to inform further research and highlight important issues for sites and the field.

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Appendix D: Literature Review

The five principles of practice drawn from the work of the BtG teams and presented in this brief are consistent with a growing, but still emergent (Scott et al. 2017), body of literature about cross-system and regional education partnerships.

(1) Keep Students, their Educational Goals, and Related Equity Implications at the Center

Asera et al. (2017) refer to efforts to refocus education institutions on student needs as a *moral* imperative, partly because existing *institutional* incentives do not necessarily propel staff, faculty, and administrators to put students first. Institutions are set up to support themselves, and the chasms between systems are indicative of how students are not central in the design of current systems. Browning et al. (2015) suggest creating a "support culture" for students. Conway et al. (2012) identify student needs as a driver of partnership design. Many studies refer to the importance of having high standards and expectations for student success, particularly in relation to student preparation for college and careers, including through dual enrollment (Barnett 2016; Nodine, 2017).

(2) Share and Use Data to Identify Successes and Barriers and to Build Engagement

Virtually every source addressing partnership priorities highlights the importance of grounding the work in tracking, sharing, and analyzing data and in otherwise committing to the use of evidence-based practices. This includes identifying and understanding the problems to be addressed (rather than starting with preconceived "solutions"), tracking student progress and outcomes, making programmatic and institutional adjustments in a cycle of improvement, communicating with outside groups, and monitoring the progress of the partnership itself. Some of the most promising early conversations among partners, in building relationships and a sense of shared ownership, springs from the generation, sharing, and analysis of internal data about the students they serve in common along the education pipeline (CFF 2017, Asera et al. 2017). Sharing data trends regarding student outcomes can make it harder for people to deny that problems exist (Dowell 2016). Successful system change efforts are those that engage in research and analysis to hone strategies and that are used to create ongoing data assessments and shared measurement systems to evaluate and reassess their own progress (Walker 2017, Kania & Kramer 2011).

(3) Engage and Support Leaders at the Top and in the Middle

Many studies focusing on successful education partnerships suggest the importance of having executive leaders committed to the partnership to set its tone, to address challenges as they arise, to leverage resources, and to increase the impacts of the partnership on the institution (Moore et al. 2015; Asera et al. 2017; Kania & Kramer 2011). These leaders include presidents, vice presidents, superintendents, and associate superintendents. Drawing from the work of

Leading from the Middle in the California Community Colleges, Rose Asera, Bob Gabriner, and David Hemphill (2017) also emphasize the important role that middle leaders serve in implementing programs and in transforming institutional culture from within the ranks of deans, department chairs, student service staff, faculty, counselors, and teachers. Whereas turnover is relatively fast among executives, middle leaders tend to serve for longer periods of time in the same institutions and can provide continuity for change over the duration. Often, succession planning is not done well at the top, and initiatives can fizzle when leaders move on. Also, a fairly constant refrain within education reform is the need for "buy-in," which implies a top-down approach—one that is challenging to sustain if the middle is not initially engaged in developing the goals, objectives, and strategies.

(4) Work *across* Institutions to Improve Connections and Create Coherence for Students

In "Collective Impact" (2011), Kania & Kramer make the case for the importance of systems thinking in order to address and solve the adaptive problems that society faces—that is, those challenges that cannot be solved through known or existing solutions. They contend it is critically important to realize the ripple effects of decisions on institutional reform. In the education segments, specifically, and in the nonprofit space, generally, the work requires seeing beyond competitive needs and understanding that student success should not be viewed as a zero-sum game; all institutions share the responsibility for and the benefits of increasing student achievement (CFF 2017; Berliner, 1997; Burns et al, 2015).

(5) Work *within* Each Institution to Institutionalize and Sustain the Work

National research has demonstrated that adding new programs is not, in itself, effective in improving student success overall. Rather, iterative changes done in a "purposeful, consistent, and cohesive way" across the functions of an institution and focused on student success can lead to "significant improvements in student outcomes over time" (Moore et al., 2017; Moore et al. 2015). Asera (2017) refers to this as focusing on the way that various reforms and improvements fit together to enhance organizational coherence for the students who have to navigate them. The late CSU Long Beach Provost David Dowell, describing some of the lasting effects of the Long Beach Promise (2016), suggested the importance of adopting a collaborative, all-institution approach and a sustained, unwavering focus on the goals—in this case, student completion. Dowell also emphasized attending not just to innovative efforts, but also to the "nuts and bolts" of lower-profile, but impactful, practices in facilitating students' timely educational progress, including enrollment management, curriculum and program streamlining, budgetary commitments, tenure track hiring, and data capabilities. The work has to cut across and integrate academic and student affairs, as well as academic and administrative units, around student success. In short, for partnerships to address institutional change, they need to affect institutional infrastructure, and to examine *themselves*.

Appendix E: Methodology

This brief draws from studies of BtG teams by EdInsights in Long Beach and the Salinas Valley. In both regions, our findings are limited by small sample sizes and are therefore exploratory.

In Long Beach, our findings are based on studies that included: 1) interviews and surveys with 12 faculty (seven from LBCC and five from CSULB) about their experiences teaching dual enrollment courses, including their experiences with and needs for professional development; and 2) interviews with 13 faculty, counselors, administrators, and program directors integrally involved in dual enrollment at their institutions (four from LBUSD, three from LBCC, and six from CSULB). Some student data are drawn from internal reports by the education partners. Methodology and other citations are drawn from "Offering Dual Enrollment in a Cross-System Partnership: A Case Study in Long Beach," an internal report by L. Jaeger, K. R. Bracco, and T. Nodine at EdInsights.

In the Salinas Valley, our findings are based on studies that included: 1) interviews with a total of 12 faculty, staff, administrators, and community members (from Salinas Union High School District, Hartnell, CSUMB, and Bright Futures) who were instrumental in planning and implementing the BtG regional education partnership in Salinas Valley, and 2) two focus groups each, with a total of 34 students, at Hartnell College and CSUMB. Some student data are drawn from internal reports by the education partners. Methodology and other citations are drawn from the internal report, "Efforts to Increase College Readiness through a Cross-System Partnership: A Case Study in the Salinas Valley," by L. Jaeger, K. R. Bracco and T. Nodine at EdInsights.

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EdInsights is a research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education. Our mission is to inform and improve policymaking and practice for K-12 education, community colleges, and public universities. We accomplish this through applied research, evaluation, the California Education Policy Fellowship Program, and the CSU Student Success Network.