

Executive Summary: Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap (BtG) supports successful student transitions from high school to postsecondary, via cross-system, education partnerships. With funding from The James Irvine Foundation, BtG partnerships focus on first-generation college students, students of color, and low-income students who face substantial barriers in meeting their educational goals.

This series explores the experiences of two California partnerships that joined the Bridging the Gap initiative in 2016: one in Long Beach and the other in the Salinas Valley. Based on interviews and surveys with faculty, staff and administrators we sought to understand the systemic, institutional, and equity challenges facing the partnerships and how they operationalized their efforts to address them. We attempt to answer the question: How have two distinct regional education partnerships worked across systems to increase college readiness for broad populations of students?

The BtG initiative coincided with policy reforms at the state and system levels to transform curricular and assessment practices in the K-12 schools, basic skills and developmental education at the California Community Colleges, and remedial and general education at the California State University.* 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

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.

* 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.

challenges inherent in, working across systems to support students' educational and career goals from high school to and through college.

The Long Beach initiative leveraged its decades-long education partnership between the City, the school district, Long Beach Community College (LBCC) and California State University Long Beach (CSULB) to develop a coherent cross-system approach to offering dual enrollment courses, pilot and implement new career exploration tools, and develop a data warehouse. The partnership prioritized dual enrollment as a key element of its college and career readiness strategy. LBCC increased dual enrollment opportunities in six-industry related pathways, and CSULB developed one course in Ethnic Studies targeting underrepresented students who may not consider themselves college-bound, and another in mathematic thinking for high school students not planning to pursue STEM majors. Partners supported these efforts with coordinated messaging and outreach to students and parents, and professional development for faculty who teach dual enrollment courses. Most interviewees described this approach as a key strength of the Long Beach partnership.

The Salinas Valley BtG initiative faced a different set of imperatives given the region's broad geographic footprint and limited collaborations among partners prior to BtG. Partners focused primarily on increasing the number of high school students who complete dual enrollment courses and the full "a-g" sequence of courses required for admission to the California State University and the University of California. The main challenges to increasing the number of dual enrollment courses included aligning schedules, meeting instructor qualifications, and funding. Further, Salinas Valley increased the number of high schools offering the full a-g sequence, encouraging more students to complete the sequence, ensuring that students and parents understand grade requirements for admission to a university, and aligning CTE and English as a Second Language programs with a-g requirements. The Salinas Valley BtG partners attributed their successes to being intentional and sequential in their approach in change.

Drawing from the work of the two BtG teams, we identified five principles of practice that we hope 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 are based on interviews and surveys with instructors, staff and administrators who participated in BtG as well as information gathered from BtG convenings.

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.

This work can be explored further in our Bridging the Gap series:

[*Bridging the Gaps for Students in the Salinas Valley*](#), [*Bridging the Gaps for Students in Long Beach*](#), and [*Bridging the Gaps through Cross-system Education Partnerships*](#).