

Oakland School for the Arts: Linked Learning Status Update

Oakland School for the Arts is committed to deeply understanding the intention and process in implementing Linked Learning at our school. Our goal is to be a school where we view Pathways as a Practice. Consequently, we have identified the areas in which our current structures need revisions. As we look at revisions to our school, we consider the following factors: 1) prospective students and families with respect to Art areas, 2) our audition and diversity recruiting process in general, 3) how we use our time in class and in preparation for class and when supporting student achievement and want to be sure we communicate with and hear feedback from each stakeholder group. We will be engaging our Academic Excellence committee from the Board of Directors to ensure that stakeholder group has a thorough understanding of what Linked Learning is. Additionally, we are working with our Pathway Development Consultant, Pivot Learning to present to our Executive Director, Chief Academic Officer, and Director of Advancement to address high level scenarios. Marketing materials to the OSA Community and Industry Partners will include information about Linked Learning as it appears at OSA both electronically and through hard copy materials.

The learning curve in our Linked Learning design process was steep and challenging at first, but now that our development team has expanded and our understanding of Linked Learning has become more comprehensive we have established significant momentum. The feedback we have received from the commission during the site visit has been valuable and the encouragement to observe other Linked Learning schools has given us a clearer sense of what changes are necessary to fully establish Oakland School for the Arts as a Linked Learning Pathway School. Our team is currently working to evaluate such structural changes as bell schedule, student cohorting, graduate profile to determine whether Linked Learning is the best direction for the school, and if so, to establish a course of action to make these changes and ensure all stakeholders deeply understand Linked Learning.

In terms of the four pillars of linked learning, our greatest growth has been in the realms of Career Technical Education and Integrated Student Supports. We are pushing to have teachers in all 9 of our arts departments CTE credentialed with wall-to-wall inclusion for our students with a CTE course sequence available to all. The CTE credentials are from Arts, Media and Entertainment and Fashion and Interior Design Pathways. With 17 teachers receiving their CTE credentials in the past year we are well on our way. We have also redesigned our student support structure to include grade level counselors and systemic student achievement reporting system where we identify struggling students early and implement comprehensive interventions to support success for these students. This includes the new role of Coordinator of Student Services who manages and oversees this process. At the end of Q1, we met with all families of students performing below a 2.5 GPA and academic and pathway teachers to analyze the current situation for the student, implement a support plan, and designate a periodic check-in process. This level of student support was simply not possible prior to receiving measure N funding.

As we move further in our pathway development process we are facing some critical decisions that entail structural changes if we are to fully meet the criteria of Linked Learning. Our development team has formed four subcommittees to expand our reach to all stakeholders as we evaluate our current structure and possible changes. These committees include graduate profile, bell/master schedule, arts integration into core content areas, and pathway structures.

The graduate profile group is currently synthesizing all desired graduate profile traits, setting up a focus group to analyze this info in comparison to our current ESLRs, and ultimately creating a finalized graduate profile that will be used to assist in the backward design of our program and pathways.

The bell/master schedule group has collected data that has led to the interpretation that our current daily schedule is outdated and needs redesign to meet the needs of our students and provide space and time to provide adequate student supports. They will be researching and visiting schools with non-traditional bell schedules and drafting alternate ways of using our time to leverage the arts in offering optimal college and career opportunities. This includes allowing time for advisories, internships, art/academic integrated courses, access to arts electives outside of the designated pathway, “flex” time, concurrent enrollment courses, etc.

The arts integration subcommittee is specifically focusing how to best leverage the passion and dedication our students have for the arts in promoting high academic achievement. The subcommittee are discussing various models of arts integration and will ultimately be suggesting systems to formalize the process of arts integration through PBL and cohorted academic subjects. We have done much of this work informally in the past but recognize that we must be more intentional if we are going to support all students in this regard.

Our pathway structures subcommittee is working to determine the appropriate number of pathways for our school and how our current 9 emphases will fit into these pathways. The critical guiding question this committee is facing is how does the pathway structure best support the cohorting of our students?

It is uncertain how all of these consideration will manifest as Oakland School for the Arts works through this process. It is entirely possible that our school design metamorphosizes significantly in the next year with a new bell schedule, graduate profile, mission and vision, pathway design, etc. We will be discovering this as our subcommittees continue their work and expand their reach amongst all of our stakeholders. Though we are uncertain at this point exactly where we will land, we are already feeling notable impact from this design process as our level of intentionality in implementing systems and structures that best support student achievement has improved significantly.