The Oakland Health Pathways Partnership

A Cross-Sector Model to Improve Access to Quality Healthcare, Education, and Employment in Underserved Communities

CARLOS REALES
Castlemont High School
“I loved the intensity of the hospital. Being at the hospital, I felt the gratification of seeing and making somebody get better. That is kind of rare, when the good outweighs the bad.”

—Robynne Oliver, student participant
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In 2015, two of Alameda County’s largest healthcare employers stepped up to partner with Oakland Unified School District to provide a seamless academic and work-based learning experience for students from low-socioeconomic-status communities. Recognizing the importance of investing early in students’ career development, the partner institutions created a cross-sector collaboration designed to support students and cultivate the workforce of the future.

Drawing on best practices from Linked Learning approaches, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership provides hands-on experiential workplace and academic learning opportunities for students through high-quality Health Pathways. A unique and highly effective solution to the community-level problem of lack of access to quality healthcare, education, and employment, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership integrates rigorous academics with sequenced, career-technical education, work-based learning, and mentoring support. The partnership unites:

- Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)
- HealthPATH, an initiative of Alameda Health System—Alameda County’s public healthcare system and a major local employer, based at Highland Hospital, that serves as the “umbrella” for a continuum of work-based learning programs.
- Alameda County Health Pathways Partnership (ACHPP), a consortium of 15 health-related internship programs housed within the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, which is also a major local employer.

This partnership creates a solid infrastructure that supports students’ dual immersion in academic and workplace learning. OUSD’s six Health Academies, also called Health Pathways, bring together a diverse group of students who have a shared interest in future healthcare careers and the well-being of their communities. The Health Pathways provide academic, career, and social-emotional guidance, along with necessary technical skills, while funneling students into workplace learning opportunities. Together, HealthPATH and ACHPP offer a continuum of age- and developmentally-appropriate programs for workplace learning in health-related fields. More than 1,500 OUSD students participate annually as part of the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership. Through this partnership, a diverse range of new internships has been made available to Academy students.

Through internships, volunteer opportunities, and other work-based learning experiences, high school students gain firsthand knowledge of healthcare careers and interact with caring professionals. These adults serve as mentors and role models to the youth who will become the next generation of healthcare workers. In this way, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership promotes academic excellence and skills for life and career success, helping young people improve their own economic status and give back to the communities where they grew up, while also improving the health and economic status of these communities.
The Challenge

“There is really a dire need for us to do high school differently, both in terms of what we teach, and how we support kids.”

—Rebecca Lacocque, Linked Learning Director, Oakland Unified School District

TODAY, NEARLY ONE-THIRD of students nationwide leave high school without the skills they need to succeed in college, have a fulfilling career, and earn a living. The situation is even worse for youth from low-income communities, where there is a lack of high-quality programs that give students the agency, skills, and career experience they need to succeed and thrive.

Additionally, researchers continue to uncover links between employment and health, with higher incomes associated with lower mortality risk and lower rates of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. Simply put, good jobs increase students’ chances of a better life.

Oakland Health Pathways Partnership was created to address this reality.

Introducing Oakland students to career opportunities in healthcare opens pathways to educational and career success for program participants and, in turn, helps improve the well-being of the entire community.

“The East Bay has a shortage of skilled workers in many healthcare professions, and the current workforce does not reflect the population’s racial and ethnic composition. Both of these factors exacerbate the health inequities that are prevalent in low-income communities.”

—Delvecchio Finley, CEO, Alameda Health System
The Opportunity

**DATA SHOWS** that Oakland students who participate in Health Pathways programs are 20% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers. The integration of academic and work-based experience makes education engaging and relevant. Adult role models, mentors, and counselors guide students to the next steps in their education and career, helping them access college and jobs with self-confidence and with résumés that set them apart.

They are especially prepared for jobs in healthcare, one of the fastest-growing sectors in the nation—predicted to add more jobs between 2016 and 2026 than any other sector. By preparing minority youth and young adults from low-income communities for careers in healthcare, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership promotes a diverse, culturally-responsive, and highly skilled workforce.

By producing a diverse workforce whose members come from and are representative of the communities they serve, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership increases access to quality healthcare and reduces health disparities.

The result: a positive impact on communities for generations to come.

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Student Voices

**TO ASSESS THE** impact of the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership, 21 student participants from across Oakland were asked to share their experiences. Here is what they had to say.

“When you find out what you want to do in life, you definitely work hard to achieve that goal. Coming into this program, I know this is something that I would definitely do in the future, so I will do whatever I can now so that I can be in a better position later.”

—Robynne Oliver, student participant

**STUDENT FEEDBACK**

How did you benefit from this program?

- Opened my mind to opportunities
- Motivated me to stay healthy
- Improved my ability to help people
- Increased my connections and networks
- Gained college credits
- Had an overall positive experience

“I was part of the respiratory department and there was a code and we ran downstairs to the ER. I think it was level-one trauma. When the patient came in, his heart was stopping so they did compressions. There were so many people in the room, but they all had a specific job and they were all working together to try to save one person. That was the thing that was like: I want to do this. I want to be in the medical field. I want to be surrounded by people I can trust who are just there helping each other, helping other people.”

—Cathya Mendoza, student participant
“Individual and community health are deeply intertwined. By creating access to well-paying jobs for youth from low-income communities, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership plays a critical role in improving economic health at the individual, family, and community levels.”

—Jessica Pitt, Executive Director, HealthPATH, Alameda Health System
Impact: Academic

**College-level classes**, hands-on training, mentoring, and college and career counseling help students excel in school. Internships are woven into the academic curriculum to give students hands-on experience and an inside look at careers.

This experience increases the number of students pursuing postsecondary education and healthcare careers.

“Five or six months ago I didn’t know what I was going to do, like at all with the careers. I didn’t know what I was interested in until I went into the MIMS class. It just kick-started me to think about what I needed to do. It also tied into my education, like I need to focus, just be driven to finish what I need to get done. Going to the MIMS, it basically gave me a plan of what I wanted to do to get into physical therapy and be a personal trainer. Just having a plan is good—it can open you up to so many different things.”

—Terrin Flores, student participant in internship program

*Mentoring in Medicine and Science (MIMS)*
Impact: Personal Growth

**STUDENTS WHO** participate in Oakland Health Pathways Partnership programs are guided to create a roadmap for the future and are motivated to pursue postsecondary education.

The exceptional support students receive helps them gain self-confidence, set and achieve goals, persevere through challenges, improve their communications skills, and increase their ability to advocate for themselves. They experience that adults in their fields of interest care about them, believe in them, and are available to support them on their journey.

“I’m always encouraging myself every day. Hearing more encouragement from others made me realize, ‘Oh, okay, some people do recognize what I do, not just me.’ I feel like, okay, I’m not alone, even though I feel lonely sometimes. Encouragement from others has also taught me to always keep believing in myself.”

—*Jhunnie Manzano, student participant*

**STUDENT FEEDBACK**

How has this Health Pathway program affected you?

- Increased confidence
- Healthier eating and drinking choices
- Increased healthcare field knowledge
- Improved social skills

Impact: Career

**OAKLAND HEALTH PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP** programs create a strong, sustainable pipeline that continues through school to jobs and careers. Students in Oakland are interested in careers in healthcare: across all pathways, 25.7% of OUSD students identified careers in health science and medical technology as their number one interest. For those in Health Academies, the figure jumps to 45.5%. This program exposes students to an array of financially-viable healthcare careers, both clinical and nonclinical.

Students gain role models—people they can relate to who are from their own communities, which expands their sense of their own potential. They also develop a network of professionals who can attest to their abilities, help them find their pathway through postsecondary education to viable careers, and inform them about how to access new opportunities.

“As soon as we expose young people to mentors and careers, their trajectory immediately changes.”

—*Dr. Jocelyn Garrick, Director, Alameda County Health Pathways Partnership*
HealthPATH represents a major investment in the health and well-being of our youth and our communities. Our programs expose youth and young adults to career opportunities in healthcare and put them on a path to educational and career success. We are preparing the next generation of healthcare workers serving their communities. In this way, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership strives to create a viable employment pipeline for a skilled, diverse workforce.

Increasing the diversity of the healthcare workforce also makes healthcare more accessible to the wider community, which improves everyone’s health and well-being.

“HealthPATH represents a major investment in the health and well-being of our youth and our communities. Our programs expose youth and young adults to career opportunities in healthcare and put them on a path to educational and career success. We are preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals, creating life-changing opportunities, and ultimately bolstering healthcare in the community, by the community.”

—Delvecchio Finley, CEO, Alameda Health System

Impact: Community

**Economic Security** is one of the most important factors contributing to individual and community health and well-being. Achieving economic security hinges on having access to stable, well-paying jobs.

Our partner institutions project that they will have more than 5,000 job openings in the next decade. The partners are committed to engaging the young people who participate in these programs to become the next generation of healthcare workers serving their communities. In this way, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership strives to create a viable employment pipeline for a skilled, diverse workforce.

Increasing the diversity of the healthcare workforce also makes healthcare more accessible to the wider community, which improves everyone’s health and well-being.
Your Investment Matters

THE OAKLAND HEALTH PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP is a best-practice model. One of its strengths is the alignment between a school district and major health-care employers. This unique collaboration enables academic and employment practices to be shaped in ways that support students as well as the institutions themselves.

The model has been piloted, evaluated, and refined; it is now ready to scale.

During the 2015–2018 school years, this partnership has supported more than 1,000 OUSD students. Our goal is to scale up immediately to serve 1,500 students by 2019–2020, an increase of 50%.

Resources are also needed to support the partnership’s collective impact approach, allowing the partners to continue to align resources, support ongoing assessment and problem-solving, and develop new programs to address the changing needs of Oakland students and the community.

Additional resources will allow the partnership to grow, bringing in other healthcare employers and ramping up the number and diversity of workplace learning opportunities. Investment will also allow the partnership to expand to provide a continuum of workplace learning activities to middle school students.

In the short time since 2015, the Oakland Health Pathways Partnership has aligned education and healthcare institutions and improved academic and career outcomes for thousands of OUSD students. With your support, this program can serve many more students and create the vibrant, healthy Oakland that its residents desire and deserve.

“If all the students had the same opportunity and did programs like this, Oakland would be a lot better. I feel like the violence would be down.”

—Cathya Mendoza, student participant

STUDENT FEEDBACK

100% of student interviewees recommend the partnership’s programs, because they:

- Create opportunities
- Teach valuable skills and knowledge
- Help students better manage academic demands
- Change the educational path for the better
- Spark interest in postsecondary education and sustainable careers
- Are generally beneficial

“If you want something, if you want it enough, you have to fight for it. You can’t sit back and hope that it will come your way. If you want it, take it. If I want to be a doctor, I can’t sit and hope that I will pass medical school and hope that I will get into good colleges and try to do the best I can. Every step I want to take is a step up.”

—Steven Nguyen, student participant
Oakland Unified School District students