



## Pathways to Possibility: Reimagining CTE in California's Continuation High Schools

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# PREFACE

**“GIVE THE PUPILS SOMETHING TO DO, NOT SOMETHING TO LEARN;  
AND THE DOING IS OF SUCH A NATURE AS TO DEMAND THINKING;  
LEARNING NATURALLY RESULTS.”**

**JOHN DEWEY**

As part of a landscape analysis of California’s continuation schools, Learner-Centered Collaborative and Center for Powerful Public Schools partnered to conduct empathy interviews and school visits at continuation schools in the following districts: Oakland Unified, Los Angeles Unified, San Bernardino City Unified, and Kern High School District.

This document is part of a broader initiative aimed at expanding access to career and technical education (CTE) for students in continuation schools, young people who have historically been overlooked in district and county efforts to prepare students for meaningful careers, the workforce, and skilled trades.

At the heart of this work lies a powerful insight captured by John Dewey, who reminds us that learning must be grounded in “real things to do,” not just content to memorize or tasks to check off. This idea speaks directly to two central challenges for continuation schools:

- 1. How can we make learning authentic and meaningful, while also navigating the complex demands students face?**
- 2. How do we create experiences that support credit recovery, timely graduation, and post-secondary readiness, while also providing the kinds of transformative, relevant learning every student deserves?**



# Executive Summary

Career & Technical Education (CTE) is a powerful lever for removing barriers to student success, cultivating learner agency, and ensuring real-world readiness. Yet, far too often, students in continuation high schools are excluded from access to robust, relevant pathways. This project, led in partnership by Learner-Centered Collaborative and Center for Powerful Public Schools, seeks to change that.

Through empathy-driven research and landscape analysis, this initiative aims to understand what students in continuation high schools want and need from CTE programs and to use those insights to inform systemic shifts that expand opportunity.

We focused our Phase 1 efforts on:

- Conducting empathy interviews and site visits with continuation school students, educators, and leaders
- Analyzing local and statewide conditions that enable or constrain CTE access and effectiveness
- Identifying promising practices and barriers across diverse school contexts
- Synthesizing findings into actionable recommendations.

Our work is rooted in a belief that listening to students is the starting point for systemic transformation. Early insights from schools reveal deep student-staff connections, creative leadership, and adaptive practices. They also surface persistent systemic barriers such as limited program access, staffing shortages, and the tradeoff between credit recovery and career readiness.

The **findings and recommendations** in this report aim to:

- **Inform policy, investment, and implementation strategies that better serve continuation school students**
- **Encourage funders to support scalable, accessible innovation in CTE**
- **Provide education leaders with actionable tools and case-based insights**
- **Center the voices and needs of students historically pushed to the margins of our education systems**

This report is a call to see, hear, and respond to continuation students, not as afterthoughts in education reform, but as central figures in a movement for learner-centered transformation.







## The Challenge

Students in continuation schools are all too familiar with the stigma that comes with their enrollment. Far too often, our educational systems label these young people as deficient, treating them as problems to be managed rather than individuals full of potential. What they are offered frequently falls short of what they truly deserve: learning experiences that recognize the full breadth of their intelligence, creativity, and humanity.

Yet these students often possess some of the sharpest insights into the very systems that have failed them. They see how barriers form, how peers fall through cracks, and how institutional hierarchies reinforce division. This wisdom is rarely acknowledged, nurtured, or leveraged as a catalyst for change. The opportunity – and the responsibility – is to create environments where their lived experience becomes a source of power, agency, and transformation.

### A Snapshot

Nearly 51,000 students in California attend continuation schools. If these schools were organized into a single district, with over 430 campuses, it would rank as the tenth largest in the state. Despite their scale, continuation schools remain dispersed and largely invisible, operating on the margins of the education system.

Students in these schools are often steered toward packet-based learning, credit-recovery programs, and other deficit-based approaches aimed at fast-tracking graduation. While these may address short-term goals, they rarely provide the foundation needed for long-term success.

This is especially concerning given many continuation students face significant instability. Rather than receiving robust support and opportunity, they're often offered the bare minimum. What's lost are the experiences that make education meaningful: transformative learning, career pathways, community partnerships, and exposure to a wide range of futures. These are the opportunities every young person deserves, especially those pushed to the margins.

**“What is to give light must endure burning.”**

**Viktor Frankl**

### The Opportunity

There are clear signs of progress – both in practice and in policy – that offer reason for hope. Several continuation schools within Los Angeles Unified are already piloting innovative, student-centered approaches, including project-based learning and Linked Learning pathways that connect academics with real-world relevance. Oakland Unified has also led the way with the passage of Measures N/H, which fund initiatives that embed career-based and work-based learning into the high school experience.

On the policy front, Assembly Bill 542 represents a promising shift. The bill aims to give continuation students greater access to work-based learning during school hours without penalizing them for time spent off-campus. Notably, the bill has received no known opposition, underscoring a growing consensus around the need to reimagine what's possible for these students.

The timing for this work is right. In places like Bakersfield and San Bernardino, momentum is building, with local leaders and educators increasingly exploring partnerships, pathway development, and innovative instructional models.

With Los Angeles Unified's 39 continuation schools and Oakland Unified's three already on the path to integrating career-connected learning, these districts, and a handful of others, are poised to become national exemplars. They have the opportunity to lead a movement that transforms continuation education, grounded in the belief that our most historically resilient students deserve not just a way to the finish line but a launchpad to thriving futures.





**“Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged.”**

**Michael Crawford**

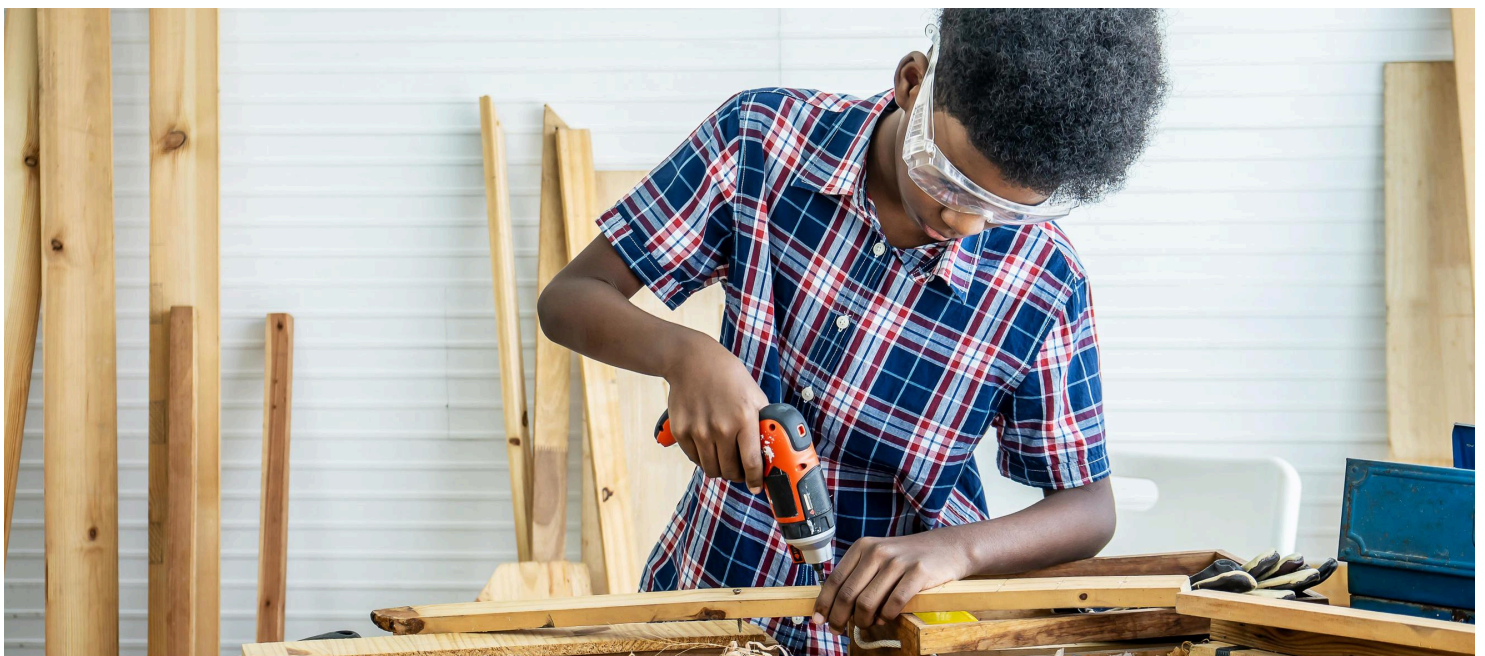
## Our Approach

**What are the necessary elements of CTE Pathways for effective, learner-centered education in California continuation high schools?**

This essential question guided our work in better understanding how to design meaningful, future-oriented learning for students in continuation settings. Our approach combined deep, qualitative insight gathering with systems-level analysis. We listened directly to students, educators, school leaders, and staff to surface bright spots and persistent barriers. We also examined broader structural challenges, such as eligibility restrictions for CTE programs, limited access to industry-recognized certifications, and the ongoing tension between credit recovery and long-term readiness.

Through this work, we aim to elevate the voices of continuation school communities, offer clear recommendations for advancing CTE access, and foster shared learning across systems.

Ultimately, this project is about reimagining how we design education for students too often viewed as an afterthought. **The insights and guidance that follow are intended to support policymakers, educators, funders, and advocates in building a future where every young person has access to a pathway that honors their potential and propels their purpose.**





# Empathy Interview Insight Report

## Process Overview

To better understand what meaningful, learner-centered CTE looks like in continuation high schools, we grounded this phase of the project in empathy work, an approach rooted in listening deeply to the lived experiences of students, educators, and school leaders. We aimed to identify what is and isn't working in current CTE programs and uncover what matters most to those navigating these systems daily.

Between January and June 2025, our team conducted fieldwork across a diverse set of continuation schools in California. Our methodology was designed to surface authentic insights through open-ended, learner-centered inquiry. This included:

- **Site visits** to a range of continuation schools representing different regions, demographics, and CTE offerings
- **Empathy interviews** with students, teachers, counselors, and administrators
- **Observations** of CTE classrooms, support centers, and key elements of school infrastructure
- **Field notes** capturing qualitative data, school culture, and contextual conditions

These conversations focused on student aspirations, barriers to access, the perceived relevance of CTE, and the types of learning experiences that promote engagement and growth.

In the following pages, you'll find case study profiles from each school site visit. Each profile highlights key findings, challenges, future aspirations, and more.

Together, these stories and insights offer a deeper look at what it will take to create CTE pathways that are both accessible and transformative for continuation school students.







# Centering Student Voices

Throughout this landscape analysis, we prioritized listening to students to understand their lived experiences, needs, aspirations, and ideas for how school can better support them. Their voices grounded our understanding and shaped the analysis that follows. What we heard from learners underscores the importance of designing systems that are responsive, empowering, and rooted in real-world relevance.

Below is a synthesis of what we heard from learners across a small sample of continuation high schools:

## Hands-on, real-world learning is highly motivating

Students want opportunities that feel connected to the real world, especially career paths, trades, and practical skills they can use after high school.

- “I want to go into a trade, maybe electrical. I’m also into music.” —Bunche Academy
- “I’m learning electrical work like running a new system, thermostats, AC units.” —Rudsdale
- “Culinary – that’s what I want to do when I get out of school.” —Dewey Academy
- “It feels like a soup restaurant; there are lots of options and you get to choose what fits you.” —Tierra Del Sol
- “I like the hands-on experience with my health pathway classes. It’s giving me the skills to pursue a career in nursing or real estate.” —Dewey Academy
- “The Crucible got me into welding. I want to do that after I graduate.” —Rudsdale
- “I got a new CPR certification.” —Dewey Academy
- “The Amazon Future Engineer program – coding at your own pace, and we talk to real engineers on Zoom.” —Tierra Del Sol

## Students are hopeful and want more opportunities

Many students expressed optimism and drive but also shared a desire for more electives, exposure to careers, and preparation for life after high school.

- “I want to go back to the DR, open a gas station and ATMs.” —Bunche Academy
- “If we had more electives, like hiking or skateboarding, I’d take them.” —Rudsdale
- “[Internships and field trips are] a great opportunity that they’re giving us.” —Dewey Academy
- “We wish there were more clubs. We want a culinary class.” —Tierra Del Sol
- “I wish we had more pathways related to construction and carpentry.” —Dewey Academy
- “I’m doing internships to see what I might want to do.” —Dewey Academy

# School Profile: Dewey Academy

## Key Programs & Initiatives:

- A partnership with the organization **EBAYC** (East Bay Asian Youth Center) offers Dewey students multiple opportunities for enrichment and summer internships, including: automotive skills, boxing, art therapy, and outdoor education. Having EBAYC on campus makes these opportunities especially accessible and impactful.
- **Career Technical Education (CTE):** The health and fitness pathway provides training in fields like medical assisting, sports medicine, nursing, pharmacology, and veterinary care. Students work toward certifications such as phlebotomy and first aid, gaining workforce-ready skills.
- **Work-Based Learning (WBL):** Students have the opportunity to participate in WBL experiences, including internships with local businesses and organizations. These opportunities provide real-world exposure and skill development crucial for future careers. Paid internships, such as those through EBAYC and the Planting Justice program, are also available, offering students both financial compensation and valuable career experience.
- **Linked Learning Certification:** Dewey is recognized by the Linked Learning Alliance with a Silver certification, highlighting its commitment to integrated academic and career preparation.



## Student Testimonials

"I'm currently doing a mentorship internship with the EBAYC program and getting hands-on experience in hiking and outdoor education. I'm also working with Highland Hospital, helping with harm reduction supplies." – Student A

"I'm doing a food handler credential internship with Planting Justice and a mentoring internship in health and science. I also go camping with EBAYC..." – Student B

"I'm in a nursing internship and also helping to mentor younger students in the community." – Student C

"I like the hands-on experience with my health pathway classes. It's giving me the skills to pursue a career in nursing or real estate." – Student D

"I wish we had more pathways related to construction and carpentry. My dad runs his own construction company..." – Student E





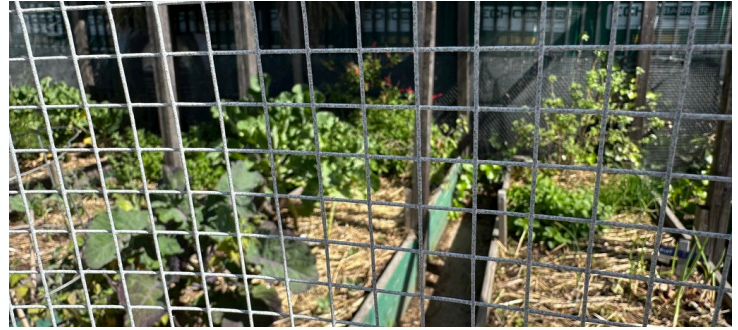


## Opportunities for Students

- **Certifications and Employment:** Students can graduate with industry-recognized certifications, such as phlebotomy and food handling, that prepare them for immediate entry into the workforce.
- **Paid Internships:** The school's partnerships with organizations like EBAYC, Planting Justice, and local healthcare providers allow students to earn while they learn, gaining valuable work experience in fields such as healthcare, culinary arts, and environmental sustainability.
- **Community and Career Exposure:** Through field trips, job shadowing, and career exploration initiatives, students connect with professionals across diverse industries, gain real-world insights, and build valuable networks.

## Challenges

- **Expanding Career Exploration:** While students appreciate the school's efforts to connect them with career pathways, many express interest in exploring fields beyond health and fitness, highlighting the need for broader career exposure.
- **Student Engagement and Participation:** Addressing students' willingness to participate in new experiences and ensuring sustained participation in programs remains a challenge, especially for frequently absent students.
- **Alignment:** Dewey is offering many opportunities to connect students to WBL and CTE experiences; however, there's a need to develop a well-braided vision that incorporates academic classes, pathway courses, and unique student interests that don't currently fit the established pathways.



## Future Goals

- **Expansion of CTE Integration:** Dewey is working to more deeply embed CTE into the daily curriculum to increase relevance and cross-disciplinary connections. For example, incorporating union qualifications in English or math classes could help further bridge academic learning with real-world skills.
- **Enhanced Support Services:** Priorities include strengthening orientation and graduation processes to better support a highly mobile student population, expanding resources for students balancing significant responsibilities outside of school, and building partnerships with organizations to increase access to internship opportunities.

## Student Aspirations and Mentorship

- **Career Goals and Guidance:** Dewey students show strong interest in careers ranging from nursing and construction to culinary arts and real estate. Those interviewed expressed appreciation for the support and mentorship they receive, connecting it to the skills needed for their future paths.
- **Life Beyond High School:** Many students plan to pursue further education through community college or job training programs like Job Corps. Others intend to enter the workforce directly, often through connections they've already established.



# School Profile: Bunche Academy

## Key Programs and Initiatives

- **Hospitality, Tourism, Recreation, and Culinary Pathways:** The pathway program is going through a rebuilding phase after staff turnover and loss of institutional connections and partnerships. The program is rebuilding with hopes to expand community partnerships and include capstone experiences.
- **Senior Seminar:** A course designed to help students explore postsecondary opportunities, reflect on personal growth, and prepare for life beyond high school. A visit to this class showed high student engagement, as viewed through student participation and the number of students present.
- **Dual Enrollment Courses:** Courses like 'Introduction to Business,' offered in partnership with local community colleges, give students a head start on earning college credits while building foundational skills in business and financial literacy.
- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** Socially conscious PBL units in 11th grade focused on themes like healthy relationships and personal growth.
- **Internships & Work-Based Learning:** Bunche is exploring expanding industry partnerships and has engaged organizations like Young Women's Freedom Center, EBAYC, and Growing Together. Although at the beginning of their journey, students are responding well to the pathway courses.

## Opportunities for Students

- Hands-on learning through culinary and garden programs
- Advisory built into students' schedules will support the shifts the current leadership wants for the school
- Partnerships with Central Kitchen, ECCCO, and City Council offices
- Capstone projects and presentation skill-building
- Support from a dedicated TSA and literacy coach
- Pathways Coach (once a week) to support planning and developing a thoughtful pathways program

### Student Testimonials

"This school really turned me around. I was on GPS and now I'm back on track."  
— Student 1

"I was going through depression at my old school. I'm doing a lot better now."  
— Student 2

"Last year there was a lot of banging... this year we have school."  
— Student 3

"Coach Peters is like family...like a great uncle."  
— Student 4

"Ms. Crystal is hands-on and supportive." — Student 5







## Challenges

- Staff turnover and need for onboarding/training for new teachers
- Lack of institutional knowledge around CTE pathways; this impacts both students and staff
- Difficulty securing guest speakers and ingredients for hands-on classes due to budget constraints
- Limited Measure H/N funding allocations
- Ongoing need to build a stronger scope and sequence in pathway programs
- Some students express that classes are not directly connected to career readiness
- Creating a new culture centering academic rigor and pathways

## Future Goals

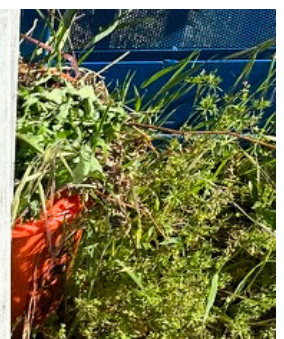
- Establish a clear and coherent HTRC pathway with certification options
- Expand dual enrollment and CTE offerings
- Build stronger partnerships with industry professionals and the OUSD Central Kitchen
- Develop a rigorous, scaffolded learning model across all classes
- Design mini-capstone experiences and a revised graduate portrait
- Increase PD for staff around career pathways, CTE navigation, and PBL
- Make postsecondary planning more visible throughout the campus and through student interactions

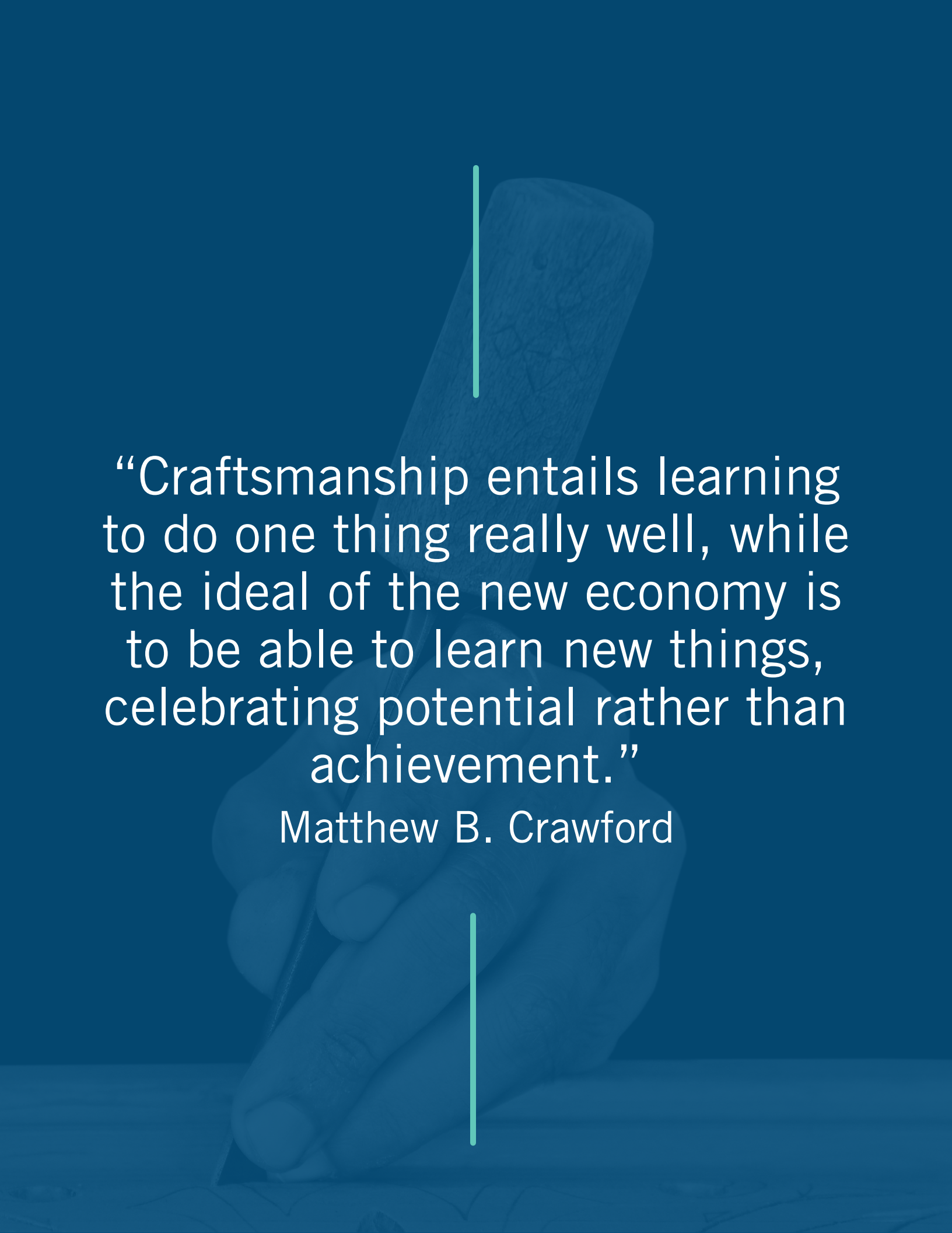
## Community Impact

Bunche is transforming perceptions, from a school some families hesitated to attend to one where parents now feel grateful for the opportunity it provides. Community partnerships are beginning to take shape, offering students exposure to civic life and hands-on opportunities. The calm, focused learning environment stands in contrast to prior years, signaling a transforming school.

## Student Aspirations and Mentorship

- **Students dream big:**
  - Student J wants to study welding, travel overseas, and return to his country of birth to open a gas station
  - Student S plans to study business and marketing
  - Student C is exploring a career in electrical trades, with a side passion for music
  - Student O is deciding between cosmetology, nursing, and interior design
  - Student I envisions managing apartment projects and learning from professionals in construction or logistics
- **Students expressed a need for:**
  - More visible pathways and CTE courses
  - Greater alignment between classroom learning and real-world jobs
  - Exposure to professionals and expanded access to internships



A hand holding a wooden pencil, with a teal background and two vertical teal lines. The background is a solid teal color. A hand is holding a wooden pencil, with the pencil tip pointing downwards. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame. Two vertical teal lines are present: one on the left side of the hand and one on the right side of the hand. The text is centered over the hand and pencil.

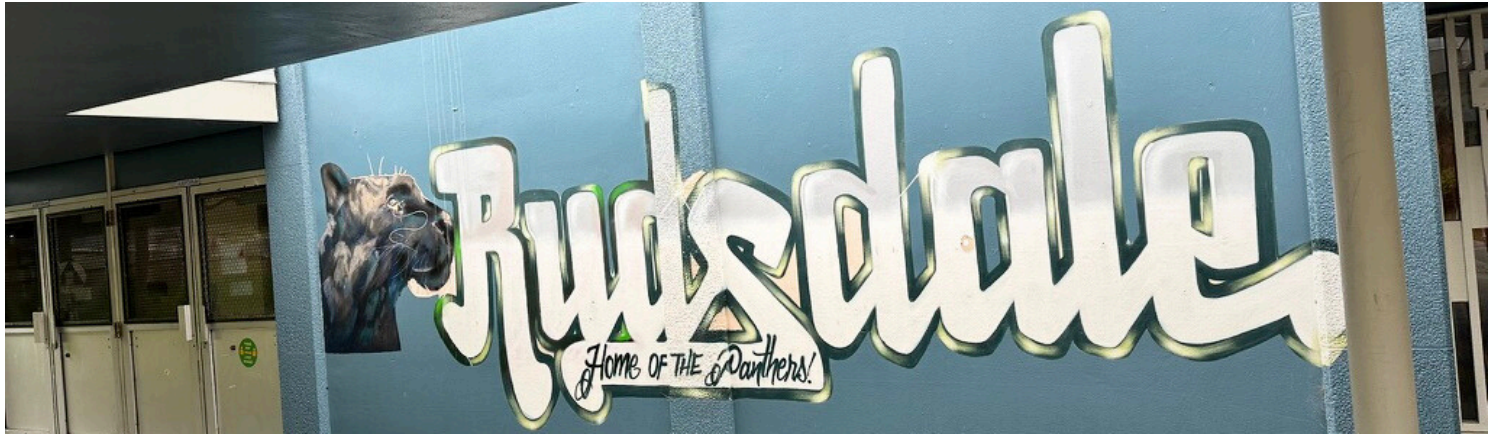
“Craftsmanship entails learning to do one thing really well, while the ideal of the new economy is to be able to learn new things, celebrating potential rather than achievement.”

Matthew B. Crawford





# School Profile: Rudsdale Continuation



## Key Programs and Initiatives

- **FabLab & Digital Design:** This makerspace features tools like 3D printers, laser cutters, silkscreen presses, and vinyl cutters, enabling students to create hands-on projects such as bookbinding, apparel printing, and laser-etched designs. Courses are offered during the school day and after school, with students gaining experience in design software through Adobe Creative Cloud.
- **Dual Enrollment with Laney College:** Students earn college credit in on-campus Photoshop classes. They explore fonts, poster design, and digital tools aligned with industry expectations. A few students also participate in both dual enrollment and FabLab courses.
- **The Crucible Partnership (Industrial Arts):** Students participate in paid 12-week cohorts in trades like welding, blacksmithing, and glassblowing. These immersive, three-hour sessions foster professional-level skills and allow students to sell their creations at community events.
- **Graduation Seminar & Capstone:** All seniors complete a portfolio that includes a resume, cover letter, essay on post-graduation plans, and a presentation to a panel of teachers. They must also complete a work-based learning experience, such as an internship or FAFSA completion.
- **Schoolwide Project-Based Learning (PBL):** PBL is embedded across all content areas, with projects ranging from CPR demonstrations and protest poster showcases to mock political campaigns and multimedia storytelling. Students participate in two annual exhibitions to present their work and explore peer projects.
- **Film & Audio Production:** Led by experienced filmmaker Eric Philip, students create music videos, learn the language of cinema, and explore storytelling through film. The FabLab includes a sound studio for podcasting and mixtape production.
- **Advisory & Transition Support:** Dedicated transition specialists and advisory classes support postsecondary planning, especially for English learners and newcomer students. Supports include FAFSA help, field trips, college visits, and application workshops.



## Opportunities for Students

- **Internships:** Students have access to paid internships in fields such as the trades, culinary arts (through SPROUTS), Chromebook repair, and various on-campus roles.
- **Electives & Enrichment:** Students can explore a wide range of creative and hands-on electives, including FabLab design, beat-making, audio editing, urban arts, hiking, skateboarding, nail technology, and 3D design.
- **Advisory-Driven Planning:** Students reflect on interests and post-graduate goals in advisory and receive one-on-one support.
- **College Access:** Students attend college visits, participate in the FAFSA "Cash for College" campaign, and receive support from the Linked Learning Office and the Peralta Colleges system.

## Challenges

- **Pathway Integration:** The school is in the process of merging two previously distinct pathways (tech and health) into a more cohesive multimedia pathway.
- **Scheduling:** The trimester system can be frustrating for staff, and more support is needed to manage transitions smoothly.
- **Internship Infrastructure:** There's a growing need to host more on-campus internships and form partnerships with local organizations to accommodate student interests.
- **Language Barriers:** Some students are eager to pursue apprenticeships but are limited by their English language proficiency.



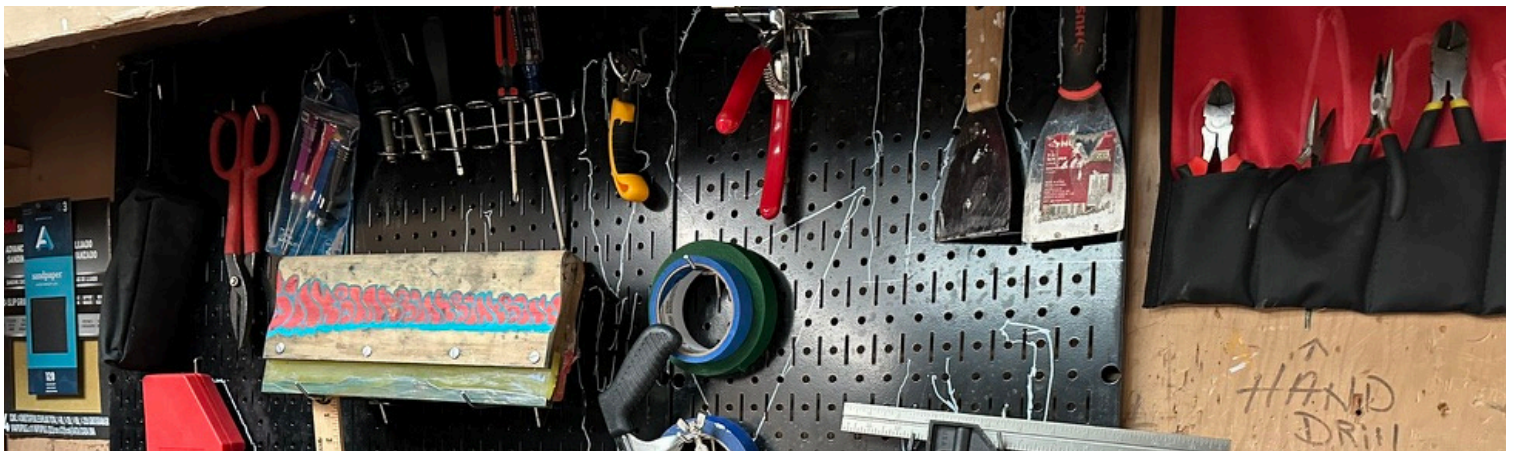
### Student Testimonials

"The Crucible got me into welding. I want to do that after I graduate."  
– Student X

"My cousin is a welder. I want to follow that path."  
– Student Y

"Mr. Nick helped me figure out what I want to do."  
– Student comment from multiple sources

"Rudsdale showed more affection than my other schools."  
– Student Z







## Future Goals

- **Build a Cohesive Multimedia Pathway:** Develop a clear course sequence that includes FabLab, film, design, and dual enrollment options.
- **Expand CTE Funding:** The school is preparing to become eligible for Perkins funding to strengthen career and technical education.
- **Increase Internships & WBL:** Continue working with Genesis Works and district departments to host meaningful, paid internships.
- **Professional Development for Staff:** Ongoing Adobe and PBL training to align core instruction with a multimedia and design focus.
- **Launch New Supports:** Plans are in motion to build a daycare on campus and add another transition specialist to assist students.

## Community Impact

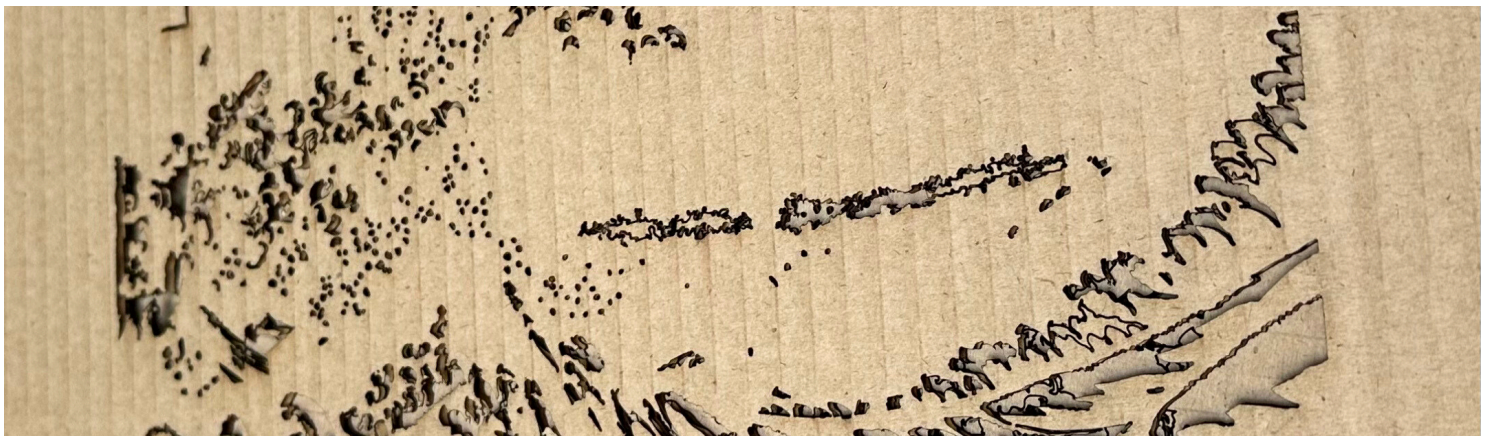
- **The Crucible:** Offers students professional-level exposure to industrial arts and entrepreneurship through public showcases.
- **Events & Exhibitions:** Students present their projects at public exhibitions, Black History Month events, and Oakland Comic-Con.
- **Local Partnerships:** Collaborations with Peralta Colleges, EBC, Linked Learning Office, and community-based organizations provide resources and access to broader career fields.

## Student Aspirations and Mentorship

- **Trades & Family Legacy:** Students cite family members—HVAC professionals and welders—as early inspirations. Others learned automotive skills from parents or spent summers painting houses and working in shops.
- **Mentorship Matters:** When referencing mentors, most students named current Rudsdale staff and their own families as individuals who serve in mentorship roles. Students also described staff as highly reliable and emotionally supportive.

## Career Skills Development

- Students note growth in technical and design skills, exposure to professional tools and software, and confidence in presenting their work publicly. They want more exposure to fields like fashion, mechanics, and electrical work, and more chances to connect with working professionals in those fields.





# School Profile: Tierra Del Sol

## Key Programs and Initiatives

- **Regional Occupational Center (ROC) and Career Technical Education Center (CTEC) Access:** Students can opt into yearlong programs, such as culinary arts. Participation depends on eligibility criteria (grades, attendance, discipline), and slots are limited per site.
- **On-Campus CTE Offerings:** TDS offers on-campus CTE courses in business, coding, career development, and life skills. Programs include real-world experiences such as credit union simulations, industry mentorship through the Amazon Future Engineer grant, and dual enrollment opportunities.
- **Professional Learning and Collaboration:** Monthly PLCs by subject areas across continuation schools in the district; participation in the Model Schools process supports site-level innovation and continuous improvement.
- **Student Support Center:** Offers food, clothing, mental health services, a calming space, and more.
- **Mobile Community Services (starting next year):** Grant-funded rotating services (vaccinations, dental, haircuts, medical) across continuation sites.

## Opportunities for Students

- **Career Exposure:** Annual ROC and CTEC tours expose students to broader CTE options.
- **Real-World Learning:** Business and coding programs include simulations, career events, and connections to professionals.
- **Personalized Learning:** Students can work at their own pace; intervention programs and flexible models support individual needs.
- **Student Voice:** Students appreciate the small-school environment, strong relationships with staff, and the ability to choose learning pathways.
- **E-Sports Team:** A thriving extracurricular that offers a unique, engaging experience.



TDS  
Campus  
Life







## Challenges

- **Limited Access to ROC/CTEC:** Enrollment restrictions (grades, discipline, attendance) and limited site slots create barriers. Mid-year entry is not allowed, and disciplinary infractions lead to removal.
- **CTE Program Sustainability:** Teacher turnover (e.g., end of construction program) directly impacts offerings.
- **Lack of Industry Certifications and CTSOs:** No certifications or student organizations are currently offered in on-campus CTE classes.
- **Credit Recovery vs. Career Access:** Students often must prioritize credits over CTE. The school sometimes keeps students for a 5th year to enable participation.
- **CTE Course Offering & Extracurricular Gaps:** Students voiced interest in more clubs and more hands-on CTE offerings like culinary arts.



### Student Testimonial

“It feels like a soup restaurant; there are lots of options and you get to choose what fits you.”

- TDS Student

## Future Goals

- **Expand On-Campus CTE Offerings:** Leadership is seeking to increase CTE courses despite space and staffing challenges.
- **Improve CTE Integration:** Desire for a more cohesive vision that weaves CTE with academic courses and diverse student interests.
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Continue building relationships with community organizations and industry partners to expand internship and certification options.
- **Innovate Around Constraints:** Creative strategies like repurposing classrooms for culinary programming reflect a commitment to problem-solving in real time.

## Student Aspirations and Mentorship

- Students express interest in a wide range of careers—from culinary to construction—and value the supportive relationships with staff that help them pursue these goals.
- Teachers describe the staff culture as deeply committed, with strong leadership and shared dedication to student success.



# Summary & Next Steps

Across multiple districts, including Oakland, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Kern, continuation schools are uniquely positioned to reimagine what education can look like for students who have been historically marginalized by traditional systems. Schools like Dewey Academy, Bunche Academy, Rudsdale Continuation, Tierra Del Sol, and others are already taking important steps to create more personalized, rigorous, and career-connected learning environments. These schools serve students navigating significant challenges, such as poverty, housing instability, violence, and systemic barriers, yet their efforts demonstrate what is possible when student needs, interests, and aspirations are placed at the center.

What we see emerging is a foundation for transformation: personalized schedules, wraparound supports, project-based learning, dual enrollment, on-campus CTE offerings, and growing connections to industry and community partners. While promising, this work is still in its early stages, and it needs deeper investment, stronger partnerships, greater coherence, increased student voice, and systemic coordination to be sustained and scaled.

To build on this momentum, we recommend the following next steps:

- **Strengthen Community and Industry Partnerships:** Many schools have either formed meaningful connections or identified organizations with partnership potential. Continued engagement with these partners—grounded in a shared vision and mutual benefit—can help establish more robust and sustainable career pathways for students.
- **Define Real-World Learning Expectations:** Schools can embed clear expectations for internships and work-based learning experiences within their graduate profiles. This signals a commitment to preparing students not just to graduate, but to thrive in postsecondary life; as such, real-world learning experiences need to be regarded as a right, and not as an option for a select group.
- **Broaden Pathway Options Based on Student Voice:** Students consistently expressed interest in careers beyond the established pathways. Further data collection and analysis can help identify emerging themes and inform efforts to expand offerings. This includes mapping potential partners aligned with student interests, even if they fall outside of established pathways.
- **Leverage Family Networks and Community Expertise:** Families often play a key role in students' career exposure and opportunities. Schools can explore how to elevate and integrate family knowledge, stories, and networks into their CTE and work-based learning ecosystems.
- **Establish Learning Hubs for the Field:** Schools making significant progress, like Dewey, Bunche, Rudsdale, and Tierra Del Sol, can serve as demonstration sites for others across the state. Hosting peer visits, sharing practices, and documenting lessons learned will help build a broader movement to improve continuation education through learner-centered, career-connected design.



# A Call to the Field

To educators, system leaders, policymakers, and funders: the opportunity to shift outcomes for continuation school students is real and urgent. With targeted investment, authentic partnerships, and policy support, these schools can become models of innovation, relevance, and removing barriers to success in public education. Together, we can help ensure every student, regardless of the path that brought them here, has access to meaningful learning experiences that prepare them for a future of purpose and possibility.



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# Relevant Research

This landscape analysis is rooted in what we heard from students and educators and a growing body of research on continuation education, postsecondary readiness, and the need for more personalized, relevant learning pathways. The following sources help frame the context, elevate best practices, and underscore the urgency of this work.

## ◆ Continuation Education: Understanding the Landscape

### **California Department of Education: Continuation Education**

- Overview of continuation high schools, student demographics, legal basis, and instructional goals.

### **AB 542: Work-Based Learning Pilot for Continuation Schools**

- State legislation that enables continuation high schools to pilot more flexible work-based learning models, highlighting growing momentum toward innovation.

### **John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities**

- Research focused on y, student voice, and data-informed practice in alternative education settings. (<https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/>)

### **“San Andreas Continuation High School: Integrated Academic, Career, and Technical Pathways for Positive Youth Development and College and Career Readiness” (Gardner Center, 2024)**

- A case study highlighting how a continuation school successfully integrates CTE, academics, and social-emotional supports. ([https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/san-andreas-continuation-hs-san-bernardino-final\\_0.pdf](https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/san-andreas-continuation-hs-san-bernardino-final_0.pdf))

## ◆ College and Career Readiness

### **“Life Beyond High School: How Students are Rethinking College, Career, and Success.” (YouScience, 2025)**

- 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report

### **“Majority of High Schoolers Say They Don’t Feel Prepared for Post-Graduation” (EdWeek, 2023)**

- National data showing that many students, especially those in alternative settings, feel unprepared for college, careers, and life after high school.

### **“Building College and Career Knowledge in Continuation High Schools” (Linked Learning Alliance, 2022)**

- A case study–driven report on strategies that work to increase career exposure and engagement for students in continuation settings.

### **Linked Learning Alliance**

- Ongoing work to integrate academics, technical education, and work-based learning in meaningful ways. (<https://www.linkedlearning.org/>)

### **“Cultivating Collective Responsibility for Postsecondary Success” (Gardner Center, 2021)**

- Examines how alternative schools can create a shared culture of support around student transition to postsecondary success. ([https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/alt-ed-briefs\\_la-sierra\\_0.pdf](https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/alt-ed-briefs_la-sierra_0.pdf))

### **“Personalized Learning as Transformative Learning” (Gardner Center, 2021)**

- Explores how personalized learning in alternative settings fosters student engagement, agency, and long-term growth. ([https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/personalized-learning-as-transformative-learning\\_0.pdf](https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/personalized-learning-as-transformative-learning_0.pdf))





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