

# Learning Communities:

## Creating Community in a Post-COVID World



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## Mission of the Learning Communities

With our foundational institutions' of student access, student engagement and student success at the core of its mission, College of the Canyons Learning Communities (COCLCs) serve as a gateway to the overall student experience at Santa Clarita Community College District (District). The development of new, along with the enhancement of our current Learning Communities (LC) will create additional experience and educational opportunities for our students. In addition, they will provide tools for academically and culturally diverse students to transfer knowledge across courses, over time, and between campus and community life, inspiring lifelong learning, personal development, and social responsibility.



## Vision of Learning Communities

To support integrative learning, teamwork, and critical thinking.

In order to meet the strategic goals of the District through Learning Communities, COC Learning Communities will create project-based learning based learning experiences for students to apply core knowledge, concepts, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, within and across disciplines, to solve real world problems.

Examples of current disciplines that are being explored, include:

- Administrative of Justice
- Early Childhood Education
- Welding
- English as a Second Language (ESL)

## Foundational Learning Objectives:

- Be able to transfer knowledge and skills students have gained in class to new situations within and beyond their academic courses;
- Identify ways in which courses connect and disconnect to past, current and future learning environments;
- Reflect on class experiences particularly in relation to their academic, professional and personal goals;
- Demonstrate knowledge and gain teamwork skills by actively participating in the linked classes of COC academic communities;
- Students will examine complexities and perspectives of an issue to establish their own logical viewpoints and belief systems.



## Learning Goals

The College of the Canyons Learning Community program platform will have several goals:

- To offer pathways to completion by providing support to students as they follow a curricular sequence;
- To provide opportunities to reflect and integrate learning in a post-pandemic work environment;
- To promote the connection of learning to a post-pandemic world;
- To implement and encourage engagement through a variety of educational and learning experiences;
- To work toward closing the achievement gaps for underrepresented students through interventions and services provided by COCLCs;
- To provide strategies to encourage continued investment of time and effort in a post-pandemic learning environment;
- To incorporate experiences with diversity by intentionally building a sense of belonging and empowerment;
- To provide students with learning opportunities that help them focus on their academic, professional and personal aspirations/growth.

## Learning Communities Implementation Plan

The following plan has been developed to support Santa Clarita Community College District (*with both the Valencia and Canyon Country campuses in mind*) with a systemic implementation of Learning Communities. This plan details the actions necessary to support the district in implementing and sustaining Learning Communities as they serve the key strategic plans of **Access, Engagement and Success** in an effort to increase student participation in civic, social, global, and cultural engagement.

### Learning Communities Provide:

1. Integrative Learning
2. Teamwork and the development of leadership capacity
3. Platform for Critical thinking for locally and globally
4. Quality and Effectiveness



Implementation is based upon research of processes and sustainability of Learning Communities. This research was conducted by the administrative and faculty team during our LEAP planning sessions. The business plan addresses an approach to:

- 1) the design of an implementation plan;
- 2) develop leadership capacity;
- 3) deploy training and sustained support and;
- 4) determine quality and effectiveness.

The following plan serves as a flexible and adaptive guide for College of the Canyons to support their student engagement. In addition, the plan is focused on COCLC building its own internal capacity to support the long-term sustainability of Learning Communities over the next three (3) years and the potential funding associated with this timeline.

## COC Strategic Goals Addressed:

**Goal #1: Access**

- Increase dual-enrolled FTES
- Increase overall enrollments for all CTE programs

**Goal #2: Engagement**

- Increase student participation in civic, social, global, and cultural engagement

**Goal #3: Success**

- To increase experiential learning

## Goals for Learning Communities Implementation

**For students:** When fully implemented, Learning Communities will:

- Enhance engagement
- Provide a systematic framework for learning 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and standards defined within College of the Canyons curriculum frameworks
- Provide a relevant application of learning

**For staff:** When fully implemented, Learning Communities will:

- Enhance opportunities for student engagement
- Provide a tool as a systematic framework for teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and rigorous content
- Provide opportunity to evaluate student understanding of relevance

**For community:** When fully implemented, Learning Communities will:

- Prepare students for real-world, problem solving experiences
- Equip our students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills necessary for success in Workforce
- Engage business community in public education through College of the Canyons partnerships



## Actions and Timelines

The actions and timelines addressed in this plan include the following:

- Develop a Learning Communities communication plan for staff, administrators, and community; include research on how learning communities improve student achievement outcomes, 2021-22
- Train faculty to lead and monitor effective implementation of Learning Communities, 2021-23
- Conduct Learning Communities assessments to determine a multi-year implementation and professional development plan, 2021-22
- Develop a set of tools, exemplars, resources and rubrics that support teachers and students in mastering and measuring progress in core content, communication, collaboration and critical thinking through learning communities, 2022-24
- Provide professional development for faculty leaders on learning communities, 2022-24
- Provide teachers with sustained professional development in learning communities and technology integration with special emphasis on developing an ongoing, sustainable coaching model to build training capacity, 2023-24

## Implementation Expectations by Year

District Implementation Expectations by Year	
Year	Learning Community/ Implementation Expectation
2021-2022 Year 1	<b>Dual Enrollment</b> : Implement project based learning communities for CTE pathways Welding and Administrative Justice
2022-2023 Year 2	<b>ESL</b> : Implement project based learning community <b>Dual Enrollment</b> : Each CTE cohort will experience 1-2 projects; these projects can be integrated across disciplines
2023-2024 Year 3	<b>ESL</b> : Implement 2-3 cohorts who will experience 2 or more linked courses; project based learning can be integrated across disciplines  <b>Dual Enrollment</b> : Implement 2 or more integrated projects for CTE pathways

## Professional Learning Timeline

The following table highlights the key actions required to develop leadership capacity and deploy training and sustained support by implementation year.

<b>Professional Learning: Developing Leadership Capacity &amp; Deploying Training and Sustained Support</b>			
<b>2021-2022</b>			
<b>Action/Training</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
1. Provide professional development training opportunities to define learning communities, 21 <sup>st</sup> century teaching, project based learning, & leading	Throughout the school year	Faculty/ Staff	To establish readiness for Learning communities & Project based implementation; to begin institutionalizing protocols with leadership
2. Deliver Professional Development on Learning Communities	Sessions throughout the year	Faculty	To build understanding of Learning Communities
3. Deliver Professional Development on technology and Learning Communities	Sessions throughout the year	Faculty/ Staff	To establish readiness for integrating technology into Learning Communities and Project based approach
4. Deliver Professional Development on Project Based Learning	Sessions throughout the year	Faculty/ Staff	To build PBL knowledge
5. Select cohort early adopters (CTE) for review/assessment	End of term	Faculty/ Staff	To create a demonstration and develop and design sample projects
6. Select cohort for project implementation	January	Faculty/ Staff	Begin institutionalizing learning communities

## Learning Community Estimated Goals

There are no projected funding requests *at this time*. The team is recommending usage of existing technical resources, organizational structures and maximize the current collaborations that are in place between College of the Canyons, Castaic High School and other community collaborators

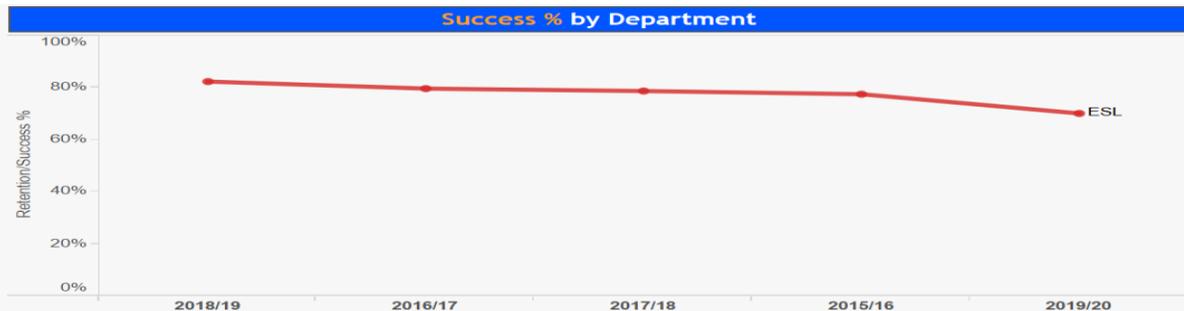
## What's Next?

Implementing an LC for our English as a Second Language (ESL) population, is part of this business plan. LCs for ESL populations have been shown to improve the retention and graduation rates of ESL students, and to facilitate their integration into the social and academic life of the college as a whole. There is a need that can be addressed. Below is data based on success and retention rates for our ESL populations.

**Dept: ESL**

**Number of Records: 351**

**Success/Retentions: 70%**



COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS	Success & Retention Overview					Department ESL	Retention/Success Success %
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Success and Retention by Year						
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total
Success Rate	77%	80%	79%	82%	70%	78%
Retention Rate	93%	94%	92%	94%	89%	93%



## Conclusion

Learning Communities engage students. When implemented, in their most basic form, LCs are a kind of co-registration or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning” (Cotton 2001). LCs represent new ways to structure higher education learning experiences. LCs are well researched and when examined they provide evidence that participation in a learning community increases levels of engagement, success rates, more meaningful relationships with other students, and improved higher-order thinking skills.

## Appendix/Resources

Castaic High School – <https://www.castaichighschool.org/>

College of the Canyons – Dual Enrollment Class Schedule: Castaic High School  
<https://www.canyons.edu/student-services/outreach/early-college-programs/dual-enrollment/dual-enrollment-class-schedule-castaic-high-school.php>

College of the Canyons-School of Personal and Professional Learning  
<https://www.canyons.edu/academics/schools/ppl/index.php>

College of the Canyons-Summer Institute  
<https://www.canyons.edu/academics/community-education/summer-camps/summer-institute.php>

## References

**The following is a partial list of the materials used by our LEAP solution team to research learning communities.**

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