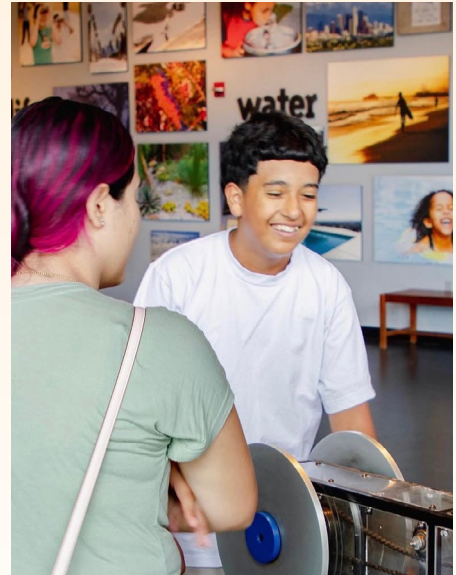


DESIGN THINKING IN THE MIDDLE GRADES: REDESIGNING LEARNING AT MAGNOLIA HEIGHTS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Magnolia Heights Middle School shows how a school and district can organize the middle grades around challenging academics and hands-on exploration.

Every student participates in a Linked Learning Gold-certified Design pathway integrated with the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, applying academic knowledge through inquiry-driven projects like designing windmills while studying kinetic energy. School and district structures sustain this learning. Teaching teams share cohorts of 100–185 students and use common planning time to develop interdisciplinary projects and coordinate support.

San Bernardino City Unified's purposeful pathways connect middle school exploration with high school opportunities, while district instructional support and funding for substitute coverage help teaching teams develop the work. Between 2021–22 and 2024–25, chronic absenteeism fell from 30% to 19%, below the district's 30% average in 2024–25. Over the same period, the shares of students meeting or exceeding state assessment standards rose from 31% to 34% in English Language Arts and from 16% to 20% in Math.



On any given day at Magnolia Heights Middle School in San Bernardino, students are participating in hands-on and performance-based learning tied to their Design pathway. They create stop-motion videos about historical figures, design windmills while learning about kinetic energy, build functional small electric cars out of cardboard, complete with circuit boards, and participate in visual and performing arts classes like theatre and honors band. By anchoring learning in relevant, authentic projects and performances, students at Magnolia Heights gain access to a coherent series of learning experiences throughout their middle school years that reflect the world around them. Magnolia Heights Middle School offers a window into how school redesign takes shape during early adolescence: in the learning students experience, the structures adults build around them, and the district conditions that support the work.

Magnolia Heights Middle School serves just over 1,000 students in grades 6–8, with only 100 6th graders admitted via a Magnet lottery system each year, and an additional 400–500 students in each of its 7th and 8th grade classes from a combination of Magnet lottery and open enrollment. Magnolia Heights is a Magnet for its International Baccalaureate (IB) World School Middle Years Programme, which is integrated with a Linked Learning Gold-certified Design pathway—a pairing providing each and every student learning opportunities focused on designing, creating, collaborating, and connecting learning to the world beyond the classroom.

Though Magnolia Heights admits its entire 6th grade class and a subset of its 7th and 8th grade through a Magnet lottery system, most of its 7th and 8th grade students are local and admitted through open enrollment. This contributes to its overall demographics being similar to the district's. At both the school and the district, about 82% of students identify as Hispanic or Latino, 7% as white (slightly more than the district), 6% as African American (slightly less than the district), and 2% as Asian. Nearly 62% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 9% experience homelessness, compared to 73% and 11% districtwide, respectively. About 13% are English learners, compared to 20% districtwide (**See Table 1**). "My school is a really good... melting pot of kids," Principal Zackary Peters explained, "We've got a whole big community here, different types of kids... Often we get labeled as an honors program because of the Magnet program, but [that ignores] the other 600-700 kids that are here. We're the largest middle school in the district... It's pretty great to be here."

Table 1: Enrollment at Magnolia Heights and San Bernardino City Unified School District

Demographic Group	Magnolia Heights Middle School	San Bernardino City Unified School District
Hispanic or Latino	82%	82%
African American	6%	9%
White	7%	4%
Asian	2%	1%
Two or More Races	1%	2%
English Learners	13%	20%
Foster Youth	1%	1%
Homeless Youth	9%	11%
Students with Disabilities	11%	16%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	62%	73%
Total	1,063	48,079

Source: California Department of Education. (2026). 2025-26 Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade: Cesar E. Chavez Middle Report (36-67876-0109488). DataQuest. California Department of Education. (2026). 2025-26 Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade: San Bernardino City Unified Report (36-67876). DataQuest.

HOW MAGNOLIA HEIGHTS REDESIGNED THEIR SCHOOL

Magnolia Heights Middle School opened in 2005 and adopted its International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) just 5 years later. The school's current principal, Zackary Peters, grew up just a couple of blocks away and started his teaching career at the school before moving into the position of IB coordinator. He sees the value of the IB program as more than just academic, though rigorous academics are certainly part of it. Peters believes that "[IB is] all about helping students be open-minded, caring, respected individuals, [who] help make the world a better place."

Magnolia Heights has had tremendous growth since it adopted the Linked Learning framework in 2021. Linked Learning pathways combine high-quality academic instruction and career and technical education courses within career-themed pathways. "As our [IB Middle Years Programme] Design courses grew, they naturally evolved into CTE-aligned STEM classes that gave students increasingly authentic opportunities to apply their learning," Principal Peters explained. "That growth helped us see a clear connection between the IB Middle Years Programme framework and the Linked Learning pathway." In the second year of their implementation of the Linked Learning framework, Natasha Flores joined the staff, lending the team her expertise from several

years as a Linked Learning Program Specialist at a neighboring high school and leveraging the Linked Learning framework to build out the school’s IB program, along with other school priorities. In 2026, the school achieved Linked Learning Gold Pathway certification.

The Design pathway at Magnolia Heights focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, which anchors the design cycle students experience. “[The focus of this pathway] turned into STEM organically from the teachers,” Principal Peters explained. “It’s really designed as a design cycle, which is kind of similar to the scientific method, but you’re designing a product to address an issue, and then you test it out [and] get feedback.” In their 6th grade year, students complete an IB Middle Years Programme Design Course that helps give them a fundamental understanding of the design process. “The real world connections and everything that’s tied to IB parallels really well to that Linked Learning [approach],” Principal Peters reflected.

What is Linked Learning?

Linked Learning connects rigorous academics, career technical education (CTE), work-based learning, and personalized student support through career-themed pathways. Students connect classroom learning with relevant postsecondary and career opportunities, gain hands-on experience with career skills, and work to solve authentic community challenges. Work-based learning can include internships and apprenticeships. San Bernardino City Unified adopted the approach in 2012 and has since developed it into a district-wide strategy.

In 2026, Magnolia Heights earned Linked Learning Gold Certification for its Design pathway. This distinction recognizes more than a pathway’s design; it reflects the quality of its implementation. The Linked Learning Alliance evaluates pathways against evidence-based quality standards developed with educators, students, and partners across the field. The standards emphasize integrated, student-centered instruction; meaningful connections between academics, careers, and postsecondary education; work-based learning; and student supports that promote equitable opportunities for all students.

Pathways progress through candidate status and two levels of certification: Silver and Gold. Pathway administrators and staff work with Linked Learning coaches to assess their practice against the standards, improve programming, and determine when to apply for the next level. Gold is the highest level of certification, recognizing pathways that demonstrate high-quality, integrated college and career learning experiences against these standards.

Independent research shows that students in certified Linked Learning pathways are more likely to graduate, less likely to drop out, and earn more credits on average than their peers in traditional high school programs.

Sources: Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Patel, D., McCracken, M., Harless, E., Park, C., Fahimuddin, L., & Adelman, N. (2016). [Taking stock of the California Linked Learning district initiative: Seventh-year evaluation report](#). SRI International (accessed 07/21/2025); Linked Learning Alliance. (2025). [Linked Learning Gold Certification](#) (accessed 02/17/2026). Linked Learning Alliance

What Students Experience

Every Magnolia Heights student takes part in the Design pathway, which is integrated with the school's IB program. This means each student at Magnolia Heights experiences an IB curriculum implemented within the Linked Learning framework. The program is designed to help students explore interests, apply academic knowledge, and connect their ideas and skills with uses beyond school, and it builds year over year. Sixth-graders start with 3D printing and CAD modeling, basic programming, applied engineering challenges, and 3D fabrication. By eighth grade, students have opportunities to deepen the work with courses in engineering and manufacturing, advanced robotics, advanced 3D design, and podcasting.

Design Pathway students are not confined to STEM-themed classes; they also take typical academic core courses, including the Humanities and Spanish, and have access to the school's robust Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) classes. The majority of students at Magnolia Heights spend the year alternating Design and VAPA classes each semester to provide a well-rounded learning experience. A minority of students experience a year-long Design Course or a VAPA course that has design elements embedded in the instructional approach, if that is their preference. "I'm a strong advocate for student choice," Principal Peters explained:

Some kids want to take year-long electives. If you talk to a music teacher, they're going to tell you, yeah, a semester is not long enough for me to build an honor band or an honor choir, so I give those kids the option, you can take a full year of VAPA, and ... we tie in the design elements to the VAPA class, so it's a hybrid, so those teachers get the training for design as well as VAPA, and then they incorporate those design elements into their curriculum.

– Principal Zackary Peters

Students also participate in career-connected experiences, including robotics competitions and enrichment activities. Magnolia Heights has over 12 community and industry partners, spanning from local universities like California Baptist and California State San Bernardino to Enchanted Education, a STEAM Education and Career Exploration center in the neighborhood. These partners often host students for STEM events, such as robotics competitions, LEGO League, and STEMapalooza, which directly reflect the design- and STEM-based coursework students are experiencing. These partnerships have been valuable so far, and Magnolia Heights staff are looking for ways to deepen these relationships and bring partners to campus more consistently.

Students also have access to after-school learning opportunities through the district's expanded learning office. After school, the school hosts Battlebots and STEM design courses that extend learning until 6PM, well beyond the typical school day. Principal Peters explained, "We just see the [expanded learning] program as an opportunity to have different activities for the students after school that they don't get access to during the school day... [The expanded learning office is] giving me extra funding to have more programs after school that kids want to do." During this time, students can participate in chess, LEGO engineering, sports, and photography, among many other options. Providing ample programming after school that reflects students' interests extends the learning day for students while also providing them a home base after school if that is what they need.

Magnolia Heights feeds into Arroyo Valley High School and Cajon High School, where students can pursue further pathway opportunities. The structures supporting that transition are described below.

The Structures That Make It Possible

Magnolia Heights supports its approach through the organization of teacher teams, time to coordinate instruction across subject areas, student support, and connections to high school. These school structures sit within a broader district effort to connect academic learning, career exploration, and personalized support.

Teacher teams and shared planning

Cohorts, combined with the school's focus on social-emotional learning, help the school develop strong relationships between students, their peers, and their teachers. Students share a cohort of core academic teachers, who have common planning time to coordinate both pathway and core academic instruction, which happens every Monday during the district's late start and during pull-out days, where substitute teachers cover teaching teams through the use of site and district central funding.

Teachers use common planning time to work in their teams, where they collaborate on grade-level projects and manage the same 100-185 students throughout the course of the school year. Because the sixth grade is small compared to the rest of the school, it has a single teaching team. Seventh and eighth grades are larger, with roughly 185 students per teaching team. Each of those two grades has two teaching teams, plus a shared team that splits its students between seventh and eighth. Together, they design interdisciplinary projects, connect on students' needs, and work together to create a coherent learning experience for their students.

Principal Peters sees his role in the school as creating opportunities for better collaboration, professionalism, and coordination among his staff, which supports instruction. "I try to make sure I give [teachers] as much time as possible to work on their own in their departments and in their PLCs. I eliminate staff meetings often. I will give them lots of department time [during Monday late start days]," he noted. Last year, professional learning focused on IB approaches to teaching, which included designing lessons that featured project- or problem-based learning, centered inquiry, and provided opportunity for student collaboration. This year, teachers are focused on writing high-quality assessments and unit plans to support that instruction. Principal Peters continued:

I try to really make sure that [professional learning is] geared towards what they need and giving them the time to actually try stuff out, do the lesson planning, do the unit writing, and explore new things... Do you have time to be innovative if you're always trying to move on to the next thing? If the principal gave you this huge data protocol that [teachers are] probably not going to look at, is that fair to them? I try to have those things in mind and really lead with the teacher first, honoring them as a professional rather than me having to just micromanage them.

– Principal Zackary Peters

Scheduling and access to learning

Magnolia Heights uses a seven-period schedule to accommodate both core academic classes and Design coursework. Each class period is 48 minutes, except for the late-start Mondays, which have 33-minute periods. In the typical seven-period schedule, students take four core classes, Math, Social Studies, Science, and English, along with Spanish, Physical Education, and either a design or a VAPA class.

As part of their work-based learning progression through the Design pathway, students take courses that build on their initial IB MYP Design course and provide them access to a variety of hands-on learning opportunities. In seventh grade, students experience robotics, coding, animation, 3D printing, sewing, and embroidery, while in eighth grade students use the design cycle to create custom animatronic characters and robotic systems with projects that include 3D printing, laser cutting, vinyl printing, coding, wiring, and assembly.

Students have ample choice in the electives they can select, which are built into their pathway design. These electives include leadership opportunities, such as the Associated Student Body course, developing publications like the school yearbook, and a variety of VAPA courses, including theatre and advanced art.

Relationships and coordinated support

While cohorted teaching teams, who share a common set of students, help provide targeted support for students, there are additional structures present as well. Teachers have a strong culture of citizenship that is anchored in the IB context, and they also implement social-emotional learning and positive behavioral intervention supports (PBIS) to incentivize prosocial behaviors.

The school also follows a restorative approach to behavioral issues and infractions, which means that educators seek to understand how students made their choices and focus on how to repair damage that has been done. Principal Peters explained the process: “We do follow a restorative framework for everything that we do on campus. So the big thing is, when a kid gets in trouble, we find out what happened, how did it affect [them] and others, how are [they] going to make it right? And that’s built into [our] discipline [approach].” These consequences could include participating in community contributions, like campus beautification, or referral to resources, including academic supports, like after-school tutoring.

The school has several counselors who also provide dedicated student support. Counselors work with each student to reflect on their academic progress and plan forward. This includes identifying whether each student is on track for A–G classes in high school, which are the sequence of courses required for admission to the University of California and California State University system. Counselors are also encouraged to frame academic challenges as restorative opportunities. Counselors help students identify the classes in which they have had issues, find solutions to their challenges, and have discussions about retaking courses or making up credits when necessary.

“They buy into our program pretty well just going through the process of getting their classes, the culture that we have through activities, and different incentives on campus,” Principal Peters considered, “But I’ve been thinking a lot about helping them be better middle school students.” To that end, Principal Peters has been considering moving toward an Advisory model, so that students have a stronger “home base” from which to launch their week and a consistent and clear adult who they can come to for guidance.

Connections to high school

Magnolia Heights feeds into the pathways at Arroyo Valley High School and Cajon High School, connecting middle school exploration with opportunities for deeper learning in high school. At both of these high schools, students have access to high school-level IB programming and a variety of Linked Learning pathways. The Magnolia Heights experience prepares students for a smooth transition to high school and allows students and parents to make informed high school pathway choices. At Arroyo Valley, five pathways also hold Gold certification, so many students move from a Gold-certified middle school pathway into high school pathways built on a common framework. Magnolia Heights has also begun building student portfolios on the same platform students will use in high school, so they can continue that work rather than starting over.

While still in middle school, students and families at Magnolia Heights have several options to connect with students at their feeder high schools and preview what their next step will look like. “In second semester, Arroyo and Cajon [staff] will come down for a couple different things for us,” Principal Peters explained, “They come to a parent meeting for me. They come to my coffee with the principal.... and we talk about all the different pathways and programs that they’re going to be offered at the high schools, and that’s a good moment for [families] to learn about that.” Arroyo Valley and Cajon staff also do a “road show” for the students, where they present to students during both a lunch and an assembly, describing the various pathways and career opportunities that Magnolia Heights middle schoolers can choose from.



District support and continuous improvement

San Bernardino City Unified School District provides several avenues of support for Magnolia Heights. The district coordinates funding for after-school programming through the Expanded Learning Program. They fund an additional full-time teaching position in either Spanish or VAPA, based on the school's needs, and have recently provided funds for substitute coverage during pullout days focused on cross-team collaboration. The school uses its own combination of Title 1 and LCAP funds for the majority of the elements of its Design pathway. Last year, the school leveraged funds allocated by the school site council to fund a resident guest teacher focused on push-in support for students identified as English Learners.

The school regularly receives instructional support from both the Secondary Education College and Career and the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) offices within San Bernardino City Unified School District. While the Linked Learning Program Specialists at the Secondary Education College and Career office focus on CTE instruction and curriculum support, the STEAM office supplements with both pedagogical and physical resources, including fixing the school's many machines, like its sticker-maker or 3D printer. The Secondary Education and College and Career offices merged over a decade ago, which allowed the combined office to be positioned to offer Perkins and Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) funds to middle schools within the district, including Magnolia Heights.

Evidence of Progress

Magnolia Heights has made steady progress over the past several years. Chronic absenteeism fell from 30% during the 2021-22 school year to 19% in 2024-25, well below the district average of 30%, and suspensions dropped from 10% to 8% (See Table 2).

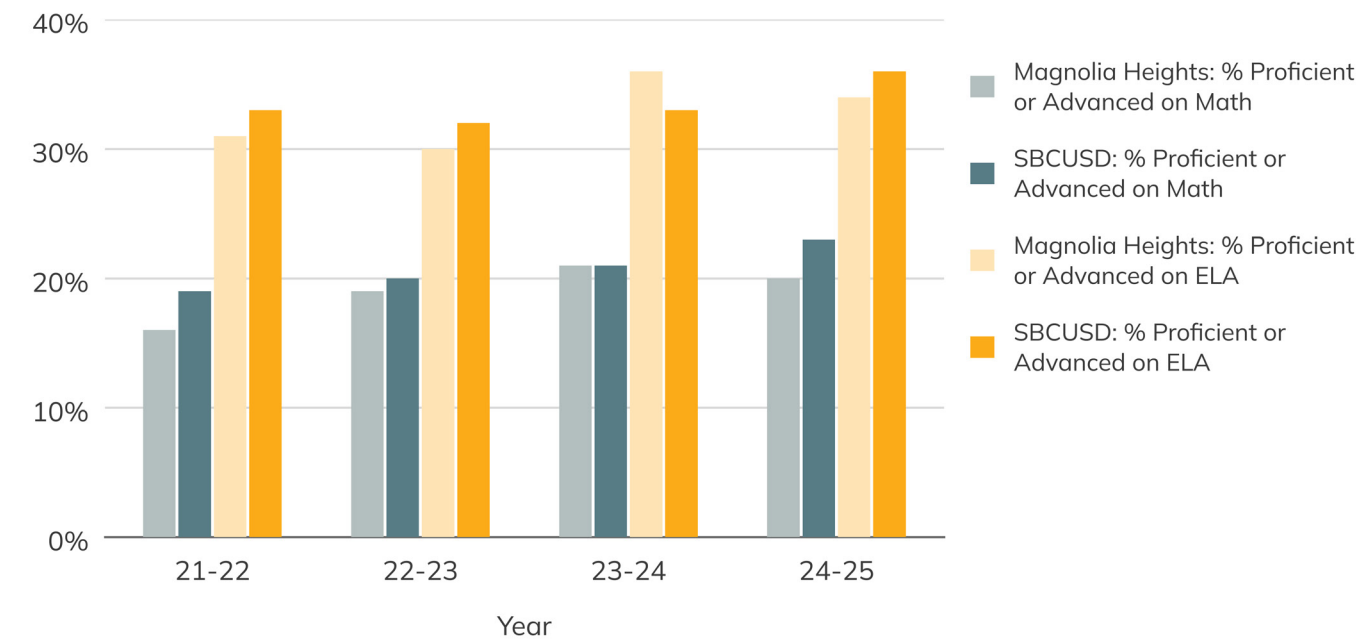
Table 2: Chronic Absenteeism and Suspension Rates at the School and District

Outcome	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2024-25	
	Magnolia Heights	San Bernardino City Unified	Magnolia Heights	San Bernardino City Unified	Magnolia Heights	San Bernardino City Unified	Magnolia Heights	San Bernardino City Unified
Chronic absenteeism	30%	44%	23%	36%	20%	31%	19%	30%
Suspension rate	10%	5%	11%	5%	7%	5%	8%	4%

Source: California Department of Education. (2026). [2024-25 Chronic Absenteeism Rate: Cesar E. Chavez Middle Report \(36-67876-0109488\)](#). DataQuest. California Department of Education. (2026). [2024-25 Suspension Rate: Cesar E. Chavez Middle Report \(36-67876-0109488\)](#). DataQuest.

Over the same period, the share of students meeting or exceeding standard on the Smarter Balanced Assessment rose from 16% to 20% in Math and from 31% to 34% in English Language Arts (ELA) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Magnolia Heights and San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) CAASPP Scores



Source: California Department of Education. (2026). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics: Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments*, [Cesar E. Chavez Middle School](#). California Department of Education. (2026). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics: Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments*, [San Bernardino City Unified School District](#).

Part of a District-Wide Effort

Several factors influenced this shift in San Bernardino City Unified School District, but most sources trace these changes back to former Superintendent Dale Marsden’s tenure from 2012-2020 (Fine et al., forthcoming). According to Fine and colleagues, Marsden’s efforts brought residents, educators, employers, and public-sector leaders into discussions about young people’s futures. The district’s secondary team subsequently adopted the Linked Learning framework and developed staffing, partnerships, and instructional supports to put that direction into practice. After Marsden’s tenure ended, the work continued due, in part, to the broad base of support that he had built among staff, families, community members, and the board of education. In December 2025, the district joined California’s Secondary School Redesign Pilot Program as part of the Linked Learning Alliance team, along with 5 peer districts.

District structures that support K-12 alignment

San Bernardino organizes career-connected learning across grade levels through what it calls purposeful pathways. Elementary students encounter different careers, while middle school students explore interests that they can pursue further through high school coursework and experiences such as internships and dual enrollment. Academic preparation, technical learning, workplace experiences, and individual support are intended to reinforce one another throughout this progression. The district supports pathways at three of its middle schools through funding, curriculum support, help hiring instructors, and access to Linked Learning conferences. At Magnolia Heights, the Design pathway provides the middle school component of this work.

The district's purposeful pathways work is organized under the Secondary Education College and Career office, which is anchored in a framework aligned to the Linked Learning quality standards that links five elements and serves as a filter for every decision:

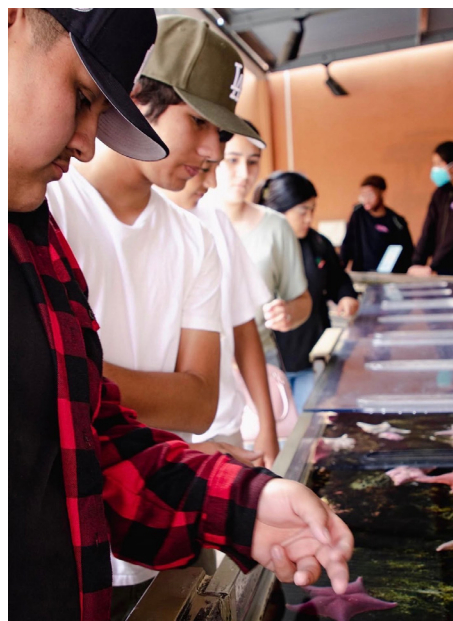
1. **Rigorous academics.** All career technical education courses are A–G approved, about half as electives and the rest as science, history, or arts credit.
2. **Postsecondary connections.** Every pathway is connected to dual enrollment or articulated college credit. More than 40 high school courses earn college credit, and about one in three students participates in dual enrollment, with completion rates near 80%.
3. **Industry certifications.** The district vetted every certification its pathways offer to ensure it carries value in the labor market. Students earned more than 2,000 in a single recent school year.
4. **Industry partners.** Employers and labor organizations validate alignment with industry standards and open access to internships and pre-apprenticeships.
5. **Work-based learning.** Every pathway at every high school has a work-based learning continuum. In 2024–25, 1,370 students completed micro-internships and 278 were in pre-apprenticeships pending competency certification.

Centering on this framework helps the Secondary Education College and Career office align the learning happening from middle through to high school and beyond.

Community voice, emphasized under Superintendent Marsden, continues to shape the work. After district staff presented pathway outcomes to the school board, the parent wing of Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC), a faith-based community organizing network, invited them to a meeting. ICUC surveyed local youth and found that many families were unaware of the pathways. Students have a voice in district leadership as well: the school board includes four student members, and district staff attend the Student Leadership Council. Magnolia Heights is looking for ways to continue to integrate family and community voice in decision-making at the site level.

When district staff surveyed 8th-graders through the Student Leadership Council, students said they wanted to see every pathway in one place. The district responded with a two-day career technical education showcase in fall 2026, at an estimated cost of \$300,000. On the first day, families, community members, unions, employers, the mayor, and city council members toured exhibits from every high school, staffed by pathway students and teachers. On the second day, nearly 4,000 8th-graders, every 8th-grader in the district, including students with disabilities, watched drones fly, saw first-aid demonstrations, examined anatomical models, and explored a cybersecurity exhibit.

Funding reinforces these priorities. The district braids federal Perkins funds, the state's Career Technical Education Incentive Grant, the Strong Workforce Program, California Partnership Academy grants, and its Local Control and Accountability Plan. It received \$36.5 million in career technical education grants over 10 years and \$50 million in career technical education infrastructure over five years. The district allocates Perkins and Incentive Grant dollars in a way that rewards completion: schools receive more per student in advanced pathway courses than in introductory ones. Career-technical education teachers are compensated on the same scale as all certificated staff.



Connections beyond graduation

With its pathway system in place, the district is now focusing on what comes after graduation. College and career readiness teachers and program specialists work together on dual enrollment and college admissions. District leaders report that the number of students receiving admission to California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) at its Instant Admit Days increased by about 57% over two years. On Instant Admit Days, CSUSB admissions counselors review seniors' transcripts and admit qualified students on-the-spot to the university.

The district's Pathway to Position initiative addresses another challenge graduates face: getting employers to recognize high school experience. The district proposed that San Bernardino County, the region's largest employer, recognize pathway completers with at least 300 hours of work-based learning as having the equivalent of one year of experience for aligned county jobs. Under the initiative, seniors work with County Human Resources to learn the application process so they can apply for stable, living-wage jobs as soon as they graduate (Fine et al., forthcoming). Through this partnership, students who complete the district's career technical education pathways now meet the minimum qualifications for entry-level jobs in almost every county department (Linked Learning Alliance, 2026).

State Policies That Support School Success

Several major state initiatives, building on local investments, have contributed to both the district and the school's redesign efforts:

- The [California Community Schools Partnership Program](#) has invested \$4.1 billion since 2021 in developing community schools that support family and community engagement, integrated supports for students, expanded learning time, and shared decision-making in settings that support social and emotional learning and restorative practices (Swain et al., 2025).
- The [Golden State Pathways Program](#), established in 2022, has invested \$500 million in industry-themed pathways that offer integrated coursework and internships that can provide both high school and college credit.
- Investments in dual enrollment opportunities, including an additional \$200 million in 2022, support California high schools and community colleges to establish opportunities for high school students to take credit-bearing college courses during the school day.
- [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) funding supports peer mentoring and peer tutoring after school.

In 2025, the governor of California issued a Career Master Plan that creates a vision for integrating initiatives across the education, labor, and higher education sectors and proposes a Career Passport to recognize competencies. In the 2025–26 budget, the state invested \$10 million in a pilot program to support high school redesign, and then reaffirmed that decision in 2026, with an additional \$50 million investment in the program, with the addition of middle schools and an overall emphasis on community schools. This program will continue to shape learning for both schools and state policymakers as it identifies opportunities for further innovations in policy and practice.

What Comes Next

Magnolia Heights and San Bernardino continue to develop a set of goals to move the work forward. At the middle school, this includes elevating family and student voice in decision-making, developing more consistent structures around relationship-centered practices and integrated student supports, and deepening relationships with community partners to strengthen their design pathway. In the district, the goals include bringing together initiatives within the district, like its redesign and community schools, to provide a more coherent experience for students and families, connect pathway themes and core academics, and strengthen the middle school pathway programs.

Elevating family and student voice in decision-making. Magnolia Heights is looking to better develop opportunities for families and students to weigh in on whole-school decisions, not just on individual student choices. The school relies on members of its school site council and associated student body to weigh in on decisions, and it looks forward to broadening the scope of participation and continuing to strengthen how it partners with students and families.

Developing more consistent structures around relationship-centered practices and integrated student supports. Magnolia Heights has a strong group of educators who understand the value of relationship-centered practices, and the school wants to build beyond a culture of relational capital and toward strong structures of support to ensure that all students receive the support they need. The principal is considering building in a weekly Advisory class, pending teacher and union input, and is also considering ways to build in additional structures that can ensure that students receive the resources they need in timely and effective ways.

Deepening relationships with community partners to strengthen Magnolia Heights's design pathway. Magnolia Heights has a subset of community partners that they work with closely, especially on STEM-related programming. Principal Peters would like to see more consistent and deeper engagement with community partners. He is optimistic that more touchpoints between partners, staff, and students can help cultivate better institutional knowledge among those partners, generate more relevant projects, and create a more seamless experience for students.

Bringing initiatives together. San Bernardino City Unified has already merged its academic and career technical education offices. Extending that coherence to the offices that support wellness, family engagement, and community schools could make it easier for schools like Magnolia Heights to offer students a single, coherent experience.

Connecting pathway themes and core academics. District-wide, there is strong collaboration between CTE programs, but less collaboration between CTE courses and core academic instruction. Extending the integration to every pathway, particularly math, is the district's next frontier and will require time and structures for academic and technical teachers to design together (Fine et al., forthcoming). This year, district program specialists are mapping where career technical education and core academic standards overlap and plan to pilot cross-curricular units at schools with strong professional learning communities.

Magnolia Heights demonstrates the meaningful change that can happen in the middle grades. The integration of IB with the Linked Learning framework allows students to gain meaningful exposure to relevant career- and college-focused skills and industries while centering personal growth and civic competencies in instruction. California is investing in this kind of redesign: the state invested \$10 million in a Secondary School Redesign Pilot Program in 2025, followed by \$50 million to expand the work (Fine et al., forthcoming). As those efforts unfold, Magnolia Heights and San Bernardino City Unified show how a district-wide vision and school-level innovation can reinforce each other.

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