

## **BAY AREA SCHOOL-TO-CAREER ACTION NETWORK**

### **The Virtual Intermediary**

**by John Niles**

The Bay Area School-to-Career Action Network (BaySCAN) is perhaps unique among school-to-career intermediaries. It is a regional collaboration, an “organization of organizations” that is developing an infrastructure to support school-to-career throughout the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose region. At the same time, it is a “virtual organization.” That is, it accomplishes its goals through working committees that coordinate the efforts of individuals and key partner organizations. By design, BaySCAN has a small core staff and a limited direct operating budget; its primary resources are human rather than financial.

BaySCAN serves three purposes:

- It is a coordinating mechanism across several boards and coalitions that are promoting educational change.
- It pools and focuses the collective expertise of the corporations, foundations, and individuals who started it, drawing on their experience in school-to-career design and implementation.
- It performs certain specific, common functions on behalf of several local school-to-career partnerships that are best accomplished at a regional level.

The organizations and institutions that support BaySCAN and contribute to its continued success are widely recognized as leading voices for educational change, particularly within the private sector. They designed BaySCAN to promote understanding among practitioners and policymakers in the Bay Area about improving education through a school-to-career perspective. And their high visibility has helped draw attention to those essential principles and made it easier for major institutions and businesses to participate.

BaySCAN serves a large region: ten school-to-career Local Partnerships are members, covering fifteen counties, from Mendocino in the north to Monterey in the south, and including heavily urbanized San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties. The collective K-12 public school population exceeds one million students. BaySCAN considers its long reach appropriate, given that the Bay Area is a coherent regional labor market.

#### **Key Lessons**

- Effective leadership can be exercised through a small core operation.

- The school-to-career field benefits from regional networking, convening, and support, as evidenced by high demand among Local Partnerships, practitioners, and program operators for many of BaySCAN's services.
- BaySCAN's virtual organization has succeeded thus far primarily because of the strong commitment of prominent partners to a collaborative model.

### **Background Information**

- *Mission:* "BaySCAN's mission is to establish and nurture a thriving, region-wide school-to-career network by linking, convening, and supporting key stakeholders and attracting and brokering resources so that:
  - ◇ "Educators, students and parents, employers, policy makers, and other interested community members communicate readily and often both in person and through participation in a virtual school-to-career community supported by appropriate, widely accessible technology and shared information resources.
  - ◇ "Restructuring schools and educators leverage assets, share curricula and best practices, collaborate around implementation of school-to-career activities and career pathways, and regularly assess progress in order to achieve continuous improvement.
  - ◇ "Industry/school learning collaboratives result in clearly articulated career pathways and standards for students, professional development, including worksite learning opportunities for educators, and effective human resource development for participating employers.
  - ◇ "Every Bay area student has ready access to information, to mentoring, and to integrated school/work-site learning opportunities through which he or she can become more aware of, prepared for, and motivated to aspire to continued learning and career opportunities."
- *Structure:* BaySCAN is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. A 10-member board of directors provides overall governance and coordination. BaySCAN accomplishes its activities through a "working membership" organized into self-governing advisory committees that provide a structure for active member participation and opportunities for leadership and shared learning.

- *Funding:* About three-fourths of BaySCAN's annual operating budget of \$450,000 derives from grants from foundations, including major funding from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Stupski Family Fund, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and Autodesk Foundation. Additional funds come from corporate grants and contracts for service, including National School-to-Work Office technical assistance funds.
- *Partners:* Founding members and active director-partners include: the Bay Area Council; Workforce Silicon Valley; Bay Area School Reform Collaborative; New Ways Workers National; the National Council for Research on Vocational Education; higher education members (e.g., California State University-Hayward, City College of San Francisco, and San Jose City College); and business members (INTA, Siemens Corporation, Autodesk, and Charles Schwab). Affiliated school-to-career Local Partnerships include Alameda and Contra Costa counties: EastBay Learns; Humboldt, DelNorte, and Lake County-North Coast STW Consortium; Marin County STC Partnership; Mendocino County STC Partnership; Napa County: Partnership for 21st Century; Monterey/Santa Cruz STC Partnership; San Francisco STC Partnership; San Mateo STC Partnership; Santa Clara: Workforce Silicon Valley; Solano County Business and Education Alliance; and Sonoma County STC Partnership.
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## Historical Summary

BaySCAN's origins lie partly in early 1997, when the National School-to-Work Office awarded a state implementation grant to California. Key local reformers believed this grant helped clarify the need for a regional coordination and support mechanism.

By that time, several organizations had begun pursuing a school-to-career approach to education reform. Most prominent was the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), funded by a \$100 million Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge grant. BASRC invests those funds in selected area high schools that use school-to-career as a lever for whole-school change. In addition, Oakland, Alameda/Contra Costa counties, and Santa Clara County had received direct federal funding for school-to-career activities, in the form of both Local Partnership grants and Urban/Rural Opportunity Grants. With the advent of the California statewide implementation effort, school-to-career partnerships began forming at the county level across the entire state.

During this same period, the National School-to-Work Office announced the availability of technical assistance funds, including funds that would be awarded through regional offices of the U.S. Labor and Education departments to groups that could provide support on a regional basis. A number of Bay Area organizations—including Autodesk Foundation, New Ways Workers National, and others—were on the roster of the National School-to-Work Office as national technical assistance providers.

Building upon such developments, the leaders of these Bay Area organizations decided to establish a voluntary regional collaborative that would support school-to-career activities and be a precursor to a formal organization. In the spring of 1997, more than 20 organizations—representing business, schools, higher education, education reformers, knowledgeable “support providers,” and Local Partnerships—made a commitment to join together to improve coordination and develop region-wide strategies. BaySCAN began as a cooperative, voluntary effort in October 1997, then matured into a formal structure. It was incorporated in March 1998.

BaySCAN’s 24 founding partners consisted of business organizations active in promoting educational change and workforce development in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, education institutions (including school districts and colleges), and foundations with program investments in school reform, as well as several research organizations. Among the many key individuals and organizations active at this stage were Bob Pearlman of Autodesk Foundation, Diana Wolf of BankAmerica Foundation, Steve Trippe of New Ways to Work, and Brady Bevis of the Bay Area Multimedia Partnership. Active from postsecondary institutions were Peter Crabtree of Peralta Community College, Judith Bell of San Jose City College, and Bette Felton of the California State University, Hayward. Also important were Sharon Oldham of the East Bay STC Partnership, Bob Goetsch of the Industry Education Council, and Richard Schorske from Workforce Silicon Valley. Seed financing came from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Stupski Family Fund, Autodesk Foundation, Bank America Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the National School-to-Work Office.

### **The Virtual Organization**

BaySCAN conducts its activities through the joint efforts of a small core staff and the collective expertise of its regional member organizations. The central staff consists of Director of Programs Sharon Oldham, a marketing director, and three learning collaborative coordinators. Representatives of member organizations carry out the bulk of BaySCAN activities, providing the regional network with either contract support or in-kind services.

BaySCAN uses four approaches to guide its efforts:

- *Leadership through board/member committees:* Five committees, consisting of key educators, employers, and community members, work on priority regional issues, such as legislative advocacy or employer engagement.
- *Building effective practice through Learning Collaboratives:* Education and business practitioners develop and share knowledge about ways to connect classroom and worksite learning through industry/education Learning Collaboratives organized around specific industry clusters.
- *Regional operations:* Direct, operational support is provided through a regional telecommunications infrastructure and regional employer outreach, public communications, and marketing.
- *Building Local Partnership capacity:* The Northern California School-to-Career Practitioner Network, connecting 15 local school-to-career directors, builds leadership capacity, discusses common issues, and coordinates resources on a regional basis.

### **Leadership Through Board/Member Committees**

Through BaySCAN committees, key stakeholders across the region collaborate on issues of common concern. At least one co-chair of each committee is a member of the BaySCAN board, which strengthens connections between each committee's activities and the organization's overall direction. Monthly meetings of the BaySCAN board further enhance cross-committee coordination.

Committees operate in five areas: legislative advocacy, technology infrastructure, public communications and marketing, employer engagement, and whole school change.

***Legislative Advocacy:*** Working through member organizations and partner affiliates (e.g., the California Business Roundtable), this committee advocates for public policy and legislative proposals that support building and sustaining a school-to-career system. The committee is designed to speak to employers, funders, and legislators with a unified voice representing the variety of school-to-career interests.

During the summer of 1999, the Legislative Advocacy Committee co-chaired a statewide meeting of Local Partnership directors as a part of an annual statewide school-to-career conference. This meeting developed a specific, single legislative action plan on behalf of all partnerships. In addition to the identification of legislative proposals, elements of the plan include a policy "white paper," a legislative briefing strategy, and site visits to expose

legislators, school administrators, and school board members to exemplary school-to-career practices.

**Technology Infrastructure:** This committee helps coordinate the design and implementation of a regional technology infrastructure that enables BaySCAN to serve as a clearinghouse for information, resources, training, and public communications. BaySCAN has developed a Web site and listserv capacity for enhancing communications and information exchange across regional partners. Under the committee's guidance, BaySCAN has applied for a federal grant to further develop this infrastructure.

The committee publishes an on-line newsletter that is distributed to more than 300 listserv members. Its clearinghouse helps alert educators about, and connect them with, professional development workshops and other training opportunities across the region.

**Public Communications and Marketing:** This committee has been instrumental in defining regional strategies for marketing the benefits of school-to-career. The committee completed its first product—a video presenting the school-to-career model—in a mutual effort that used funds contributed from a variety of sources. The successful collaboration has led all participating Local Partnerships to pool a portion of their grant funds to market school-to-career through BaySCAN's single, regional voice. Other California regions are replicating this coordinated approach to communications.

Recently, the Public Communications and Marketing Committee conducted a survey of employers that are leaders in Bay Area school-to-career activities. BaySCAN has published this survey, and schools and Local Partnerships are using it as a basis for promoting action among schools and employers. Drawing on the survey's findings, they are emphasizing the need to construct work-based experiences that are connected to a classroom curriculum and to provide more teachers with worksite experience as a vehicle for designing realistic curriculum projects.

**Employer Engagement:** This committee has defined a region-wide employer-engagement strategy, building on the efforts of the National Alliance of Business and the National Employer Leadership Council (see the council's Web site: [www.nelc.org](http://www.nelc.org)). The plan will be implemented with BaySCAN funds supporting a full-time "employer broker," based at the Bay Area Council, to help organize employer involvement on school-to-career activities throughout the region. The Bay Area Council, a founding member of BaySCAN, consists of chambers of commerce and industry associations, as well as individual employers.

The employer broker will work through the council's membership structure to provide services that help interested employers participate in school-to-career activities. The broker will draw upon the expertise of "coaches" and other knowledgeable individuals from active business firms to provide technical support in worksite mentoring, work-based learning, and teacher externships.

**Whole School Change:** This ad hoc committee disbanded upon completing its single assignment: to produce a policy statement to guide all BaySCAN efforts that integrate school-to-career strategies within a larger vision for whole-school change. BaySCAN uses the guiding principles to focus all school-based support activities.

The statement has served a number of purposes. It focused early attention on common definitions, a step that was especially important given the differing perspectives on the meaning of "school-to-career." In addition, it articulates a challenging conceptual vision that stands in contrast to a narrow, more programmatic view of school-to-career. Further, the statement has helped define the activities that are accomplished through BaySCAN working groups. Finally, it functions as a manifesto, helping individuals and organizations who join the school-to-career effort understand what it is and why it is important.

### **Building Effective Practice Through Learning Collaboratives**

BaySCAN has organized business-school Learning Collaboratives within specific industry areas as a way to engage practitioners from Local Partnerships in developing a common approach to school-to-career activities. Thus far, building on interests expressed by its founding organizations, BaySCAN has created three collaboratives: Financial Services, Multimedia Learning, and Teaching and Learning Careers. In each collaborative, employers, community members, educators from K-12 and higher education, and other key local stakeholders meet regularly to share knowledge, define and agree on effective practices, and reach consensus on program design.

Each collaborative is a "managed change process," complete with its own goals, standards, and progress indicators. Participants tackle such tasks as identifying appropriate skill standards, defining career pathways, developing new curriculum materials, designing quality work-based learning experiences, and providing educators with worksite externships and professional development through training and summer institutes.

For example, the membership of the *Multimedia Learning Collaborative* includes Apple, Silicon Graphics, Autodesk, Kinetix, and more than 100 other multimedia companies, along with 20 high schools that have established

academies for multimedia-integrated studies and the region's major state university and community colleges. The collaborative seeks to establish and expand multimedia design and production programs, organizes professional development for teachers and workplace supervisors, facilitates mentoring relationships, and convenes teams of teachers and employers in joint design efforts.

The *Teaching and Learning Careers Collaborative* grew out of a recognition by K-12 districts and teacher education programs that school-to-career pathways offer an ideal opportunity to encourage students to consider teaching as a profession. The School of Education at California State University, Hayward is a lead partner in this collaborative and has restructured its college-level courses and programs to emphasize integrated learning.

### **Regional Operations**

Through its working committees, BaySCAN performs selected operational functions that it believes benefit from being accomplished on a regional basis. These include enhancing communications with the public, designing and implementing employer engagement strategies, and creating a regional communications network among school-to-career practitioners and policymakers.

*BaySCAN Connects* is BaySCAN's regional telecommunications service. To link schools, students, and employers, it uses cutting-edge techniques, including listservs, Web sites, videoconferencing, and video streaming (video clips viewed through the World Wide Web). *BaySCAN Connects* also uses the on-line database PathFinder to help arrange thousands of work-based learning experiences for students.

### **Building the Capacity of Local Partnerships**

Prior to BaySCAN's creation, the Northern California Practitioner Network (NCPN) emerged in early 1996 as a way to promote communication among the large number of organizations and individuals pursuing the development of school-to-career systems in northern and central California. The initial convening took place under the leadership of New Ways Workers National and its director, Steve Trippe. Coordinators from each of the Bay Area's seven Local Partnerships gathered informally to discuss common issues related to implementing school-to-career programs.

When BaySCAN was organized, the NCPN became a project housed within the new group. Sharon Oldham, coordinator of the East Bay School to Career Partnership and an active participant in the NCPN, became the director of BaySCAN.

Meeting quarterly, members of the Northern California Practitioner Network share ideas and information relating to implementation, curriculum design, skill standards and certification, staff and teacher development activities, work-based learning, employer engagement strategies, and common measures of success. The network consists of all state and federally funded Bay Area Local Partnerships, schools and community organizations, federally qualified technical assistance providers, foundations, and others engaged in school-to-career implementation. Representatives of the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the California S2C Interagency Partnership also participate.

BaySCAN makes all products of its Learning Collaboratives and other working committees available to this network. Thus, the Local Partnership coordinators (and others in the partnerships who are active in schools and among employers) contribute to the efforts of BaySCAN committees. Moreover, the network's members are key to disseminating BaySCAN information, approaches, and materials.

Specific examples of this collaborative development/joint dissemination strategy include:

- Creating career pathway models through one of the industry-specific collaboratives, and then implementing the models at school sites within the member Local Partnerships;
- Recruiting employers, with follow-up operational connections between employers' branch offices and the appropriate Local Partnerships; and
- Pooling partnership resources for joint development of public communications products, such as brochures, press kits, and public service announcements.

### **The Future**

The basic organizational design of BaySCAN and its choice of operating strategies have proved remarkably successful to date. BaySCAN still operates essentially according to the original vision that led to its creation. This is reflected in BaySCAN's general plans for the coming year:

- Continued implementation of career pathways designed by the industry-specific Learning Collaboratives;
- Roll-out of public communications products, including a coordinated media campaign that builds on the commitment of a major Bay Area television station to promote school-to-career connections;

- Establishment of a fourth Learning Collaborative, *Information Technology*, which is projected to begin formal activities in the fall of 1999;
- Increased attention to promoting the school-to-career philosophy among schools and educators, which represents an acknowledgment that schools have proven to be a significant barrier to implementation; and
- A greater emphasis on advocating for statewide educational policies that support school-to-career sustainability. Specifically, BaySCAN recently created a statewide policy committee that is partnering with the Association of California School Administrators and the Association of County School Superintendents to develop a legislative and policy agenda that supports sustained school-to-career system-building.

### **Achievements and Lessons Learned**

It is early to extract definitive lessons about intermediary operations using BaySCAN's two-year-old model of a "virtual organization." However, BaySCAN is building a track record of service and accomplishment, chiefly through its role as convenor and organizer. As an intermediary, it distributes the benefits of its products and services widely across member organizations. Those members do not view it as an organization that exists to develop and refine a privately held product line.

Several observations are worth noting:

*Effective leadership can be exercised through a small core operation.*

BaySCAN's small staff focuses on harnessing the efforts of hundreds of others through working committees and collaboratives. The organization has made a conscious decision not to expand central operations.

*The school-to-career field benefits from regional networking, convening, and support, as evidenced by high demand among Local Partnerships, practitioners, and program operators for many of BaySCAN's services.*

BaySCAN performs at least three critical roles. First, it provides technical support: its brokering of information about school-to-career practices helps connect teachers and program operators with knowledgeable experts. Second, it serves as a policy convenor and coordinator across several education reform initiatives. Third, it performs selected operational functions that are best carried out regionally.

*BaySCAN's virtual organization has succeeded thus far primarily because of the strong commitment of prominent partners to a collaborative model.*

BaySCAN exists because its partners see value in cooperation, collaboration, and synergy. The founding partners have forged a shared ethic that carries through into the culture of BaySCAN and its working groups. People and organizations who join BaySCAN to participate in its projects understand how it works and accept the spirit of alliance and collaboration.

At the same time, from its very first day, BaySCAN has been effective because of the prominence of its founding partners. These organizations are highly visible, and their active, effective leaders have contributed significant regional clout. Doors open and phone calls get returned simply because of the effectiveness and credibility of BaySCAN leaders. Moreover, many founding partners bring special expertise that others want; the BaySCAN structure makes this knowledge available to the network members.

**Acknowledgments/For more information:**

This case study was prepared by John Niles of the Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning. It is based in part on interviews with BaySCAN Executive Director Sharon Oldham; Bob Pearlman of Autodesk Foundation; and Steve Trippe, Director of New Ways Workers National.

Other sources include: "The Bay Area School-to-Career Action Network: A Working Document" (a prospectus for potential funders) (1999); "BaySCAN 1998 Review," BaySCAN Learning Collaboratives *Guiding Principles*, and BaySCAN's *Whole School Change Criteria for BaySCAN School Partners*.