



LINKING YOUTH EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WITH A HEALTHY LAKE ENVIRONMENT IN LAKE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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JUNE 2021

Preferred Citation: Abrams, Carolyn, Jonathan K. London. 2021. Linking Youth Education and Workforce Development with a Healthy Lake Environment in Lake County, California. UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

CLEAR LAKE YOUTH EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Youth education and workforce development are both priorities in Lake County for community revitalization. Providing strong K-12 and post-secondary educational opportunities, coupled with viable career training and employment prospects is critical to a prosperous economy. A successful workforce development strategy must be based on the understand that the economy of the region revolves around businesses associated with Clear Lake (e.g., lake-based tourism, hospitality, natural resource and agricultural industries). Therefore youth education needs to consider the career pathways from K-12 and post-secondary education into these employment sectors and to understand that the educational outcomes and well-being of young people is a crucial investment in long-term lake health.

PURPOSE FOR REVIEW IN LAKE COUNTY

The Socioeconomic Subcommittee of the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake identified youth education and workforce development as important aspects of the economic vitality of the Clear Lake region. The Subcommittee requested more information about what work is being done in these areas, what opportunities and challenges exist, and recommendations for moving forward. Our approach has been to document what's currently being done in Lake County related to these areas, and then identify initiatives that could be resourced further that the BRC should consider in their final decisions and recommendations.

METHODS

The CRC's qualitative data collection team, led by Research Data Analyst Carolyn Abrams and Student Researcher Alex Volzer, conducted a total of 13 formal interviews and two informal interviews in 2019. Interviewees answered questions about their economic development vision for the region, with particular attention paid to major drivers of economic change and whether change is welcome and/or needed. The objective of the economic development interviews was to provide insight from stakeholders and situate the conversation within promising practices for holistic community economic development.

The CRC conducted a virtual focus group in April 2021, led by Carolyn Abrams and Jonathan London, and a second focus group was conducted in May 2021, led by Carolyn Abrams and Sara Watterson. The CRC created the list of stakeholders after consulting with the BRC Socioeconomic Subcommittee and encouraged those invited to suggest other contacts within their community as well (see Appendix).

The formal interviews consisted of eight female informants and five male informants, with geographic representation from both incorporated and unincorporated communities in Lake County. Two infographics were produced to represent the demographics of those interviewed and summarize the interview findings about amenity development. Organizations and sectors represented in the focus groups included the Lake County Office of Education, Mendocino College Lake Center, Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians, the Mendocino-Lake Community College District Board of Trustees, Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and North Coast Opportunities.

RESULTS: EMERGING KEY THEMES

Linking education and Lake-oriented workforce development

Both the interview and focus group participants identified land and natural resource management as critical to workforce and economic development. A land management economy could offer an economic and business model that addresses the local workforce needs and improves the region's natural environment. It was generally agreed upon that a different level of respect and appreciation is cultivated for the environment when opportunities are provided to connect with the land and serve a role in protecting these resources. There is a need for greater research and applied educational opportunities for youth, including both K-12 education, in area community colleges and pathways into 4-year and graduate-level higher education. Focus group participants highlighted the need to link students' classroom learning to experiential learning, with an intentional focus on future college and career opportunities. Recognizing that young people would benefit from opportunities to learn about natural resource management, (e.g., fire science, fisheries management, watershed restoration, indigenous natural resource stewardship) there is great potential to provide educational experiences and career development for youth and young adults connected to Clear Lake. Leveraging this local resource for learning and discovery could propel many students into STEM fields related to the health of both Clear Lake and the human communities that depend on it .

Participants expressed a desire to build sustainable partnerships between the local community colleges, with a specific focus on Clear Lake and the environment. There is a need to expand curricula and course offerings at the community colleges and create extension programs to this workforce pathway. Cultivating partnerships between the community colleges and local agencies or organizations could also provide expanded learning opportunities to supplement classroom curriculum.

Workforce development and readiness is a limiting factor

Workforce readiness at the local level is critical, and it's important to ensure that job training and education are provided for both youth and adults. However, it remains a challenge to prepare a high-quality workforce without clear and well-resourced career paths. As expressed by focus group participants, there also remains a lack of understanding how to access statewide funding for workforce development, how to coordinate addressing this sector of the economy at the local level, and how to leverage local funding resources and opportunities. Greater coordination is needed between statewide, regional, and local workforce development efforts.

Tribal engagement

Area tribes and tribal residents have crucial knowledge and resource stewardship practices that are crucial elements of any successful workforce training pathway strategy. Tribal governments and enterprises are also key contributors to the region's economy. Tribal government environmental protection departments are important sources of expertise and job opportunities.

Focus group participants frequently underscored the need to engage area tribes as leaders in workforce development. There also was significant traction around connecting the cultural knowledge and practices associated with the lake with a restoration and stewardship-based economy. There is a large interest in learning about the land in a way that benefits the community and individuals. Tribal members want to be more engaged as co-stewards or co-managers of the land to facilitate a sense of ownership, which is often critical to investing in a place and taking care of it. Supporting efforts such as the Tribal Ecosystem Restoration Alliance (TERA) that train participants for natural resource-based careers can be an important part of this effort. TERA is a cross-cultural, multi-organizational collaborative based in Lake County. TERA partners work together to revitalize ecology, economy, and culture through indigenous-led stewardship. Through their natural resource and workforce development trainings, their collaborative efforts support tribal autonomy, regenerative land management, and reconnecting people to place. TERA partners include Robinson Rancheria Pomo Indians of California, Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians, United States Forest Service - Mendocino National Forest, Berryessa Snow

Mountain National Monument, Bureau of Land Management - Ukiah Field Office, and the Clear Lake Environmental Research Center.

Other opportunities included the intentional engagement of tribal youth in educational programs related to lake restoration to provide opportunities to support the maintenance and growth of indigenous knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROMISING PRACTICES

Strengthen the cradle to college and career pipeline

Youth are a key constituency from an educational and workforce development perspective. Research demonstrates that linking learning to a student's future in college or career supports students' academic success. As such, it will be critical for Lake County leaders to expand research and educational opportunities for youth, emphasizing K-12 and community college education.

Funding should be secured to intentionally link students' learning to career pathways starting in elementary school to get an earlier start in helping prepare students for success in college, careers, and life. It's also critical to support career pathways connected to lake restoration and lake-based economic sectors. One specific recommendation is to secure funding to hire a Work-Based Learning (WBL) Coordinator to establish and manage relationships with businesses and other employers and to coordinate WBL opportunities for students ranging from field trips to internships to part-time and summer employment. WBL opportunities can help students understand how their classroom learning relates to the working world, gain knowledge of college pathways to particular careers, and learn skills that will prepare them for college and careers.

In addition, a Linked Learning Coordinator could work with teachers at local high schools to closely plan classroom instruction and student projects to help maximize students' exposure to content and skill-building relevant to particular career pathways. Additional opportunities could be offered, including speakers in the classroom, field visits, service learning, project-based learning projects, or job shadows. Specific to the Lake, funding could be secured to hire a Youth STEM Coordinator to offer specific guidance for college or career opportunities in STEM.

Furthermore, it will be important to create more collaboration between the community colleges in the region. Two interests of the focus groups and interview participants included the expansion of course offerings, as well as the creation of extension program related to STEM and natural resource-based careers. It would also be beneficial to explore options to share staff between the

community colleges, which could allow for more specialized courses to be offered by the faculty who already teach at one of the campuses.

Leverage resources to support land-based science education and career pathways

Funding should be secured to support efforts to integrate local science and environmental centers with educational institutions to create hands-on learning opportunities and pipeline programs for youth. This would support research efforts to make a stronger connection for students who are interested in STEM fields while also leveraging the lake as a key educational resource.

For instance, the County Office of Education's Taylor Observatory and a proposed Water Lab could be connected to schools and educational institutions to create hands-on learning opportunities and pipeline programs for youth. There is a large interest in learning about the land in a way that benefits the community and individuals. Tribal members want to be more engaged as co-stewards or co-managers of the land to facilitate a sense of ownership, which is often critical to investing in a place and taking care of it.

Local economic ties to issues of watershed management, lake health, and stewardship of the forest are prime opportunities to create jobs and develop career pathways. Clear Lake and the surrounding ecosystem offer valuable local resources that provide the potential for apprenticeship opportunities and pre-apprenticeship programs as potential career pipelines.

Other opportunities include providing vocational training and certification support through the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#). Securing these resources could also provide high quality services for youth and young adults beginning with career exploration and guidance, continued support for educational attainment, opportunities for skills training in high-demand industries and occupations, and culminating with a high-quality job along a career pathway or enrollment in postsecondary education.

Connect cultural elements of the lake with restoration and revitalization efforts

It will be important to prioritize and value tribal knowledge and practices to support and inform land management career pathways. Providing opportunities to support tribal land management practices can be a way to connect young people to the land and to their communities. This can cultivate respect for the land and teach about land and lake stewardship practices that can be applied in multiple career pathways.

Land ownership is key for tribal leadership to provide educational opportunities for young people. As a key funding recommendation from the focus group, there would be great value in

purchasing land next to Clear Lake to establish a tribal education center. There is concern that much of the shoreline is already private, which does not benefit the broader community.

Establishing a tribal environmental center would provide opportunities for youth education, and it would create meaningful jobs that have a positive impact on the Lake. Having access to the Lake is a key component of cultivating enthusiasm and a sense of interest or pride in the Lake, especially among young people.

Funding should also be secured to support other programs that promote cultural knowledge and land management such as TERA, described above. TERA is a perfect example of how job training can promote ecological literacy, cultural knowledge, and vocational skills.

Promote sustainable and equitable job creation and economic growth

Economic vitality will need to involve a diversification of the job market. This will include the promotion of industries beyond tourism that will create jobs and invest in the local workforce. By considering the long-term needs of Lake County residents, including the populations they want to retain (e.g., young adults) and the people they want to attract to the region, local leaders can best identify industries that meet these needs. Job development should look at everything contributing to lake health, including forestry, soil health, land use, watershed, wildland fire and fuels management, burning practices, tree planting and seed collection, restoration practices, and cultural resource monitoring. In all job development and training efforts, a priority should be placed on engaging typically under-served populations, including tribal youth, youth of color, and low-income youth. All sectors must thrive if the community as whole can thrive.

More broadly, the Lake County region should adopt a “community economic development,” approach which views economic revitalization, the well-being of area residents, and a sustainable and healthy and sustainable natural environment as intrinsically linked. No one element of this system can be successful if one of them lags behind. The youth education and workforce development strategies can be a key contributor to the long-term health of the Lake, and conversely, a healthy lake is necessary for a thriving economy.

APPENDIX

Resources

[Idea Partnership](#): The IDEA Partnership reflects the collaborative work of more than 50 national organizations, technical assistance providers, and organizations and agencies at the state and local level to solve complex educational problems. Idea Partnership offers the [Cradle to College & Career \(CCC\) Resource Collection](#) which offers tools to build common knowledge on the topic and engage deeply in this work.

[PolicyLink's Promise Neighborhood Initiative's Model Legislation](#): The Promise Neighborhoods Institute (PNI) at PolicyLink introduced model legislation to be used at the state and local level to secure support for cradle to career efforts. The legislation was intentionally drafted in a manner that it may be used to support various strategies that advance educational outcomes from cradle through college and career.

[Tribal EcoRestoration Alliance \(TERA\)](#): TERA is a cross-cultural, multi-organizational collaborative based in Lake County, California, in the ancestral territories of Eastern Pomo, Southeastern Pomo, Lake Miwok, and Wappo people. TERA partners work together to revitalize ecology, economy, and culture through indigenous-led stewardship. Their efforts support tribal autonomy, regenerative land management, and reconnecting people to place.

[State Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Strategic Plans](#) (2020-2023): Each U.S. State and Territory submits a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor and Department of Education that outlines its workforce development system's four-year strategy, and updates the plan as required after two years. There are a variety of [policy resources and technical assistance materials](#) available to the public about the WIOA State Plans and the organizations that work together to create them.

Works cited

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