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### A Pathway to Achievement

by John K. Waters

*An innovative IT skills program is laying students a trail between high school, higher education, and ultimately, the job market.*



**CLINT JOHNS, TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR** and teacher at **Irvington High School** in Fremont, CA, is determined to create what he calls "seamless pathways" between his school's students and both the modern job market and the demands of higher education.

"We're looking for meaningful and relevant connections between what students are learning in the classroom and the job skills companies are looking for in the years to come," Johns says. "Technology training is the logical link, but this isn't a trade school, so this challenge for us is also very much about infusing technology within courses to gear kids for college."

For Irvington, a Bay Area public high school serving about 2,000 students, that pursuit of a "logical link" led to a collaboration with nearby Ohlone College. Ohlone, a community college with campuses in Fremont and Newark, CA, enrolls 18,000 students per year on campus and online. The school offers 184 degrees and academic programs, and every year more than 500 Ohlone students transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

The Irvington-Ohlone partnership revolves around the college's Career Pathway in Information and Communication Technology. The ICT program is designed to lead high school students through courses that prepare them to enroll in a community college and then transfer to a university for baccalaureate degrees with a computer science or engineering focus.

"The strongest connection right now between K-12 and higher education is the community college," says Richard Grotegut, professor of computer networking and emerging technology at Ohlone. "We're typically thought of as the vocational, tech-training arm of the education system, but community colleges also serve as an academic bridge between high school and the universities. In this case, the focus just happens to be information technology."

Ohlone makes a natural partner for Irvington, Johns says, both because of its geographic proximity and the college's active interest in linking the two schools. "This is a connection we both wanted to make," he says.

The two schools are making that connection through technology-- or rather, their shared view about technology: that standards-based tech skills taught early will serve to smooth the way for students entering postsecondary institutions. And yet, according to Ameetha Palanki, chief academic officer at Edgenuity, a maker of educational software solutions, tight couplings such as the Irvington-Ohlone partnership are still rare because of a fundamental difference in the ways K-12 schools and higher ed institutions use information technology.

"The links we see right now tend to be about leveraging technology for advanced placement online courses, and we see systems for automating the application process," says Palanki, a former director and faculty member at UCLA's School Management Program.

"But none of the technologies we're seeing are addressing core issues on the K-12 side that might help on the postsecondary side. The trouble is, we really haven't identified a common problem that we can address through technology."

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