



To: Coalition for Multiple Pathways
From: Spitfire Strategies
Re: Name of the field
Date: November 11, 2009

In 2008, after four years of pursuing a strategy to advance multiple pathways in California, the James Irvine Foundation asked the Bridgespan Group to assess the state of the multiple pathways field and to make recommendations about how to strengthen it. The Bridgespan report included three core recommendations, one of which suggested the development of a clearer definition of multiple pathways and stronger messaging aligned with that definition. (The full Bridgespan report, "Assessing California's Multiple Pathways Field," is available at www.irvine.org.) To act upon that recommendation, Spitfire Strategies began developing a marketing plan for the field of multiple pathways and initiated a discussion about the name "multiple pathways." To gain input from the field on this matter, the James Irvine Foundation organized a committee of Coalition members and other key stakeholders. This group convened several times to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the name and to consider whether or not the field should continue to use this name. To come to a decision, this committee, the James Irvine Foundation, and Spitfire Strategies assisted in the following steps:

1. We asked a communications consulting firm to review existing research, conduct new audience research and then recommend whether the name should be changed.
2. We considered their recommendation and built consensus to change the name.
3. We considered name and tagline candidates that convey the attributes of multiple pathways and that resonate the most with key audiences.
4. We selected the name and tagline we believe can work best.
5. We recommended the name to various committees, working groups and leaders in the field to get feedback and build consensus around the recommendation.
6. We are now presenting the new name to the full Coalition for Multiple Pathways.

Reasons for Changing the Name

The findings from the Bridgespan report, noted above, made it clear that the name "multiple pathways" was a potential liability as we continue to build the multiple pathways field. Based on their comprehensive interviews, research, and an assessment of how we can further strengthen the field of multiple pathways, it was clear that we must at least consider the costs and benefits of changing the name. We then asked a communications firm, the Neimand Collaborative, to conduct focus groups to assess stakeholder perceptions of multiple pathways as an approach and field name. These focus groups included input from current multiple pathways students and their parents/guardians, as well as students and their parents/guardians who were unfamiliar with the multiple pathways approach. The effort built upon the work done by Coalition member UCLA/IDEA, which informed our initial impressions of stakeholder needs and desires. This research, along with the experiences of numerous individuals and organizations as they communicate about multiple pathways, has led to a general consensus that

changing the name would help us communicate more clearly and market the concept more effectively. The most compelling reasons to change the name are:

- **Multiple pathways is a great product with a not so great name.** None of the key audiences in the research found the name particularly motivating. While it is acceptable to nearly half the stakeholders, it is equally confusing and unacceptable to the others. However, the approach itself is highly valued and motivating among all stakeholders. We have a clear understanding of how to most effectively describe the program, but that job is made harder by the name. Clear, consistent and compelling messages will also be needed, but a different name would make the communications job much easier.
- **Many key audiences find the name confusing.** It is unclear to many of our key audiences what “multiple” refers to in the name. Many also confuse multiple pathways with career technical education, which is often seen as a euphemism for vocational education. The danger is that multiple pathways will be considered an updated form of vocational education.
- **“Multiple pathways” does not convey the most important values of the approach.** The values and attributes that resonated most with key audiences were:
 - Connection
 - Transformation
 - Real world experience
 - Career AND college ready
 - Challenge
 - Success
 - Expertise
 - Options and choice
- **Multiple pathways students dislike the name because it doesn’t capture connection and transformation.** The majority of multiple pathways students entered the programs because of an intense interest in a particular career or profession. They liked that they had the option to pursue their interest, but not necessarily the option to pursue multiple interests. In addition, they identified connection—interests to education; academics to real world application; peer-to-peer; student-to-teacher, school-to-professional community—as their highest value, one that produced intellectual and social transformation that provided an advantage in high school, college and career, and life. It may seem that we need not preach to the converted, yet research showed that the strongest marketing is student and parent recommendations. Multiple pathways students should be comfortable with and motivated by the name that describes their education experience.
- **The name “multiple pathways” is not owned on the national level.** While multiple pathways is emerging as an approach in California, it is being confused on the national level with a similarly named program in New York centered on recovery of out-of-school youth and alternative education systems. Although we are focused on implementing the program throughout California, the new political and policy context dictates that we must be sensitive to how multiple pathways is perceived in Washington. The Obama administration is taking an increasingly strong role in education innovation, providing funding incentives and policy leadership for programs like multiple pathways. Californians are spending a lot of time in

Washington explaining how they are not the New York program before they can explain the value of their program

Choosing and Implementing a New Name

Based on these reasons, and after numerous meetings and discussions among various groups of Coalition members, we have developed a new name and tagline to present to the full Coalition on November 17. This name and tagline are based on the work of several communications consultants, including a national firm that specializes in naming, and was vetted and approved by various groupings of Coalition members, including the Building Awareness Working Group.

This decision was made with a full consideration of the costs and benefits of changing the name, as well as the costs and benefits of not changing. While we certainly recognize that changing the name will require time and energy, we believe the costs of not changing are far greater. In recognition of the costs of changing, Spitfire Strategies will remain involved to help Coalition members implement the name change through their communications vehicles. We look forward to the discussion on November 17.