

**UCLA**

**Labor Center**

**YOUNG  
WORKERS  
EDUCATION  
PROJECT**



# Teaching LAUSD Students About Their Labor and Workplace Rights

**An Evaluation of the Young Worker Labor  
Curriculum and the AB 800 Workplace Readiness  
Five-Day Learning Cycle**



## Introduction

Understanding California’s youth work participation—where they work, how much they work, and their overall work experiences—is critical for informing labor policy and educational pathways and for shaping workforce development strategies. In 2023, the UCLA Labor Center published [California’s Future is Clocked In: The Experiences of Young Workers](#), the first statewide study to examine the employment and education outcomes of young workers aged 16 to 24. In 2024, a UCLA Labor Center follow-up brief, [After the Bell: A Portrait of High School Workers in California](#), explored the particular workplace experiences of the more than 150,000 high school student workers across the state.

According to these reports, the majority of California’s high school student workers are students of color (65%), with 46% identifying as Latine (Ramakrishan et al, 2024). These young workers are chiefly employed in the retail and restaurant service industries, sectors where workers face high rates of wage theft and health and safety violations. In September 2023, based on young worker testimonies and data, Assemblymember Liz Ortega enacted AB 800 Workplace Readiness Week, an Assembly bill requiring all public high schools in California, including charter schools, to provide information to 11th and 12th grade students on their rights as workers. The bill outlines an expansive list of specific topics to cover: child labor, wage and hour protections, worker safety, workers’ compensation, paid sick




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leave, prohibitions against retaliation, the right to organize a union, the labor movement’s role in fighting for workplace rights, and apprenticeship programs in California (see *Workplace Readiness Week Permits*). Secondly, the bill mandates that any student under the age of 18 seeking a school authority to authorize a valid work permit must obtain a document clearly explaining basic labor rights extended to workers (see *Workplace Readiness Week Permits*).

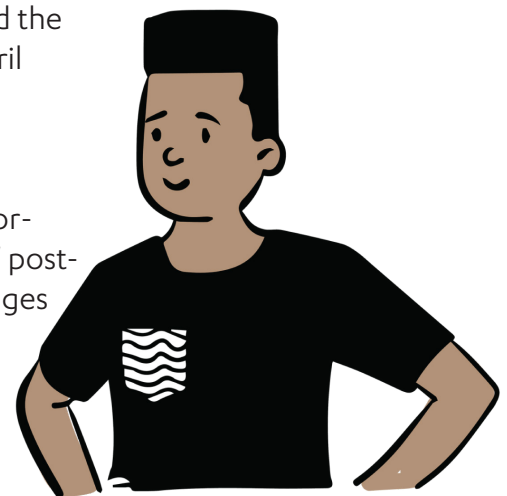
While the bill encourages that this information be taught during a specific “Workplace Readiness Week,” it does not require classroom enactment beyond distributing the Know Your Rights at Work [brochure](#) developed by the UC Berkeley and UCLA Labor Centers. Currently, the week assigned to Workplace Readiness falls in late April, right before the statewide and national high-stakes testing at all California secondary schools. We recommend that workplace readiness education take place at the beginning and throughout the academic year, since this is when most students are seeking employment and when teachers have more time to include the information in their lessons. The specific labor topics mentioned in the bill can be easily integrated into regular classroom learning and in alignment with the existing History-Social Science Framework present in the California Department of Education Content Standards.

Using AB 800 as a framework, educators from the Young Workers Education Project and the UCLA Labor Center’s Young Worker Initiative worked together to create, pilot, and share a curriculum that meets the bill’s requirements. During the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 academic school years, these educators piloted a variety of standards-based labor lessons in 14 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) high schools and in multiple social science courses. These curricula have been shared statewide on the [California Federation of Teachers](#) (CFT) and the [California Department of Education’s](#) (CDE) websites. Furthermore, the UCLA Labor Center and the Young Workers Education Project presented this curriculum at an April 2025 CDE webinar for all California school district administrators with Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond.

To evaluate student and teacher participant experiences in these labor-specific lessons, we analyze in-class observation fieldnotes, students’ post-lesson feedback and reflections, and conversations and email exchanges with LAUSD high school teachers.



The majority of California’s High School student workers are students of color (65%) with 46% identify as Latine. They are chiefly employed in the retail and restaurant service industries where they face high rates of wage theft and health and safety violations.



## Overview and Context of Young Workers in Los Angeles

For many high school students, working is a necessity. Young people are working to offset household expenses, save for the rising costs of college, and afford other daily essentials. According to the UCLA Labor Center findings, 48% of high school workers worked 20 hours or more per week. These students are balancing work, school, and an ever-changing world rife with economic and political instability. Young people, more than ever, need support in these areas. The goals of AB 800, the Young Workers Education Project, and the Young Worker Initiative are to meet students where they are and to offer them this support. These programs and initiatives employ interactive lessons and simulations to equip high school students with knowledge about worker history and advocacy and the skills to defend themselves against workplace violations.

## Program Overview

Veteran LAUSD social studies teacher Nicolle Fefferman directs the Young Worker Education Project program. Topics that students engage with include collective bargaining, worker organizing (that can lead to strikes), union elections, the global economy, and the history of the U.S. labor movement. These lessons enable students to practice the challenging conversations that occur between coworkers, between employees and employers, as well as between consumers and companies.

With the support of the UCLA Labor Center and the Labor & Climate Justice Committee of the California Federation of Teachers, Fefferman created a specific five-day learning cycle that provides teachers with standards-based lessons based on the requirements of AB 800 legislation. Along with four other workplace simulation lessons listed in the table below, the Workplace Readiness Week curriculum has been taught 22 times to approximately 1,200 students from 2024 to 2025 (see Appendix). Fefferman was able to coordinate learning opportunities in a variety of classroom settings, including U.S. History, World History, Government, Ethnic Studies, and Economics. Young Worker Education Project and UCLA Labor Center-Young Worker Initiative courses are listed below:



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[AB 800](#) Length: 5 hours

**Purpose:** To teach students workplace readiness and labor rights.

**Outcome:** Students become the experts in the workplace readiness week pamphlet and create memes to share information with their peers and broader school communities.

[Collective Bargaining](#) Length: 4.5 hours

**Purpose:** To engage students in the process of bargaining a union contract by acting as managers and workers of “Getwell Hospital.”

**Outcome:** Students craft arguments on and bargain with their peers to create a union contract that includes: wages, healthcare benefits, health and safety protocols, career ladder, and child care.

[NLRB Election: Starcups](#) Length: 4 hours

**Purpose:** To lead students in understanding the process of organizing a union and holding a democratic election under the National Labor Relations Act.

**Outcome:** Students engage in a town hall discussion and act as either Starcups workers, Starcups management, NLRB agents, or community members. The town hall discussion ends with a union election.

[Orange Computers](#) Length: 4 hours

**Purpose:** To support students in answering the question “Can companies ethically make a profit?” by analyzing the working conditions of a Chinese “Orange Computers” factory.

**Outcome:** Students discuss the positives and negatives of globalization in a mock company meeting with the Orange Computers CEO. Students offer recommendations on ways to improve Orange Computers’ working conditions.

[Homestead Strike](#) Length: 4 hours

**Purpose:** To guide students to analyze the working conditions of skilled and unskilled workers at the Carnegie Steel Company’s Homestead plant in 1892 Pennsylvania.

**Outcome:** Students discuss workplace conditions through a historical lens by acting as either a skilled or unskilled steelworker.

[1934 General Strike](#) Length: 4 hours

**Purpose:** To create student understanding around alliance building and political negotiations.

**Outcome:** Students recreate the dialogue and decision-making of community stakeholders during this historical event.

Educators from the UCLA Labor Center and undergraduate student workers from the UCLA Labor Studies Department supported the Young Worker Education Project through the Center’s Young Worker Initiative. Selected UCLA undergraduate students learn how to facilitate the curriculum, and then they sign up to support live lesson demonstrations in a LAUSD high school classroom. UCLA students are recruited through the Labor Studies internship and capstone courses, the UCLA Labor Summer Fellowship, and, most importantly, the UCLA Labor Studies and Education M136 course Working Families and Educational Inequalities in Urban Schools, taught by Dr. Janna Shadduck-Hernández (Fefferman & Rivera, 2023).

The undergraduate students from Labor Studies/EDUC M136 have been instrumental in observing and documenting their reflections on the labor history lessons taught by the YWEP. UCLA students both support the facilitators with in-class activities and take detailed notes on what they observe. These notes and reflections have provided educators Nicolle Fefferman, Jazmin Rivera, and Janna Shadduck-Hernández with important data to understand the impact of workplace rights lessons in the 11th and 12th grade social studies classrooms.



# Program Evaluation

By analyzing and coding observation field notes and evaluating student and teacher written feedback on lesson content, the following evaluation highlights emerged:


1. Student interest, confidence, and learning are best supported through collaborative and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.
2. Students best understand and engage with workplace issues when given creative tasks that connect to their lived experiences and their imagined futures.
3. Trained facilitators/educators play a vital role in developing a classroom community where students are challenged and supported to be creative and think critically.

Scholars agree that student engagement comprises three interrelated “modes” of learning: thought, feeling, and action (Corso et al, 2013). Using this framework, we analyzed the ways students were thinking, feeling, and acting with the workplace readiness material. Field observation notes and teacher and student reflections indicate that these participatory lessons encouraged student engagement, peer-to-peer learning, and creative expression. Finally, we found that when teachers observe the lessons conducted in their classrooms or when they participate in professional development content sessions, they are more likely to embrace this curriculum and engage their fellow teachers.

## The Power of Peer-to-Peer Learning

A key component shared across all workplace readiness lessons is the application of peer-to-peer learning activities. Small group work exercises that encourage equalized participation between students have been found to increase student engagement, especially with quiet, often disengaged students (Shernoff, 2013, p. 90). The workplace readiness lessons provide opportunities for collaboration among all students and encourage introverted and academically challenged students to participate and demonstrate their skills (Shernoff, 2013, p. 91).

Our educators were frequently pulled aside by the hosting classroom teacher before a workplace readiness lesson to point out the “problem” students. These teachers then shared with us how these students can be disruptive in class and often do not participate or refuse to do classwork or homework. At times, teachers cautioned our educators about the English

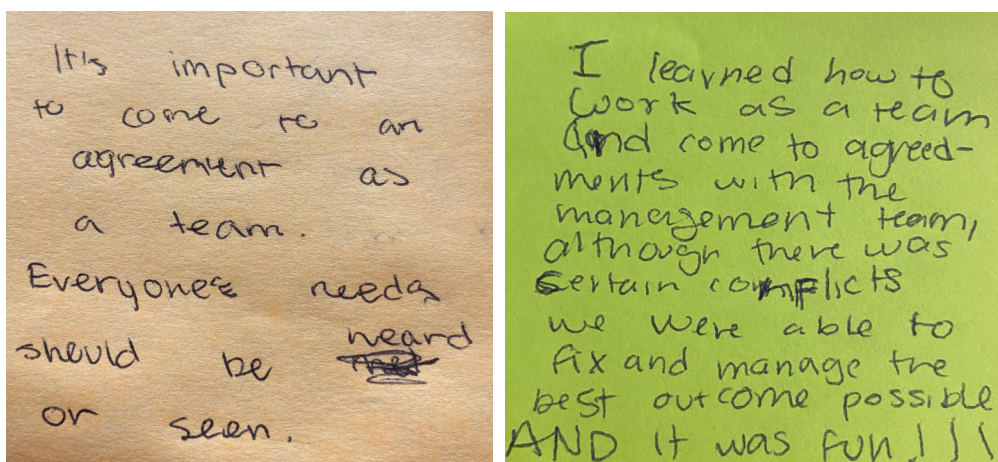


Students best understand and engage with workplace issues when given creative tasks that connect to their lived experiences and their imagined futures.



Language Learners (ELLs) who struggle with classroom material. Typically, we observed that these resistant or reluctant students became the key participants in the learning activities. Classroom teachers consistently pointed out to the workplace/Know Your Rights educators how these “disengaged” students were activated and motivated as a result of this learning modality.

At the end of these activities, students are asked, “What did you learn today?” Their responses demonstrate the power of connecting real-world work experiences through peer learning.



Two images of student feedback. The image on the left is a light tan Post-It written by a Garfield High School student that reads: “It’s important to come to an agreement as a team. Everyone’s needs should be heard and seen.” The image on the right is a bright green Post-It written by a Gardena High School student that reads: “I learned how to work as a team and come to agreements with the management team, although there was certain conflicts we were able to fix and manage the best outcome possible AND it was fun!!!”

Students are asked to complete a quick debrief immediately after the activities, and then more time is offered for deeper reflection later on that day or the next. Students typically discuss how working together in an engaged and peer-to-peer learning environment prepares them to talk to future coworkers or employers. Practicing these tangible skills is just as important as learning the hard facts of workplace rights and labor issues.

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An LAUSD high school teacher who observed one of these lessons in action shared:

“Many students commented on how the activity helped them distinguish between productive dialogue and argument, fostering empathy and open-mindedness by viewing issues from multiple perspectives. In addition, several of my working seniors shared that the experience gave them valuable knowledge about their labor rights and how to address workplace violations—an empowering and relevant takeaway as they enter the workforce.”

The AB 800 lessons are designed to support student engagement throughout specific activities throughout the learning cycle. Students must work together with partners and in small groups to draw on their existing knowledge, become familiar with new information about their workplace rights, and then draw on their digital media expertise to share their learning with their peers and beyond the classroom with their families and communities.

According to an LAUSD Economics teacher we spoke to:

“The most significant benefit of this learning experience was the development of real-world skills that prepare students for both college and career success. Students not only gained academic knowledge, but also practical life skills such as communication, negotiation, and critical analysis. Programs like this truly embody the mission of creating college and career-ready graduates by bridging classroom learning with authentic, hands-on experiences.”



After participating in these learning modules, students expressed that they gained valuable knowledge about their labor rights and how to address workplace violations.

### A LABOR EDUCATOR STORY:

The first time Jazmin Rivera entered the Taft Library in the Spring of 2023 to observe over 50 students taking part in a full-day lesson on collective bargaining, she noticed how quiet the room was. Almost everyone was wearing headphones, no one was speaking to one another, and the majority of students were happily scrolling on their phones. Students didn't know the names of their peers sitting at the same table. As the collective bargaining lesson continued throughout the day, students slowly started breaking out of their shells. Students began to feel passionate about their role as either management or workers. The quiet library became a frenzy of passionate voices as students worked furiously to settle their collective bargaining agreements before time was up.





Two pictures of Taft High School students during a Collective Bargaining Simulation in April 2023. The first picture shows three students on one side of a library table standing to present their proposals to the opposite team. The center student is speaking while his team members and their classroom teacher listen to him. The second picture shows two teams bargaining at a table. They are sitting down, talking, taking notes, and referencing their paperwork to share their proposals.



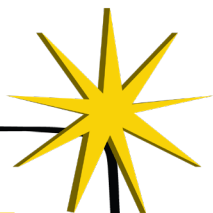
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## The Power of Creativity: Characters, Costumes, and Memes

The curricula offer opportunities for students to engage in creative activities such as crafting arguments from specific points of view, portraying these viewpoints through a dynamic roleplay scenario, and sharing their learning with the greater school community. When students are challenged to analyze and interpret information in their own words and work experiences, they are more likely to be engaged with the material and gain new knowledge (Newman, 1992, p. 69). In the roleplays and simulations, students take on the real-world roles of workers, management, consumers, and government officials. Groups read informational texts and then students individually develop a background story and perspective for their character. The informational texts are nuanced so that students have details that can fuel diverse imaginings within the scenario's context.

In the National Labor Relations Board v. Starcups simulation, our educators provide props for student groups like ties for management, badges for the NLRB agents, and mugs for the neighborhood customers. Students delight in choosing a tie to wear or devising a slogan for their union stickers. During the collective bargaining simulation, student groups sometimes use provided resources like Post-its, blank paper, and markers to create signs or stickers to support the bargaining sessions.

At the end of the AB 800 learning cycle, students are asked to create memes to share the information they learned over the course of the five lessons with their school community. In pairs, they transform the four-page brochure on California labor rights into visual bites of information that can be easily shared on school social media platforms and beyond. Through this final project, students connect the content learning to daily online culture by applying informative and entertaining elements.



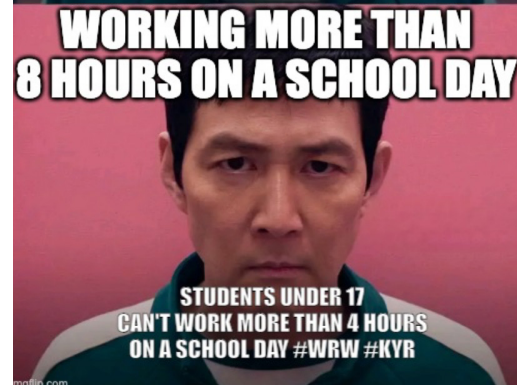
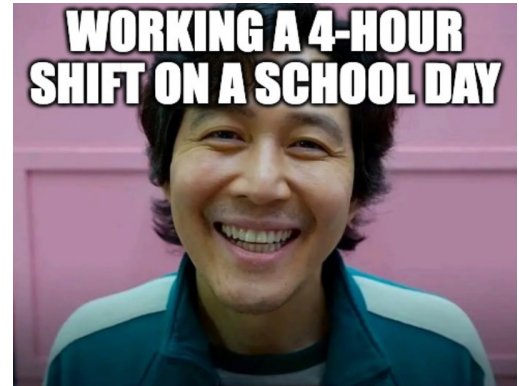
In the roleplays and simulations, students take on the real-world roles of workers, management, consumers, and government officials.



It is illegal for a person under the age 18 to use heavy dangerous equipment at work. #Cal/OSHA #workplacesafety



All employees are entitled to an unpaid, uninterrupted 30-minute break for every 5 hours of work. #WRW #KRY



Student-created memes: The top left meme features the actor Will Poulter in his youth, with his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. It is a movie still from the comedy film titled *We're the Millers*. The meme is captioned, "When you find out that a 13 year old is using a power saw at work instead of being in school. It is illegal for a person under the age 18 to use heavy dangerous equipment at work. #Cal/OSHA #workplacesafety"

The bottom left meme shows a brown dachshund dog giving the camera a side eye look while the text says "Me when my boss asks me to do something on my lunch break". The caption reads "All employees are entitled to an unpaid, uninterrupted 30-minute break for every 5 hours of work. #WRW #KRY"

The right meme shows two images of the main character of the show *Squid Games*, named Gi-Hun. The top photo shows Gi-Hun smiling with text that reads, "Working a 4-hour shift on a school day." The bottom shows Gi-Hun not smiling with text that reads, "Working more than 8 hours on a school day. Students under 17 can't work more than 4 hours on a work day. #WRW #KRY"

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All three memes showcase students' understanding of their workplace rights. Students learned the material, synthesized the information, and are now able to share what they learned with their peers and school community in a relatable format.

**A LABOR EDUCATOR STORY:**

At the conclusion of the NLRB v. Starcups election simulation, 10th grade students in San Pedro High School were ready to participate in a mock town hall meeting and union election. To my surprise, students arrived at school early and dressed to impress.

The group of students who were role-playing managers came dressed in suits and ties. One manager even wore a wig to look more "official." Students from the union group came to class with a bowl of candy and a sign that read Join the Union. Even before the bell rang, students had already started debating with one another. The classroom was loud and buzzing with excitement for the town hall meeting to begin.

Once it was time to get started, students sat in a circle facing one another and took turns presenting their group's opinion on the matter. Students who were shy and quiet at the beginning of the week were now the loudest in the room, defending their group's viewpoint. Students stood up from their seats, unprompted, to give impassioned speeches. Students made the lesson their own.



Students used memes to demonstrate their synthesis of the information they learned. These memes are sources that are relatable and easily shared with the community.





San Pedro High School students participating in the Starcups NLRB Election simulation in November 2024. The first image shows students playing the role of Starcups Management. They have dressed in blazers and ties. One of them is wearing a short bob wig and another is in sunglasses. They have their hands somberly folded on their desks. The second image is a group of students in two of the non-union Starcups workers. Almost all of them are looking in the same direction towards Starcups Management while a student seated in the second row is speaking.



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## The Role of the Teacher/Facilitator

**Facilitator Note!** This simulation brings up challenging and important topics, and we hope for these conversations to be matched with play and joy. The more you engage, the more your students will engage. We encourage rigorous engagement alongside play. Have fun!



Example of facilitator note in Starcups: *National Labor Relations Board Election Simulation lesson plan*

When students are invited to engage in well-prepared complex problem-solving, such as bargaining a union contract through a Collective Bargaining Simulation or organizing to vote for a union during the NLRB Election Simulation, our findings indicate that students were significantly engaged and paid close attention to the material (Shernoff, 2013, p. 91). In the many classrooms we worked with, the majority of teachers had never experienced or used this type of pedagogy in their curricula. By teaching AB 800, trained teachers and facilitators model student-centered and interactive pedagogy so that new and seasoned classroom teachers gain confidence to lead these lessons with future cohorts.

In addition, we encourage giving teachers the time to observe the lessons and experience how animated their students become when engaged in a participatory learning modality. The roleplays, simulations, and workplace readiness lessons are designed with teachers in mind. We provide detailed facilitation guides that offer levels of scaffolding that teachers can adapt for their students. Our Canva slide decks make content and instructions accessible in English and Spanish.

As one LAUSD San Pedro High School Economics and AP Government and Politics teacher noted:

“Students responded extremely positively to the simulation activities. The level of engagement was evident both during and beyond class time—students continued to discuss the activity in the halls, and those who had not yet participated were eager to know when their turn would come. The excitement and enthusiasm the students demonstrated reflected how meaningful and enjoyable the experience was for them. It was clear that the simulation successfully captured their interest and deepened their connection to the content.”

We found that when lessons are modeled, the teachers observing them witness how their students eagerly and thoughtfully engage with the material while also being able to reflect on potential extension lessons for their classroom. Given the wide range of social issues that arise when talking about workplace rights, teachers can create a critical space to discuss complex topics such as child labor, wage theft, immigration, and hazardous working conditions that can be difficult to discuss with youth (Hilliard, Attaya, & Millben, 2021). Below, a high school World History teacher comments on her experience observing a labor simulation in her classroom,

“The most significant benefit to this learning is that teachers can observe how to lead complex simulations without having to attend another conference or another off-campus location on a weekend or after work hours. It allows teachers to experience the learning first-hand and to see it played out in their own context: their classroom.”

We also found that providing youth with an initial historical context about how young workers have fought and won critical labor rights across generations allows current students to make sense of workplace inequalities they have encountered or may face in the future.

**AP GOVERNMENT TEACHER REFLECTION:**

“I was highly impressed by both the content and pedagogy of this lesson. The material was exceptionally relevant, connecting historical and theoretical concepts to current events such as the unionization efforts at Starbucks and Amazon. This contemporary focus resonated deeply with my students, particularly seniors preparing to enter the workforce. I also appreciated the involvement of community leaders who work directly in collective bargaining and labor relations; their mentorship provided authenticity and real-world context. The pedagogy encouraged critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving—skills that are essential for success beyond the classroom. After observing the lesson in action, I feel confident and inspired to implement similar activities in my own teaching practice.”


The power of a workplace rights curriculum grounded in labor history and current labor campaigns offers educators the opportunity to have critical discussions with youth that validate their lived experiences and those of their families. Teachers who connect these issues with students’ lived experiences make the lesson more relevant to students and inspire them to adopt helpful life skills (Shernoff, 2013, p. 87). Moreover, these readiness lessons empower students with concrete tools to stand up for themselves in the workplace.



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Our findings confirmed what research reveals: teachers set the tone of the learning environment (Newman, 1992; Corso et al, 2013). We found that when teachers are interested and excited about the lesson material, students are likely to remain engaged and model their teacher’s interest. High levels of student engagement, in large part, are determined by the teacher’s ability to model thoughtfulness and create a classroom environment where students feel supported and challenged.

Simulation lessons, such as the NLRB election activity, allow teachers and students to create community with each other, as well. A great facilitator creates a learning environment where students feel safe to take intellectual and emotional risks. The facilitator models leaning into the creative aspect of the simulation lesson, while giving students the space to do the same. Furthermore, the facilitator helps students connect the fun they’re having with real-world issues.



These modules allowed teachers and students to create community with each other; a great facilitator creates a learning environment where students feel safe to take intellectual and emotional risk while connecting the fun they’re having with real-world issues.



## Recommendations

After nearly two years of piloting and evaluating the four labor lessons described in this evaluation, we recommend the following areas as points of departure for teachers across California to engage their students and fellow educators and administrators around this critical material:

- Engage with workplace and labor-centered initiatives such as the Young Worker Education Project, directed by seasoned high school teachers.
- Require consistent, dependable support and coordination from policymakers, school administrators, and labor unions.
- Conduct the workplace readiness CA standard-based curriculum at the beginning of the academic year and throughout both semesters in the social science classroom.
- Support legislation and school policies that financially support workplace readiness coordinators and offer salary point courses that incentivize teachers to become trained in young worker education for the high school classroom.
- Support consistent district funding for paid, full-time staff positions within the public school system to manage young worker-related tasks: curriculum building, teacher training, work permit tracking, outreach, and evaluation.
- Implement experiential peer learning, workplace readiness, and labor rights curricula with trained and experienced facilitators/educators/teachers to guide students through dynamic roleplay and simulation lessons with creative, supportive, challenging, and playful environments.
- Build trust with students through their lived experiences and draw from their existing knowledge of work and labor rights from their families, friends, and communities.



Thanks to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, we have a labor rights poster that teachers can put up in their classrooms. You can see a full version of the poster here: [tinyurl.com/AB800Poster](https://tinyurl.com/AB800Poster)



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## Organizations

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# Appendix

School	Learning Opportunity	Students Reached	Date
Garfield High School	Collective Bargaining	50	March 2024
Compton High School	AB 800	25	April 2024
Diego Rivera	AB 800	25	May 2024
	Collective Bargaining	40	December 2024
San Pedro High School	Collective Bargaining	80	May 2024
	Collective Bargaining	70	April 2025
	Starcups	60	November 2024
Stoney Point	AB 800	20	February 2025
	Collective Bargaining	20	April 2025
Odyssey High School	Collective Bargaining	20	February 2025
	Collective Bargaining	20	April 2025
	Starcups	25	May 2025

School	Learning Opportunity	Students Reached	Date
Garfield High School	Collective Bargaining	65	February 2025
	AB 800	50	October 2024
	Orange Computers	30	February 2025
Marshall High School	Orange Computers	50	January 2024
	Starcups	85	March 2025
	Orange Computers	85	May 2025
Cleveland High School	AB 800	60	January 2025
Gardena High School	Homestead Strike	35	May 2024
Jefferson High School	AB 800	65	March 2025
Portola Middle School	Homestead Strike	40	April 2024
UCLA Labor Studies/ EDU 136M	AB 800	60	Spring 2024 and 2025
<b>Total</b>	<b>1210 Students Engaged</b>		