

Expanding Learning: A Powerful Strategy for Equity

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The disparity in educational outcomes between student populations is one of the most serious challenges facing our public education system. Gaps in test scores, graduation rates, and college readiness pose a fundamental problem that school officials must solve.

Education leaders cannot address these inequities by looking at the school day alone. They also need to consider the significant amount of time and the varied experiences young people have outside of school. Free and affordable learning experiences after school and in the summer are essential strategies for equalizing student outcomes. Under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), districts have greater regulatory and financial flexibility, accompanied by an increased expectation that they will address achievement gaps for low-income students, English Language Learners, and foster youth. The time is right for California school districts to maximize these expanded learning opportunities.

This brief describes why and how California's local education leaders are mobilizing expanded learning to close the opportunity gap, and recommends some key steps for districts.

California's new accountability and continuous improvement framework relies on district and school leaders using multiple measures of school performance to identify where change is needed, and to monitor carefully the development, testing, and evaluation of improvement strategies over time. This process of continuous improvement requires that local leaders have access to research-based evidence and strategies that they can implement in their schools and opportunities to learn from one another about what works, under which conditions, and for which students. PACE's series of Continuous Improvement Briefs aims to support education leaders at all levels in learning how to improve the performance of their schools and students.



A Dramatic Opportunity Gap Exists Outside of the Regular School Day

“It turns out that the learning that happens in the 80% of waking hours that are spent out of school (between the ages of 5-18) has as much to do with achievement gaps that show up in school as anything in the school. We can’t expect a 20% solution to solve 100% of the problem; we’ve got to address the inequalities of enrichment and stimulating activities outside of school.

Professor Paul Reville, Harvard University Graduate School of Education/Education Redesign Lab

Differences in how young people spend their time outside of school pose one of the biggest challenges—and most promising opportunities—for California’s education system. Families who can afford to purchase classes, sports, and camps for their children, do so as a matter of course. They know the exposure, skills, and experiences are essential for their children’s development and future. In fact, over the last

40 years upper-income parents have increased the amount they spend on their children’s enrichment activities, like tutoring and extra-curriculars, by 10 times the amount their lower income peers have been able to invest.

This unequal access has resulted in a wider opportunity gap, with immediate consequences for academic achievement and long-term consequences for success in work and life. (See Figure 1).

California’s Publicly-funded Programs Improve Outcomes for the Kids Most in Need

California excels in the size, consistency, and quality of its investment in expanded learning programs. The After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program, combined with the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, operates on 4,500 school sites and serves about 860,000 children and youth, almost all of whom are eligible for free and reduced price meals (FRPM). (See Figure 2.)

While the program has broad reach across California, the funding is very thin. State grants provide \$8.19 per child, per day, and sites are limited in the number of children for whom they receive funding. The limits are particularly challenging in the summer months, because only five percent of the state/federal investment can be used outside the school year.

The new financial flexibility districts have under LCFF, combined with the imperative to close achievement gaps, gives districts a compelling opportunity to better serve youth by partnering and investing more in expanded learning programs.

Publicly-funded programs increase underserved students’ learning time.

Students who participate regularly in California’s after school and summer programs can gain up to 115 additional days of learning, expanding the regular school calendar by more than 60 percent. It’s time young people spend working hands-on with science and technology, participating in the arts, being part of a team, and experiencing success through new and engaging activities.

Evaluations across the state show that participation in expanded learning programs improves academic outcomes. From La Honda on the Northern California Coast, to San Diego in the south, these include

Figure 1

The Opportunity Gap



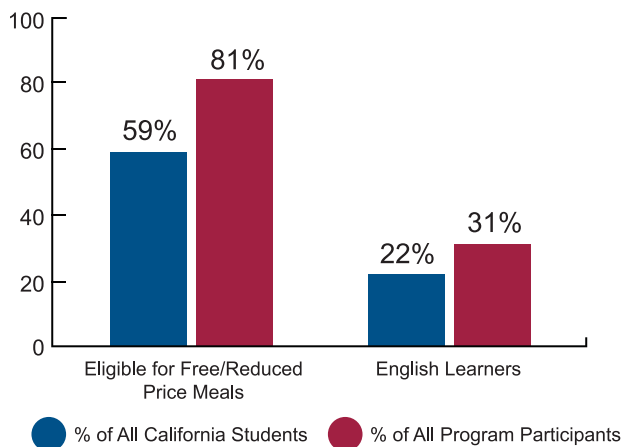
- **Unequal Learning Time.** By the time they reach 6th grade, upper and middle class students have spent 6,000 more hours learning than kids born into poverty. Of those 6,000 hours, over 4,000 are spent in after school and summer programs.
- **Unequal Access to Enrichment.** Higher income youth are nearly twice as likely as their lower income peers to participate in after school skill-building activities such as sports, science, and the arts.
- **Unequal Access to Mentors.** Informal and formal mentoring relationships help young people overcome hardships, navigate challenges, and broaden their horizons. Higher income youth are two to three times more likely than their lower income peers to have informal mentors such as teachers, religious and youth leaders, or coaches.

Figure 2

California's Strong Expanded Learning Infrastructure

California invests \$600 million per year in the ASES program, plus \$132 million from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Both programs are overseen by the California Department of Education (CDE). This funding supports site-level grants, with the majority of programs operated in partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations. The 4,500 sites with expanded learning grants represent over half of California's elementary and middle schools and three-fourths of the schools with 40 percent or more of students eligible for FRPM.

Students in these programs are more likely to come from low-income families and be English Language Learners than their peers across the state.



For more information about the state's Expanded Learning infrastructure, see State of the State of Expanded Learning in California 2016-17.

increases in reading and math scores plus measurable progress in fluency and English proficiency. In areas as diverse as Tehama County, Silicon Valley, and Los Angeles, participants and their families report that participation helps young people do better in school by teaching them new skills such as critical thinking and STEM, while also improving their grades.

Expanded learning programs build social-emotional skills.

K-12 educators and the expanded learning community also share in supporting social-emotional skills as a cornerstone of student success. High-quality after

school and summer programs offer projects and activities that support social-emotional development because they keep learning active and meaningful for students. As Figure 3 explains, California's expanded learning community has deep expertise in specific areas of social-emotional learning.

Participation in expanded learning programs yields positive behavioral outcomes, including better school attendance, higher graduation rates, and reduced involvement in juvenile crime.

Expanded learning programs increase access and exposure to positive adult role models.

Expanded learning staff are natural role models who can demonstrate the value of academic, social and emotional skills within a culture of mutual respect. In quality programs, staff members take the time and have the skills to build authentic and meaningful relationships with participants. These relationships are particularly powerful because staff often share similar backgrounds and experiences with the youth.

The expanded learning workforce in California is staffed by approximately 70 percent people of color, with a similar percentage under the age of 29. In contrast, the California teaching workforce comprises approximately 30 percent educators of color.

How to Leverage Expanded Learning Programs to Support Equity Goals

School officials throughout California are taking advantage of existing expanded learning programs and partnerships to address achievement gaps. Their experience offers key strategies for working with expanded learning programs to align, measure, and support shared goals for student success.

Use local funding to sustain programs and increase access.

With increases in funding tied to equity goals, some districts are using a portion of their LCFF funds to enable more students to attend their after school and summer programs. Though California has a robust expanded learning infrastructure, the demand for these programs far exceeds current resources. Districts across the state have thousands of students and families on waiting lists for their ASES programs.

The San Bernardino City Unified School District has responded to high demand for its after school and

Figure 3

How Expanded Learning Programs Support Social-Emotional Learning

The expanded learning practices defined by the California Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs align very closely to social-emotional learning. The PCY report, *Student Success Comes Full Circle*, defines three social-emotional outcomes that expanded learning programs are particularly well-positioned to support.



summer programs with a \$2 million annual investment of LCFF funds. Site visits and presentations to the school board demonstrated the strong success of ASES programs and their alignment to district goals and community needs. LCFF funds reduced the wait list for families wanting to participate in the after school program, covered operating costs not covered by the ASES grant, and increased the number of students in summer programs.

Invest in program quality to ensure positive outcomes.

High quality programs do not happen by chance. They result from policy choices and resource allocations that support both staff capacity and student participation.

In districts with the strongest expanded learning programs, school leaders have invested in effective and intensive quality improvement systems. In Oakland Unified School District, for example, the Expanded Learning Office implements an observation-based quality assessment and improvement process in partnership with its after school program providers. This system includes annual improvement plans that school day teachers and after school site leads create together, with input from the site principal. These plans are linked to district-provided professional development opportunities. Year-to-year improvements in quality ratings and student outcomes validate the district's investment in quality.

Keeping youth engaged in programs is a key to effectiveness. High-quality programs assign staff to monitor attendance, taking steps such as calling families when a student misses even a single day of programming. They also build close relationships with parents/caregivers and youth, helping them address issues that might undermine attendance both in and after school.

Develop and sustain a committed, skilled, and diverse workforce.

At the heart of program quality is the skill and stability of both management and direct service staff. Programs that are serious about quality find the time for professional development through creative structures like Saturday academies, evening classes, and the alignment of work and training schedules. Innovative districts combine trainings for after school and school day staff in order to develop consistent practices, shared language, and collaborative relationships. In the San Leandro Unified School District, for example, after school staff have been included in the district's teacher training days for sessions on social-emotional learning.

Building staff capacity is a long-term strategy for improving both expanded learning programs' and schools' ability to serve high need students. School districts in some communities are recognizing the opportunity to build a pipeline for an experienced and diverse teaching corps. They are partnering with higher

education to create pathways that guide young people into youth development and teaching careers.

The California Teaching Fellows Foundation (CTFF), for example, works with Fresno State's School of Education and the Fresno County Office of Education to identify undergraduate students interested in teaching careers, hire them to teach and lead after school programs, and provide extensive hands-on professional development. Since the implementation of LCFF in 2014, CTFF has increased the number of teaching fellows by nearly 50 percent, with 1,900 Teaching Fellows in over 50 school districts.

Tap into the state infrastructure to continuously improve programs.

School leaders looking to improve quality can access the System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL) through staff at 16 County Offices of Education, CDE Expanded Learning Division staff and statewide intermediary organizations contracted to support after school and summer programs. SSEL Leads organize regional conferences, provide training and coaching to individual districts, and broker program resources across sites. They provide planning support and advice about all aspects of program quality and public funding. Non-profit organizations and independent consultants also help support quality improvement efforts. School leaders can access such organizations and individuals through their SSEL Leads.

Make expanded learning part of the core work of the school site.

School district leaders need to communicate to principals and teachers their commitment to building strong expanded learning partnerships. In addition to providing funding, district leaders signal their support by highlighting program successes, including expanded learning leadership in district meetings and events, and by setting school level guidelines and expectations for partnering with these programs. In the San Francisco Unified School District, for example, the director of expanded learning programs is frequently at the table with district leadership connecting these programs to other initiatives such as community schools, social-emotional learning, multi-tiered systems of support, and school climate and culture. The district office meets regularly with principals to ensure regular communication with the expanded learning site coordinator, and to emphasize the unique role these programs can play in supporting school day goals.

School site leaders, in turn, make sure the school day and expanded learning staff work well together. They communicate that the after school program is a site priority through messages and actions, ranging from the purely logistical (securing classroom space) to the

inspirational (including expanded learning in the school's mission and vision). Examples of effective school day/expanded learning site collaboration include participation of expanded learning staff in School Site Council and Student Support Team meetings, regular communication between school day and expanded learning site leads, and joint development of annual program plans to ensure a shared understanding of goals and activities.

One consistent finding is the importance of staffing structures that intentionally blend roles across school day and after school time, resulting in staff who work in both settings. At South Bay Union School District (in San Diego County) the district looks to its cadre of after school staff members to fill part-time classified positions such as classroom aides and noontime supervision. It also encourages its after school partner, the Boys and Girls Club, to consider hiring from the classified workforce for its before and after school staff. This dual staffing has helped the district retain staff members who might otherwise have had to look elsewhere for full-time positions.

Many districts hire school day teachers as "academic liaisons" to the expanded learning programs. They help bridge the school day and expanded learning strategies and structures. They may, for example, advise on lesson planning and program design, observe and coach expanded learning staff, and update other teachers about the program's impact. A critical factor in the success of these roles is having clearly defined job descriptions and training.

School district leaders can encourage and facilitate collaborative staffing through their personnel policies, investments in planning time, union contract provisions, and compensation structures.

Expanded Learning Opportunities are a Smart Investment for California School Leaders

Learning for young people shouldn't end because the school bell rings. Every child requires and deserves additional learning opportunities every day. Without public funding, poor families cannot give their children these opportunities to the same degree that middle and upper income families can. Educators know that the resulting gaps in learning opportunities have long-lasting effects.

California is well-positioned to significantly narrow this opportunity gap. Districts can and should take advantage of the strong expanded learning program infrastructure the state has created. When schools and expanded learning programs align their strategies and visions for student success, better opportunities open up for the students they both serve. In districts

throughout California, smart local policies and practices are bringing these forces together to help all students reach their full potential.

For More Information:

California Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs, *California Afterschool Network*

CDE System of Support for Expanded Learning, *CDE*

Finding Common Ground: Connecting Social-Emotional Learning During and Beyond the School Day, *Partnership for Children & Youth*

Social Emotional Learning Practices: A Self-Reflection Tool for Afterschool Staff, *American Institutes for Research, Beyond the Bell*

State of the State of Expanded Learning in California, 2016-17, *California Afterschool Network*

Student Success Comes Full Circle, *Partnership for Children & Youth*

Time Well Spent, *Partnership for Children & Youth*

PACE Continuous Improvement Publications

PACE. *2020 Vision: Rethinking Budget Priorities Under the LCFF*. 2014

Katie Brackenridge, Jessica Gunderson, Mary Perry. *Expanding Learning: A Powerful Strategy for Equity*. 2017

Mark Murphy. *Promising Practices in School District Budgeting Under LCFF*. 2017

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