



**California's Expanded Learning Programs Since
Proposition 49 Passed in 2002:
*Progress, Evidence, & Future Directions***

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Executive Summary

Today, California operates the largest and most robust expanded learning infrastructure in the nation. California's expanded learning programs seek to enlighten, inspire, and engage young people before



and after school, during inter-session, and in summer so they can build essential skills needed for success in life. **Proposition 49, which passed in 2002 and was implemented in 2006**, dedicated an estimated \$6.77 billion dollars to support school-based expanded learning programs across the state. On the 20th anniversary of Proposition 49 passing in California, we reflect on what California's expanded learning programs have achieved, what gaps remain, and where California should go in the future.

Key Facts & Findings

Expanded Learning Programs Are Good for Communities

Expanded learning programs are a win-win for communities. They help working families and keep kids safe and engaged in the hours between 3-6pm. When communities invest in expanded learning, they get their money back over time.

Research examining the costs and benefits of expanded learning programs estimate **significant, positive, and long-term net savings**. Reports suggest that the estimated cost savings for our society ranges from **\$9-\$16 per dollar spent on expanded learning opportunities**. Studies suggested that estimated benefits were primarily driven by reductions in criminal behaviors and the associated costs of legal fees and incarceration.

Return-on-Investment Benefits:

- *Improved school performance and high school graduation*
- *Reduced criminal behaviors and associated costs*
- *Reduced teen pregnancy and birth rates*
- *Less substance use/abuse*
- *Improved health outcomes (e.g., heart disease, diabetes)*
- *Less reliance on social programs*
- *Increased lifetime earnings*



See [Chapter Two](#) for more information about the benefits of expanded learning for society.

California Leads the Nation in Public Support for Expanded Learning

Thanks to funding enabled by Proposition 49, California invests **\$650 million a year** in state funds to support free or low-cost expanded learning programs across the state. California invests more in expanded learning than the other 49 states combined, a central part of the Golden State’s commitment to supporting kids and families.

Proposition 49 unlocked **\$650 million a year in additional funding** for expanded learning programs in California.

In 2021, California deepened its commitment to kids and families through the creation of the **Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P)**, which allocates an additional **\$5 billion** to support expanded learning programs for every elementary and middle school in the state. Coupled with the momentum supporting universal access in California, in July 2022, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Cardona launched the [Engage Every Student Initiative](#) to increase youth access to expanded learning programming nationwide.

This investment extends beyond dollars. The California Department of Education collaborates with a broad coalition of practitioners and intermediaries on strategic planning, professional development, and technical assistance to ensure the field delivers high-quality programs, embeds a continuous quality improvement approach to evaluation, and nurtures the development of the whole child through engagement and learning.

See [Chapter One](#) for more information about California’s nation-leading investments in expanded learning.

Hundreds of Thousands of California Families Benefit from Expanded Learning Programs










The passage of proposition 49 brought...

a seven-fold increase in the number of schools served since expanded learning programs were initially publicly funded in California since 1999.

Proposition 49 led to a seven-fold increase in the number of California schools with free or low cost expanded learning programs since they were initially publicly funded in 1999. Today, **4,500 schools across the state host a free or low cost expanded learning program**, which keeps hundreds of thousands of California kids safe and engaged afterschool.

High-quality expanded learning programs promote embedded learning at all times - in the experiences youth have, in the relationships they develop, and in the activities they engage in – helping them thrive academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. Available evidence shows that California’s kids are doing better since the early 2000s, which reflects the variety of investments the state has made in children and families, including in expanded learning opportunities.

<p>Since the early 2000's, California's youth are ...</p>			
	<p>More likely to graduate from high school (and less likely to dropout)</p>	<p>More likely to complete the A-G requirements giving them access to the state's public colleges/universities</p>	<p>More likely to be in good physical health</p>

			
<p>Less likely to be arrested or incarcerated</p>	<p>Less likely to become pregnant as a teen</p>	<p>Less likely to be disconnected from school and work</p>	<p>More likely to avoid drinking and smoking tobacco</p>

Despite progress, many racial/ethnic disparities remain, including graduation/dropout rates, A-G requirement completion, arrest and incarceration rates, and disconnection, favoring White and Asian youth over Black and Latino/a/x youth. Expanded learning programs should engage in culturally responsive practices shown to improve outcomes for marginalized youth.

Broad access to expanded learning programs helps families, too. When kids can attend free or low-cost expanded learning programs it’s easier for their parents to work or to go to school, and to save their hard-earned money for other essentials. Research shows that parents are less stressed when their child has access to expanded learning opportunities between 3-6pm, making it easier to engage in the workforce.

See [Chapter Two](#) for information about how families benefit from expanded learning programs; [Chapter Three](#) includes information about the wellbeing of California’s kids.

Kids in California’s Expanded Learning Programs Have Stronger Connections to School & Attend School More Often

Young people who regularly attend high quality expanded learning programs feel more connected to their peers, to caring adults, and to their schools. These connections are linked to many positive outcomes, including stronger academic behaviors and outcomes, stronger personal skills like getting along with others, and reduced likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.

Regular attendance at school is a passport to success for young people, and **participation in expanded learning is associated with more regular school attendance.** Studies reported that young people in Proposition 49 funded expanded learning programs attend school more often than similar students, which translates to more learning time for kids, and more funding for schools.

Expanded learning programs **help kids build future-ready skills** like positive connections to other people and stronger academic behaviors.



In 2018-2019, kids who attended publicly funded expanded learning programs in elementary and middle school attended school about **2 more days**, on average, than their peers. High school-aged participants attended school about **5 more days** than similar students. These additional days can yield several million dollars in additional attendance-based funding for schools.

Expanded learning programs should continue to seize all opportunities for learning across the multiple settings in which youth are embedded and advocate for policies that acknowledge the integration and value of all developmental domains.

See [Chapter Two](#) for more information about how kids benefit from attending high quality expanded learning programs.

A Call to Action: Sustained Access to High-Quality Expanded Learning Programs is Key to the California’s Future



As access continues to expand with the new \$5-billion-dollar investment, the Expanded Learning Opportunity Program (ELO-P), California must continue to expand access while sustaining program quality. Promoting program quality at scale will be challenging yet is critical for ensuring the youth and families benefit.

To reach the promise of expanded learning statewide, we must develop better systems for recruiting, retaining, and supporting high-quality staff. California’s expanded learning programs must offer livable

wages and benefits to maintain both full-time and part-time positions and invest in meaningful training and professional development to ensure staff members feel prepared and supported in their work with youth. Further, to track the progress of this expansion, we need better state-level data collection systems to monitor, report, and use data to drive continuous quality improvement.

As the future of expanded learning unfolds, it will be necessary for all those working in the youth development sector to collaborate and innovate to build comprehensive systems of support for enhancing engagement, expanding learning, and bolstering academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes for all of California's youth.

See [Chapter Four](#) for our recommendations about making the most of California's commitment to expanded learning.

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Chapter 1. California's Expanded Learning Programs: History of Funding, Expanding Access, & Investments in Infrastructure

California operates the largest and most robust expanded learning¹ infrastructure in the nation. California's expanded learning programs seek to enlighten, inspire, and engage young people² before school, after school, during inter-session, and in summer so that young people can build essential skills (academic, social-emotional, and physical) they need for success in life. Recognizing the importance of supporting the whole child, expanded learning programs keep youth safe, provide opportunities to connect with caring adults and mentors, and offer hands-on, engaging learning experiences that complement the school day. Expanded learning programs are considered integral to a complex and multi-faceted youth development ecological system, including their family and/or caregivers, peers, schools, and broader communities.³ Research has shown positive and cumulative effects when youth experience caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities for engagement/contribution across this system.^{4,5} Indeed, there is an emerging recognition that youth development takes place in this inter-connected system, and the synergy of our efforts across these spaces is essential to bolster California's youth against risks and build their competencies to achieve their goals.⁶

On the 20th anniversary of Proposition 49 passing in California, which provided one of the most significant expansions in access to expanded learning programs in California (and across the nation), we reflect on what California's expanded learning programs have achieved, what gaps remain, and where California should go in the future.

First Chapter

This first chapter describes a brief history of funding for expanded learning in California, the numbers of youth and schools reached through the expansion of the financing for expanded learning, and **the significant developments** that contributed to California's network of supports and programming across the state.



What is the history of public funding for expanded learning programs in California?

What were significant accelerators propelling California into the nation's most well-funded network of expanded learning programs?

Second Chapter

The **second chapter** explores historical and emerging research that underscores the importance of expanded learning for promoting **positive youth outcomes and reducing adverse effects**, including a summary of the return on investment of expanded learning and secondary benefits stemming from educating and supporting the expanded learning workforce.



How do youth benefit from expanded learning programs?

What program features drive these benefits?

What is the return-on-investment for funding expanded learning programs?

Third Chapter

The **third chapter** explores youth thriving indicators, highlighting improvements and declines observed over time.



How have youth demographics changed in California over the past twenty years?

What are the holistic health and wellness trends for California's youth during this timeframe?

Fourth Chapter

The **fourth, and final chapter**, offers insights into how California can continue to operate as a leader in expanded learning and drive even more significant impacts for youth.



What are the critical future goals for expanded learning in the state of California?

To address these questions, our team employed a narrative synthesis approach to summarizing publicly available and notable reports, statistics, research/evaluation findings, and insights from leaders in the expanded learning space. This summary was somewhat limited by the strength and quality of the existing materials available to answer our orienting questions and certainly does not include a synthesis of every article produced on these topics. Further, although summaries about expanded learning in California already exist,⁷ few published reports (1) provide a historical accounting of expanded learning in California over the past twenty years and (2) bring together research, reports, and data to tell an evidenced-based story of expanded learning in California.

Finally, we hope this paper speaks to multiple audiences embedded in the expanded learning community by:



Practitioners

highlighting the difference practitioners make in the lives of youth and reinforcing the critical elements that need to be in place for high-quality programming.



Policymakers

providing evidence that investing in expanded learning pays off and identifying remaining issues and challenges to be addressed.



Researchers

identifying directions for future research to enhance our understanding of the impacts and implementation processes that drive impact.



State Departments of Education

offering insight related to the structures, processes, and decisions surrounding expanding learning in California that could be leveraged by other states interested in building a comprehensive system of expanded learning.



There are several key milestones in the history of funding expanded learning programs in California.

California has a longstanding commitment to publicly funded expanded learning programs. Building on the success of several large, expanded learning programs, including Los Angeles's Better Educated Students of Tomorrow (LA's BEST), Sacramento START, San Francisco Beacon Initiative, and San Diego's 6 to 6, a group of committed advocates, practitioners, and policymakers came together in 1997 to draft a series of bills.⁸ Their work culminated in \$50 million from the state budget for the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program (ASLSNPP). By 2002, the state allocated additional funding to support before-school programs (BASLSNPP), providing a total of \$122 million dedicated to expanded learning programs. This early advocacy and dedicated state-level funding also coincided with the federal government's investments in expanded learning through the 21st Century Community Learning Programs (21st CCLC), which remains the only federal funding focused exclusively on expanded learning.

Although there was shared recognition of the value and need for expanded learning programs and mounting evidence to suggest that expanded learning is effective,⁹ state funding was precarious in the late 90s, and there were still hundreds of thousands of youth across the state without access to

these programs. In response, Arnold Schwarzenegger, a long-time advocate of education and afterschool programs, built a broad-based coalition of afterschool leaders, practitioners, and policy experts to champion Proposition 49. The idea was that expanding access to afterschool programs would help working parents, keep children safe, prevent crime, and improve learning outcomes. While on the campaign trail to advocate for Proposition 49, Schwarzenegger stated, "**Every California child deserves access to a proven, quality, life-changing afterschool program, and now they will have it. My hope is that, as goes California, so goes the rest of our nation.**"¹⁰

Proposition 49 was passed on November 5, 2002, with the support of 56.6% of California voters, **providing an additional \$428 million (for a total of \$550 million in annual funding)** for expanded learning across the state.



From the extensive advocacy of this coalition, Proposition 49 was passed on November 5, 2002, with the support of 56.6% of California voters, providing an additional \$428 million (for a total of \$550 million in annual funding) for expanded learning across the state. According to a report by the Afterschool Alliance,¹¹ the successful passage of Proposition 49 was credited to several factors, including (1) a broad-based coalition of supporters and advocates for expanded learning, (2) a proven approach to youth development built upon the

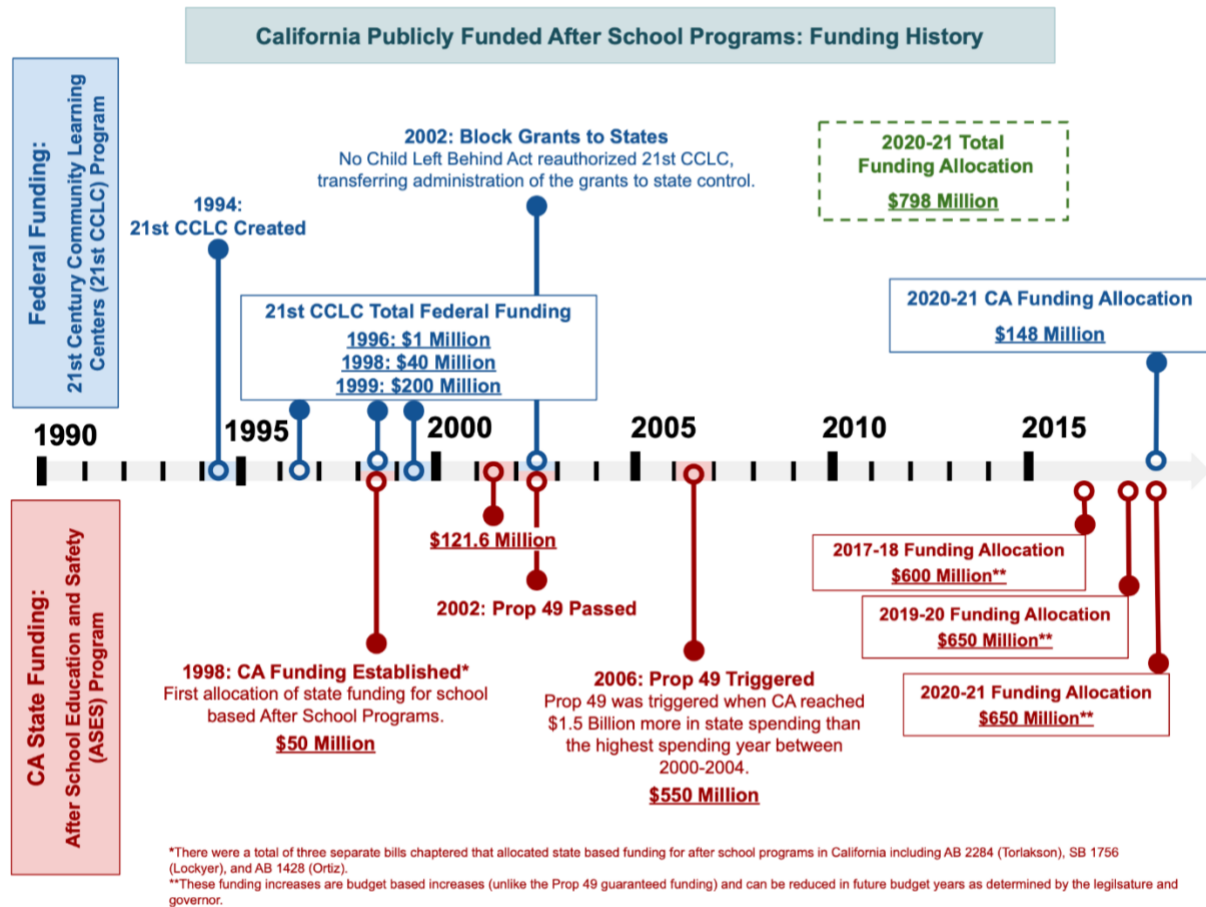
success of existing expanded learning programs, (3) the popularity of this issue among California voters, and (4) a knowledgeable, passionate, and persuasive proponent of expanded learning programs, Arnold Schwarzenegger (who continued advocating strongly for expanded learning programs by participating in multiple summits, supporting Lights On Afterschool in its' first five years, and partnering closely with the large, national expanded learning program After-School All-Stars).

Proposition 49 replaced BASLSNPP with the **After School Education and Safety (ASES)** program and dramatically expanded access to before and after school programs. During the four years between the passage and implementation of Proposition 49, the California Department of Education worked collaboratively with multiple groups (e.g., State Governor's office, foundations, school districts, County Offices of Education, providers, and child/youth advocacy groups) to determine the optimal roll-out and implementation of ASES. Senate Bill 638, authored by Senator Tom Torlakson and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2006, improved the implementation of ASES by reducing the grant match from 50% to 33%, allowing direct grants to schools instead of using reimbursements, and increasing the daily pupil rate from \$5 to \$7.50.¹²

Concurrent with Proposition 49, the federal Department of Education transferred the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program to the states in 2002, after the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was enacted. The California Department of Education received approximately \$148 million in funding from 21st CCLC, totaling roughly \$798 million in financing for

ASES and 21st CCLC combined in 2020-2021. **Figure 1** provides a visual depiction of California’s publicly funded expanded learning programs from 1990-2020.

Figure 1. Fundings Summary of California’s Publicly Funded Expanded Learning Programs from 1990-2020



Source: California Department of Education Expanded Learning Programs Division, 2020.

In 2021, California extended its commitment to publicly funded expanded learning programs by establishing the **Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P)**, supplementing funding for expanded learning programs beyond ASES and 21st CCLC programs.¹³ With an initial annual budget of \$4 billion and planned increases to \$5 billion over the next three to five years, the ELO-P funds afterschool and summer programs at all school districts that educate youth in grades TK-6, including more than 3 million children statewide. Designed to work seamlessly with the existing ASES program, the initial round of ELO-P grants went to more than 2,700 local education agencies in 2021-2022, propelling California closer to universal access to expanded learning programs. This funding represents a massive commitment by Governor Newsom, the California Department of Education, and the California Legislature, reinforcing that expanded learning programs are crucial for youth, their families, and communities.

Coupled with the momentum supporting universal access in California, in July 2022, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Cardona launched the Engage Every Student Initiative¹⁴ to increase youth access to expanded learning programming nationwide. In the press release announcing the initiative, Secretary Cardona stated,



“Quality out-of-school time programs have always supported students' academic, social, and emotional growth, but as we recover from the pandemic, these opportunities have never mattered more; we need bold action, especially for low-income students and students of color who have historically struggled to access quality afterschool programs and rich summer learning experiences. This **new partnership cements the Department of Education's commitment** to ensuring that more students have access to meaningful, enriching out-of-school programming, not just some of the day, but all day, all year round.”¹⁴

- U.S. Department of Education Secretary Cardona, 2022



Access to expanded learning programs increased dramatically in California since Proposition 49.

As a result of these investments, stemming mainly from the \$550 million investment made possible by Proposition 49, publicly funded expanded learning programs increased dramatically since the early 2000s (from 614 schools served in 1999⁹ to 4,548 schools in 2018-19).¹⁵ The funding authorized by Proposition 49 supports about 3,900 programs serving approximately 750,000 students in elementary and middle schools each year. Federal funds support over 700 programs serving 126,000 students, mostly in high school.⁷ Moreover, California is one of the only states to dedicate federal 21st CCLC funds specifically to expanded learning programs serving high schools, a policy commitment made possible by the additional funds provided by Proposition 49.

Altogether, the California Department of Education has funded expanded learning programs to about 4,500 schools, or about 45% of public schools statewide since 2006,⁷ representing more than a seven-fold increase in the number of schools served since the state publicly funded expanded learning programs. Expanded learning programs are also embedded at schools that serve primarily socioeconomically disadvantaged youth (82.2%), youth of color (79.2%), or English Learners (28.5%).¹⁶ Approximately 886,000 youth in grades K-12 attend these programs annually. Almost 75% of youth enrolled in expanded learning programs at elementary or middle schools in 2018-2019 attended at least 60 days of the program (with 45% attending at least 150 days).⁷ These findings suggest

that many expanded learning programs in California can retain youth enough to meet or exceed the dosage thresholds known to predict better outcomes for youth.¹⁶

Since 2006, when Proposition 49 funds began flowing to school districts across California, the state has invested an additional \$6.77 billion in expanded learning programs.¹⁷ This unprecedented investment has created opportunities for millions more California youth and employment opportunities for tens of thousands of California residents.



As access to expanded learning programs increased, California continued to invest in its infrastructure.

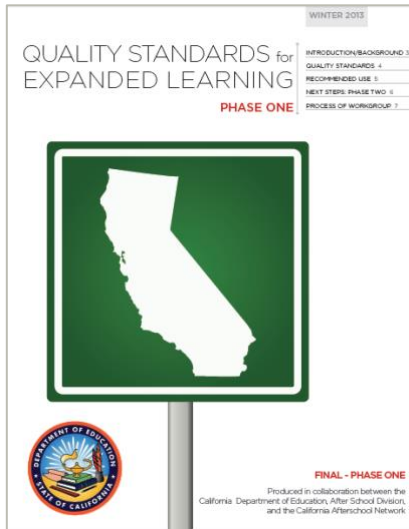
During this time of unprecedented growth, California’s Expanded Learning Division (EXLD) of the California Department of Education continued to improve the infrastructure and supports surrounding publicly funded expanded learning programs. California’s progress may have been lessened if not for the careful roll-out and implementation of expanded learning programs across California. Below, we describe significant investments in expanded learning infrastructure in California made to ensure the maximum impact of funds.



- In 2011, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction created a new division within the California Department of Education (CDE) called the After School Division (ASD) which was dedicated exclusively to administering funds and supporting afterschool programs state-wide. A strong leader with extensive experience running high-quality afterschool programs staffed this Division.¹³
- In 2016, recognizing the need to align the mission of the division with the goals of expanded learning programs, the CDE changed the name of this division from the After School Division (ASD) to the Expanded Learning Division (EXLD). The purpose of the change was to “emphasize its commitment to fostering programs that are part of a comprehensive, integrated enrichment-based system of learning for students.”¹³ This vision is captured in the CDE’s definition of Expanded Learning, included in California *Education Code (EC)* Section 8482.1(a):

*Expanded learning means before school, after school, summer or intersession learning programs that focus on developing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of pupils through hands-on, engaging learning experiences. It is the intent of the Legislature that ELPs are **pupil-centered, results driven, include community partners, and complement, but do not replicate, learning activities in the regular school day and academic year.***

- California’s EXLD leveraged the knowledge and expertise of the field to **inform a strategic plan that was built by the field, for the field, and centered on developing and sustaining high-quality programs throughout California**, among other critical strategic initiatives.¹⁸ Building from the Learning in Afterschool and Summer (LIAS) Principles developed by Sam



Piha and colleagues,¹⁹ as well as emerging research on positive youth development (summarized in the next chapter), 12 **Quality Standards for Expanded Learning** were identified (six point-of-service standards and six programmatic standards).²⁰ Because these quality standards were relevant regardless of the expanded learning activity, the focus on program quality allowed program providers to have flexibility and responsivity in programming to meet the needs of youth. Prioritizing program quality also allowed programs to nurture and develop youth in diverse ways. This strategy aligns with a strengths-based approach, allowing staff to see youth as “resources to be developed” rather than as “problems to be managed.”^{21,22}

This level of responsivity undoubtedly contributed to how well the field could pivot and meet the needs of communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the countless examples where expanded learning program staff provided critical support to communities across California include providing meals to youth and their families, offering virtual and in-person learning opportunities, connecting families to community resources, providing in-person services for school-age children of essential workers, and supporting the mental health and well-being of youth and their families.¹³

- Implementation and roll-out of the CDE’s Quality Standards for Expanded Learning was improved through a statewide effort that included comprehensive systems of technical assistance providers and supports, called the **System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL)**. Staff at County Offices of Education and the CDE work collaboratively as a regional team to provide grant compliance supports for districts in California’s 13 regions. Nonprofit partners include the California Afterschool Network, which provides professional development opportunities for staff and program coordinators, and the After School Assistance Providers Connect (ASAPConnect), which supports technical assistance providers across the state.
- The EXLD’s commitment to supporting positive youth development was also enhanced through a **statewide professional development strategy** launched in 2015 that recognized the importance of social and emotional development for healthy development and success in life. A collaborative called **Expanded Learning 360°/365** was formed with the EXLD,

Bechtel Jr. Foundation, and five intermediaries: Partnership for Children and Youth (the Partnership), ASAPconnect, California Afterschool Network (the Network), California School-Age Consortium (CalSAC), and Temescal Associates. Together, this collaborative identified six foundational social-emotional skills aligned with expanded learning programs (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, and growth mindset). They provided training, resources, and support to improve the field's knowledge and implement programs to build these social-emotional skills.²³

- Recognizing the need to educate the whole child, coupled with research demonstrating the deleterious effects of food insecurity on youth,²⁴ the **EXLD has been steadfastly committed to offering healthy snacks afterschool.** After federal funding became available in 2010 from the After School Meal Program of the Child and Adult Care Food Program, expanded learning programs offered meals (or hot supper) to youth, provided that the program operated in schools where 50 percent or more of the students were eligible for free or reduced price meals.⁷ Local advocacy groups in California, along with the California Afterschool Network, worked in parallel with these federal programs to ensure health and wellness of California's youth remained a central tenet of its programming. This advocacy work has culminated in the Whole Child Health and Wellness Collaborative²⁵ which seeks to support a statewide strategic plan to leverage California's expanded learning programs as centers of whole child health.



- Stemming from Senate Bill 1221 passed in 2014,²⁶ the **CDE's commitment to continuous quality improvement (CQI)** ensures that programs continuously evolve and improve the quality of services offered to youth. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a comprehensive, embedded, and on-going learning approach that aims to enhance the program's quality through ongoing assessment, reflection on findings, and execution of improvement strategies.²⁷ Because research suggests that program quality is one of the most influential drivers of positive youth outcomes, the CDE has developed multiple tools for supporting programs to engage in CQI. They have provided extensive technical assistance designed to equip the field with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to implement CQI systems effectively. Requiring programs to use CQI ensures that program quality remains at the center of the work. High-quality programs have demonstrated better youth outcomes across multiple developmental domains (academic, social, and emotional). Investments in state-level data collection systems are needed to ensure expanded learning programs across the state are indeed offering high-quality programs known to optimize youth development.^{16,28,29}



Section Summary: Looking Forward

Stemming from strong early advocacy and a broad coalition of supporters, Proposition 49 was passed in 2002 and dramatically expanded access to expanded learning programs across California. State and federal funding combined to operate expanded learning programs in approximately 4,500 schools (or 45% of schools statewide), serving almost 886,000 students annually, particularly youth of color from socio-economically disadvantaged families. This shift represents more than a seven-fold increase in the number of schools supported since expanded learning programs were initially publicly funded in California, providing access to enriching opportunities for millions of California's youth and creating employment opportunities for tens of thousands of residents.

During this time of unprecedented growth, California continued to improve the infrastructure and supports surrounding publicly funded expanded learning programs. A new division within the California Department of Education was created and renamed the Expanded Learning Division, signifying a commitment to learning opportunities for youth. Significant investments in strategic planning, professional development, and technical assistance were launched to ensure expanded learning programs offered high-quality programs, embedded a continuous quality improvement approach to evaluation, and nurtured the development of the whole-child (academic, social-emotional, and physical).

Collaboration is at the heart of expanded learning programs in California. Strategic investments, initiatives, and training were intentionally informed by a comprehensive network of intermediaries, practitioners, and community members who worked tirelessly from the ground up to ensure policies were feasible, practical, and ultimately relevant to California's communities. These expanded learning networks strengthened the communication and collaboration within the expanded learning field, creating a tight-knit community that could mutually support one another and mobilize quickly into action when required.

There is a robust and growing body of evidence justifying the need for and benefits from high-quality expanded learning programs. In the next section of this paper, we examine the evidence base to explore why expanded learning programs continue to be a solid investment to support young people, their families, and their communities.

Chapter 2. The Role of Expanded Learning Programs in Promoting Youth Thriving

Given the recent investments and expansion of expanded learning programming across California, as summarized in the previous section, it is essential to review and explore key research and evaluation findings that support expanded access to programming. We begin with a summary of the positive youth development benefits and the prevention of negative/risky behaviors associated with expanded learning programs. We then explore which features of expanded learning programs may account for these positive developmental benefits, including the importance of supervision during the hours after school and offering high-quality intentional programming for youth. Next, we offer insights about the benefits of expanded learning as a workforce development space for adults seeking employment in California's expanded learning programs. We note the symbiotic relationship between the need for K-12 educators and the alignment in skills possessed by the current expanded learning workforce, if given relevant and appropriate professional development. Lastly, we summarize key findings about the return-on-investment of expanded learning programs in California in recognition of the comprehensive range of benefits to children/youth, families, program staff/leaders, and communities.



Expanded learning programs promote positive youth development for California's youth.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an approach to youth-centered programming that seeks to promote youth's internal strengths by creating environments where youth can build their skills and have meaningful experiences with peers and other caring adults. This approach represents a shift from prevention efforts emphasizing expanded learning efforts to reduce youth's negative, risky, or unhealthy behaviors. In contrast, PYD recognizes that all children and youth have strengths and an inherent capacity for positive growth and development. In line with developmental contextual models, optimal development and thriving are possible through the adaptive alignment between the individual's strengths and their supportive developmental contexts at home, school, and community.³⁰ PYD focuses on optimizing developmental spaces, liked expanded learning opportunities, to meet youth's needs and support their positive development. Furthermore, the core philosophy of PYD emphasizes comprehensive whole-child development, meaning that academic learning, for example, is not given preference over nor examined in isolation from other forms of development like social and emotional development. Both PYD and whole child development approaches align with the widespread acceptance that learning is a multi-faceted concept, rather than over-emphasizing academic performance as the most important goal of education spaces.³¹

As anyone who has visited an expanded learning program knows, high-quality expanded learning activities have been associated with many positive benefits for youth across developmental domains (e.g., social, emotional, and academic). Several studies, meta-analyses, and systematic reviews (studies that explore the effects across other studies) have found that expanded learning programs are associated with the following positive developmental outcomes:



Academic behaviors and performance: reading and math achievement,^{29,32,33,34} college aspirations and reading grades, achievement test scores and grades,^{16,35} longitudinal grades and advanced course taking,³⁶ work-study habits.²⁹

Social and emotional competencies: self-perceptions and positive social behaviors,¹⁶ motivation,³³ social-emotional functioning,³⁷ prosocial behaviors,^{29,34} and social skills.²⁹

School bonding/connectedness¹⁶ and school attendance¹⁵


Furthermore, research conducted recently in California suggests that expanded learning opportunities were linked to higher protective factors for CA youth in grades 7, 9, and 11. Compared to non-participants, expanded learning participants had higher levels of school connectedness, academic motivation, caring adult relationships, meaningful participation, and high expectations.³⁸ In sum, it is clear that expanded learning opportunities have the potential to offer whole-child benefits to youth participants.^{39,40} Although the studies summarized in this section generally measured outcomes for comprehensive expanded learning programs, we also know that programs with a particular content focus, like sports, arts, science, or leadership programs (to name a few), also promote youth outcomes that are more specific to their unique learning goals and experiences.

The skills and competencies developed in high-quality expanded learning spaces are essential for youth to succeed in school, life, career, and community endeavors.⁴¹ Because of these consistently documented benefits, many believe that access to high-quality expanded learning programs is also crucial for closing the opportunity gap among youth living in historically marginalized communities.⁴² Ironically, many of the youth most in need of services and support have less access to these types of opportunities in their homes and communities; youth from lower-income families are half as likely to have access to structured youth programming compared to youth from higher-income families.⁷



Expanded Learning programs are also associated with reductions in negative and risky behaviors among youth.

Despite an overarching emphasis on positive development, research also suggests that expanded learning programs are associated with reductions in negative and/or risky behaviors. In addition to the positive developmental benefits noted above, meta-analyses also demonstrate that afterschool programs employing SAFE features (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit activities) are associated with reductions in problem behaviors (e.g., noncompliance, aggression, delinquency, disciplinary referrals, rebelliousness, conduct problems) and drug use among program participants.²⁷ The Alaska Afterschool Network (2014) analyzed the associations between protective factors and risk behaviors in one large school district. They found that participating in organized afterschool activities for at least two days per week was related to a lower likelihood of alcohol use, marijuana use, and skipping school.⁴³ Specific to the LA's BEST program in Los Angeles County, Huang and colleagues (2014) found that participation in the LA's BEST program was associated with a lower likelihood of juvenile crime.⁴⁴ In their quasi-experimental exploration of program benefits, youth participants in LA's BEST were less likely to commit crimes than a matched sample of non-participants. These benefits were enhanced as youth attendance and engagement in the program increased.



Expanded learning programs combine supervision with intentional and engaging activities to bolster youth development.

Research suggests that this association between expanded learning programs and reductions in risky or negative behaviors results from youth having less unstructured and unsupervised time during non-school hours.^{38,45,46} This finding is reinforced by explorations of crime rates which demonstrate a peak in crime during after-school hours in California and nation-wide.^{47,48,49} Because parents/guardians regularly work during after school hours, youth who do not have access to or choose not to participate in structured youth programming typically spend their time in unstructured leisure activities with no inherent developmental purpose. Moreover, youth may find themselves in situations where they engage in unhealthy or risky behaviors during this time. A recent study by Vandell and colleagues (2020) explored combinations of settings where youth spend their hours after school, including high-quality expanded learning programs, extracurricular activities, and unsupervised time (e.g., hanging out with peers, caring for younger siblings, and being home alone) in a sample of ethnically diverse elementary students from low-income communities.⁴⁴ Using teacher and child-reports, their study found that children in the expanded learning program group and those who participated in the program and other extracurricular activities displayed higher teacher-reported academic performance, work habits, and task persistence, and less aggressiveness compared to youth who participated in both extracurricular activities combined with unsupervised time after school.



Several studies have explored the associations between unsupervised time with peers and risky, dangerous, or unhealthy behaviors. These studies have consistently found that the more time a young person spends unsupervised with peers is related to more engagement in misconduct/problem behaviors (e.g., rule-breaking, skipping school, dangerous driving), substance use, and depressive symptoms.^{50,51} When these same youth spent more time in *supervised* peer interactions, they had fewer problem behaviors, fewer depressive symptoms, and better school performance.^{47,459} Indeed, Cross and colleagues⁵² (2009) found that youth randomly assigned to a free afterschool program spent significantly less time engaged in unsupervised socializing compared to their peers. In their study, the rate of unsupervised socializing was linked to higher drug use and delinquency, above and beyond prior use/delinquency, site, and demographic controls.

Unique Features of Expanded Learning Activities

- Youth make more choices about their participation and lead/co-create meaningful experiences for themselves and their peers
- Youth are exposed to project-based learning and other avenues for creativity and expression
- Youth participate in structured opportunities that promote the development of social and emotional competencies
- Youth build positive, caring relationships with non-familial adults and peers they might not be exposed to in other parts of their lives
- Youth are held to staff's high expectations for their effort and participation



However, expanded learning is much more than simple supervision during the hours after the school bell rings. Indeed, research suggests that high-quality expanded learning is a space distinct from the time at school, home, and other unstructured leisure time (supervised or otherwise) and often introduces youth to new and passionate educators from community-based programs, museums, science centers, local musicians, and local businesses, to name a few. These innovative partnerships supplement and enhance learning for youth, exposing youth to opportunities, actors, and experiences that they would not normally receive in school.⁵³ Research suggests that during their participation in structured expanded learning programs, youth experience higher levels of concentration, challenge, effort, intrinsic motivation, and other positive emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement), in comparison to other settings where they spent their time, including academic learning environments in school or other leisure activities (e.g., watching TV, interacting with friends).^{30,54,55} High-quality expanded learning programs are often unique spaces for youth because they are characterized by greater intentionality and structure.



Defining and promoting program quality are vital to ensuring youth benefit from expanded learning participation.

The potential benefits of participating in expanded learning programs are possible, provided the program intentionally promotes strong, nurturing relationships with staff, includes high-quality programming and staff practices, and offers youth meaningful experiences that meet their developmental needs. Insights from research and practice have demonstrated that despite extreme variability in program goals, structures, offerings, resources, and participants, there is some consensus about defining “high-quality” programming and its link to youth outcomes.

Empirical studies have linked program quality to youth outcomes, demonstrating an emerging consensus that program quality matters for success in expanded learning. Deborah Vandell and colleagues have conducted several studies linking program quality to outcomes (e.g., academic grades, work-study habits, and peer relations) in expanded learning programs across school levels.^{30,56} In elementary school program participants, researchers examined longitudinal growth in academic and social outcomes as a function of several program quality indicators (i.e., staff-child relationships, variety of enrichment activities, and student choice and input).⁵⁶ Katoaka and Vandell (2020) found that positive experiences in an afterschool program, as measured by emotional support, positive peer relationships, and autonomy, were related as a composite and individually to teacher-reported academic behaviors (i.e., work habits, task persistence) and prosocial behaviors.⁵⁷ Durlak and colleagues (2010) studied features of program implementation and disaggregated outcome findings by these features.¹⁶ Their study demonstrated that effective programs implemented “SAFE features” or sequenced, active, focused, and explicit activities. In their review of 75 studies of elementary and middle school programs, the frequency of SAFE features was a significant moderator of program effectiveness. These studies demonstrate practically significant gains in program outcomes (i.e., self-confidence, self-esteem, school bonding, positive social behaviors, school grades, achievement test scores, reduced problem behaviors, and drug use). Lastly, a study by Smith, Witherspoon, and Osgood (2017) found that higher levels of observed program quality were related concurrently and in the long-term with several positive developmental outcomes (e.g., competence, connection, caring) in their

study of elementary school children of diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds.⁵⁸ All in all, these studies demonstrate a growing body of evidence to suggest that youth outcomes are more likely when expanded learning programs are high-quality.



In recognition of the importance of high-quality expanded learning, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the “Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs” in 2014 which define afterschool program quality and frame quality improvement efforts.²⁰ Informed by published research in expanded learning and a California Afterschool Network (CAN) Working Group, the CDE adopted a framework for program quality that separates quality into two primary categories: “point-of-service quality” and “programmatic quality”:

Point of Service Quality (6 indicators):

(1) safe and supportive environment, (2) active and engaged learning, (3) skill building, (4) youth voice and leadership, (5) healthy choices and behaviors, and (6) diversity, access, and equity.

Programmatic Quality (6 indicators):

(1) quality staff, (2) clear vision, mission, and purpose, (3) collaborative partnerships, (4) continuous quality improvement, (5) program management, and (6) sustainability.

Also mandated by this new legislation, expanded learning providers receiving state and federal funding must engage in site-level continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts and provide evidence of this process annually. The annual reporting includes offering information from each expanded learning site about assessing quality (e.g., tool/strategy), reflecting on the quality assessment, identifying high priority needs by quality standards, and developing a quality improvement plan. The overall intention of this policy change was to ensure that youth have opportunities to engage in high-quality expanded learning programs and to build the infrastructure to bolster program quality across the state. Despite annual data reporting to the state, there is no public reporting or analysis of these CQI data from California’s expanded learning programs. It would be worthwhile to devise a system for exploring and sharing state-level data to inform expanded learning efforts and supports across the State of California, given that we know this rich and extensive data is being entered and stored in state databases.



In addition to youth participants, families also experience many benefits when their children have access to expanded learning.


In addition to the direct benefits for youth, research has also identified several important family benefits of expanded learning participation. With the rise of maternal employment after World War II, there was a “supervision gap” in the hours when children were out of school, but parents/caregivers were still at work;⁵⁹ this supervision gap precipitated an enhanced need for safe

spaces for youth after school so that parents could continue to work. One consequence of the misalignment between parent work schedules and child school schedules is “parental concern about after-school time (PCAST)”.⁶⁰ Survey research with large groups of families has found that more “parental concern for after-school time” is associated with higher levels of family stress, lower parent wellbeing, more workplace disruptions (e.g., being distracted at work, missing work hours), and lower productivity and job performance among parents.⁶¹ The broader economic consequences of this stress is that lost job productivity costs US companies billions of dollars each year.⁶² When families have access to high-quality expanded learning spaces, there is less stress about their child’s wellbeing in the hours after school. Another benefit for families is the ability to build connections and social networks with families whose children attend the same schools and programs.⁶³ These connections act as a bridge between families, schools, expanded learning programs, and communities.



Workforce development is another essential goal of expanded learning, as young adults prepare for careers in education and related fields.

A final benefit of expanded learning extends beyond the youth and families served to the competent and professional staff members who make up expanded learning organizations. There are recent pushes in the state of California and beyond for expanded learning to be a space for career development for young adults interested in careers in education or other related fields. Several key rationales drive these efforts, including:

- There are **high levels of alignment between the existing skills and competencies needed for work in expanded learning and those required for teaching**, such as engaging and supporting students in learning, planning instruction, and designing learning experiences.⁶⁴ Those who work in expanded learning leave these positions with the necessary experience and passion for supporting youth development/learning and family wellness. Such skills and mindsets are pivotal for careers in education. 
- Compared to those employed in K-12 teaching, **the current expanded learning workforce is more representative of the youth in California**, are more likely to speak the primary languages spoken by youth (particularly English-language learners), and often come from the same communities as youth. For reference, more than 78.3% of K-12 students were youth of color, compared to 38.8% of K-12 teachers.⁶⁵ However, the expanded learning workforce is composed of approximately 70% people of color.
- Lastly, there is a **mutually beneficial opportunity, whereby teacher shortages exist in California simultaneous to unprecedented expansions in the expanded learning workforce to meet the demands of new financial investments**.⁷ As this expanded learning

workforce is trained and builds their skills and experiences in youth development, there is an excellent potential for these staff to transition to careers in education and other human services fields, capitalizing on their training in expanded learning. Furthermore, site coordinator surveys administered yearly by the California Afterschool Network (CAN) from 2015-2018 demonstrated that site coordinators in expanded learning programs expressed an interest in education jobs (across years, more than half of site coordinators expressed interest in K-12 teaching as a career goal).⁷

Expanded learning has great potential to support a workforce of young adults residing in the same communities where expanded learning programs operate, thereby supporting their advancement into important and lucrative careers in human services. Indeed, a Vision for Expanded Learning in CA Workforce Strategy Committee⁶⁶ has made recommendations for articulating a clear pipeline for how expanded learning staff members can advance into higher levels of leadership within organizations, as well as transition to education and related fields utilizing the skills and competencies gained in their expanded learning careers.⁶² We discuss more information about these workforce goals in the final chapter of this report.



The benefits of expanded learning program participation far outweigh the costs of offering these critical opportunities for children and youth.

Given the myriad of benefits summarized in the preceding sections, expanded learning policymakers have also been interested in exploring the return on investment (ROI) for expanded learning programs. Estimating the return on investment is a complex and expensive task given the many potential short and long-term benefits derived from program participation (and the challenge of quantifying those benefits). The previous section of this chapter included a summary of the immediate behavioral, academic, social, and emotional benefits experienced by youth participants in

high-quality expanded learning programs, typically over one academic year of participation. However, ROI studies also attempt to capture benefits to individual youth, their families, and their communities during a participant's lifetime. Estimates of these benefits for the youth participants themselves, as well as savings to public monies (e.g., social programs, costs associated with crime) associated with each participant, in published research and reports are highlighted here. In addition to the benefits for youth and the reduction of social costs associated with these phenomena, there are other immediate social benefits for families (e.g., reduced childcare

Return-on-Investment Benefits:

- *Improved school performance and high school graduation*
- *Reduced criminal behaviors and associated costs*
- *Reduced teen pregnancy and birth rates*
- *Less substance use/abuse*
- *Improved health outcomes (e.g., heart disease, diabetes)*
- *Less reliance on social programs*
- *Increased lifetime earnings*



costs for families, increased parent earnings) and the broader community (e.g., paying jobs available to community members at expanded learning programs) that are used to bolster these estimates.

Overall, the ROI research literature estimates a significant, positive, and long-term net saving to our society from expanded learning opportunities in relation to the comparatively minimal costs of offering those opportunities. The estimates used to make this claim, although somewhat distinct across these studies, have converged around the idea that expanded learning is beneficial for both individual youth participants, but also the greater social ecosystem surrounding each young person, with these benefits far exceeding the investments required to offer and operate high-quality programs.

Two critical research articles explored the ratio of costs to social and emotional benefits for youth programs. The first estimated the value of building noncognitive skills (e.g., emotion management, social skills, self-discipline, motivation, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills) among youth in structured programs in relation to their lifetime earnings. Across 41 published studies, Jones and colleagues.⁶⁷ estimated a range of potential benefits from -5.50% to an 11.2% gain in earnings per standard deviation change in the non-cognitive skills explored. Similarly, a second study investigated the economic value of social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies (e.g., soft skills). Their case studies of four SEL programs for youth suggested lifetime savings to our society of between \$190,000 to \$1,222,000 for every 100 students in the intervention (*median* = \$706,000).⁶⁸ Several other reports (not published in peer-reviewed journals) have also attempted to estimate the value of expanded learning opportunities, including research estimating the impact of Boys & Girls Clubs in California,⁶⁹ estimating the effects of the After School Education and Safety Program (ASES) Act of 2002,⁷⁰ and exploring the ROI for expanded learning program in the state of New York.⁷¹ These reports have suggested that the estimated cost savings for our society ranged from \$8.92-\$16.18 per dollar spent on expanded learning opportunities, depending on the formulas used to quantify benefits and the benefits outlined. These studies noted that a large majority of these estimated benefits were driven by reductions in criminal behaviors and the associated costs of legal fees and incarceration.

Taken together, estimates of the Return on Investment (ROI) for expanded learning programs suggest that between **\$9-\$16 are saved for each dollar spent on expanded learning opportunities.**



Section Summary: Looking Forward

The research is clear. Expanded learning programs have the power and potential to benefit youth participants in many ways, including bolstering academic behaviors/outcomes, building social and emotional competencies, and reducing engagement in risky or negative behaviors. Since the shift in philosophy from reducing negative behaviors to promoting positive youth

development, expanded learning researchers and practitioners have recognized that each participant has unique strengths, assets, and protective factors in their lives. The role of expanded learning is to build upon those assets, create opportunities for youth to showcase their talents, and support youth in achieving their versions of success. Indeed, expanded learning program participation has been identified as an essential protective factor for youth wellness and thriving.

Although many point to the importance of supervision during afterschool hours, particularly regarding reducing juvenile crime, expanded learning programs in California offer much more than childcare. High-quality programs featuring structured opportunities for positive youth development are more beneficial to youth than other ways youth can spend their time when not in school. In turn, youth experience more enjoyment, engagement, and positive feelings in expanded learning spaces than in school or other leisure pursuits. Furthermore, return-on-investment research demonstrates a significant and long-term net saving for every dollar invested in expanded learning programs, particularly those aiming to build social-emotional and non-cognitive factors among youth participants. More empirical work is needed for further the consistency and confidence in ROI findings.

Future expanded learning programs should capitalize on the research and evaluation findings around what defines a high-quality program and engage in the continuous quality improvement resources offered by the CDE to ensure that youth have beneficial and meaningful experiences in expanded learning. California should also be commended for its attention to the role of expanded learning staff and building workplaces where staff members receive the professional development and experience to transition to careers in K-12 education and other social service fields.

Chapter 3. Status of Youth Thriving in California

Much has changed in California since the passage of Proposition 49 in 2002, especially in the lives of our young people. To thrive, youth need more than to avoid problems. They need strong relationships, good health, and promising opportunities for school, work, and social connections. The good news is that California’s young people are doing better than in the past. Since the early 2000s to today, California’s kids have been more likely to graduate from high school, be healthy, and avoid drinking and smoking. Although many challenges persist among California’s children and youth, particularly on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, when exploring the types of outcomes targeted by expanded learning outcomes, there are many promising findings.

Identifying the catalysts for these positive shifts for California youth is challenging. As detailed in other chapters, we know that youth are embedded in complex developmental systems that include their interests, attributes, and values; their interactions with peers, school leaders, families/caregivers, community members, and expanded learning program staff; and the unique socio-political culture. As with any significant shift in California communities, multiple factors play a part. Thus, we know there are many contributing factors to the current status of youth thriving; the state’s major commitments to opportunity for all, including health insurance coverage, revised approaches to juvenile justice, and investments in expanded learning, have all contributed to this progress. Although we cannot explicitly confirm that access to and experiences in expanded learning *caused* these promising trends in youth wellbeing, we are confident that participation in expanded learning has *contributed* to these important outcomes.

This section starts with a brief description of the young people living in California, exploring the changing demographic and linguistic characteristics of our young people. This section aims to explore the status of young people in California and trends in these indicators since the early 2000’s when Proposition 49 was passed. To conclude this section, we summarize the remaining challenges experienced by children and youth in California to demonstrate the need for ongoing structure and support for thriving via expanded learning programs.



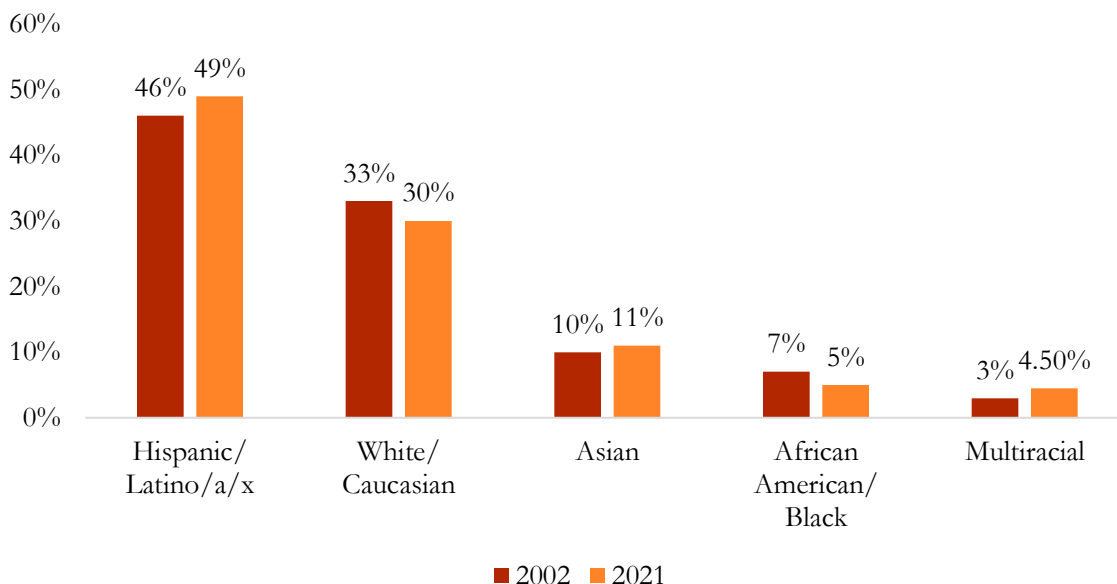
California children and youth are an evolving community of young people.

Since the passage of Proposition 49 in 2002, the number of young people in California has declined from more than 9.5 million young people to fewer than 9 million in 2021. Today, California is home to 12% of the country’s youth ages 0-18.⁷²

The Golden State has been known for its diverse and vibrant population for generations. In 2021, 49% of California’s youth identified as Latino/a/x, 30% as White/Caucasian, 11% as Asian, 5%

as Black/African American, .4% as American Indian/Alaska Native, .3% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 5% as multi-racial. The proportion of Black/African American and White/Caucasian youth has declined since 2002, whereas the proportion of Asian and Latino/a/x has increased (refer to **Figure 2**).⁷³

Figure 2. Percent of California Youth by Race/Ethnicity in 2002 and 2021



Note: Youth who identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaska Native were not included in this figure because they represent less than 1% of the youth in California at either time point.

Source: KidsData, *Child Population by Race/Ethnicity*, by Population Reference Bureau, <https://www.kidsdata.org>, accessed September 13, 2022.

California’s young people benefit from rich linguistic diversity, as well. As of 2021-2022, 2,360,744 students speak at least one language in addition to English, or 40% of the state’s public-school enrollment. California’s 1,127,648 English learners constitute 18% of the total enrollment in the state’s public schools.⁷⁴



On key indicators of thriving, California youth are more equipped to achieve their goals and engage less often in negative or risky behaviors.

This section summarizes how the youth of California are currently faring since Proposition 49 was passed in the early 2000’s. Assessing youth thriving represents a whole-child approach to understanding these youth’s status on various indicators, including promoting positive development and reducing engagement in negative and risky behaviors.



**Promoting
Positive
Development**

Academic
Motivation,
Persistence &
Graduation

Social &
Emotional
Skills

Mental &
Physical Health



**Reducing
Negative
Behaviors**

Youth Arrests
&
Incarceration

Use of Alcohol
Tobacco &
Other Drugs

Teen
Pregnancy

Youth
Disconnection

We hope that these indicators can offer us some insights into how youth thriving/wellbeing has changed since the passage of Proposition 49 in 2002. In the absence of a longitudinal and experimental impact study, exploring longitudinal trends in these indicators allows us to estimate the potential impact of this legislation on youth in CA, again, with the caveat that access to high-quality expanded learning is one of many influences on youth thriving. We selected these specific indicators of thriving/well-being for several reasons:

- These measures of youth thriving have been **associated with participation in expanded learning programs** in previous research and evaluation studies (as summarized in Chapter 2).
- These indicators **explore wellness in a holistic sense**, accounting for behavioral, social, emotional, and academic outcomes among California youth.
- There is **publicly available data** on these indicators over time, specific to youth in California.

The following sections explore these indicators individually, summarize trends over time, and note any existing disparities in youth thriving based on youth characteristics.

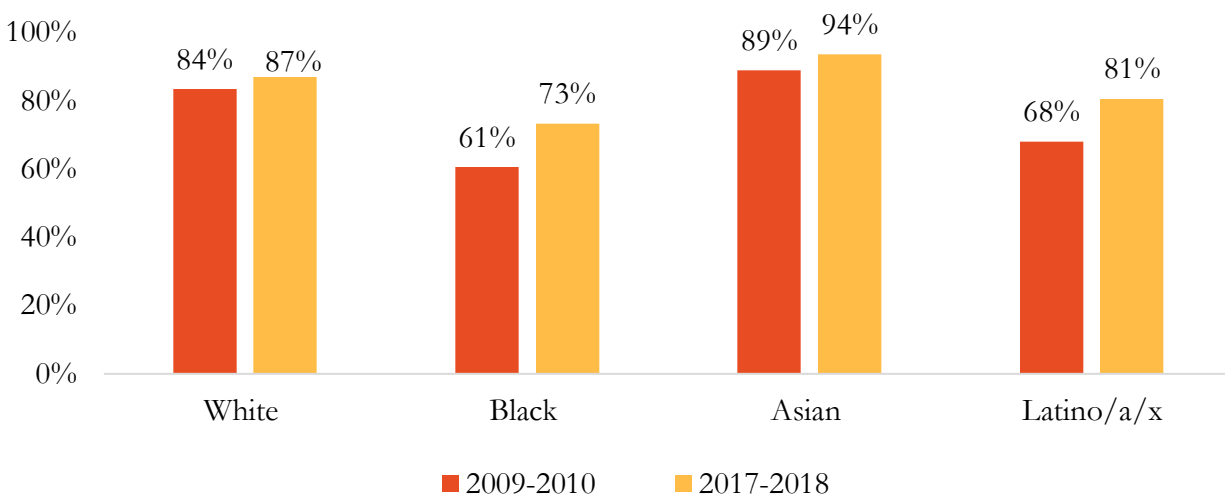


California youth have demonstrated improvements in important positive youth development measures since the passage of Proposition 49.

Academic Motivation, Persistence, & High School Graduation. Students with higher levels of school connectedness tend to have higher academic motivation, academic performance, and related mental health outcomes.⁷⁵ Elementary students in California report high and sustained levels of academic motivation, ranging from 87% in 2015-2017 to 83% in 2019-21.⁷⁶ Middle and high school aged students are somewhat less likely to report high levels of academic motivation. In 2013-2015, 75% of California’s 7th graders reported having high levels of academic motivation, increasing to 80% in 2015-2017, and falling back to 75% in 2017-2019. Ninth graders demonstrated a similar pattern: 68% reported high levels of academic motivation in 2013-2015, rising to 73% in 2015-2017, and decreasing to 72% in 2017-2019.⁷⁷ Among 11th graders, just 66% reported high academic motivation in 2013-2015, increasing to 70% in 2015-2017 and again to 71% in 2017-2019.

More students in California are graduating from high school than ever before. In 2009-2010, the overall graduation rate was 74.7%. In that period, 89% of Asian students completed high school, compared with 83.5% White students, 68.1% Latino/a/x students, and 60.5% Black/African American students. By the 2017-2018 school year, the overall graduation rate increased to 83%. Graduation rates for Black/African American (from 60.5% in 2010 to 73.3% in 2018) and Latino/a/x students (from 68.1% in 2010 to 80.6% in 2018) increased during this period, lessening the disparity among racial groups (refer to **Figure 3** for graduate rates by race/ethnicity groups).⁷⁸

Figure 3. Graduate rates among California Youth from 2009 to 2018 by Race/Ethnicity

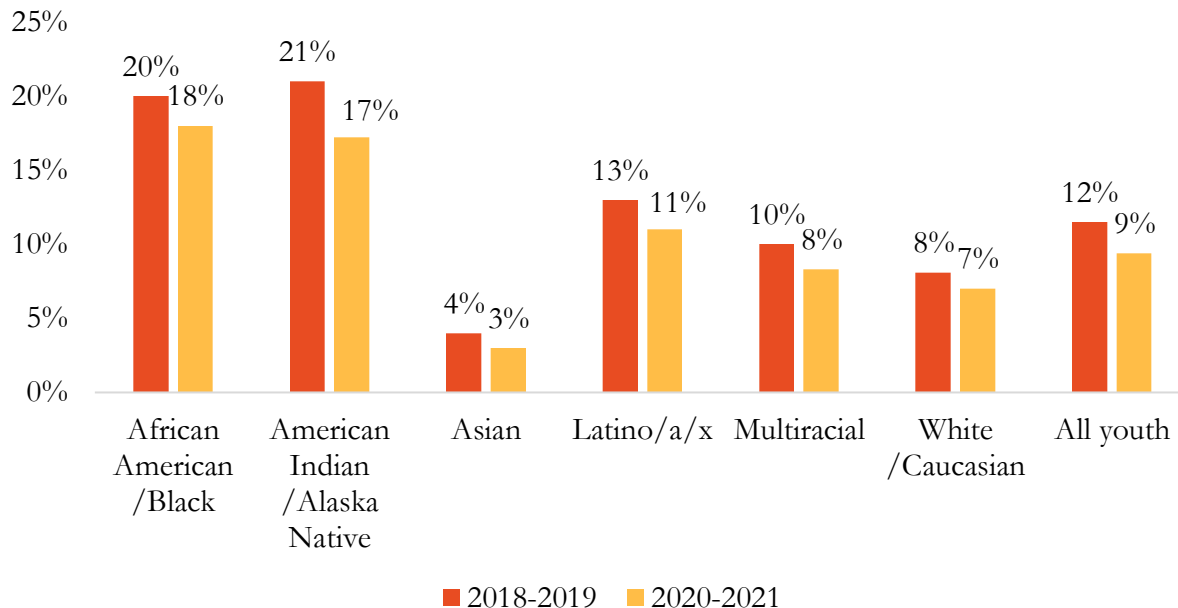


Source: Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), “What is California’s Highschool Graduation Rate,” https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/HS_Grad_Rate_online.pdf accessed August 12, 2022.

The proportion of eligible graduates to apply to the state’s public colleges and universities has also increased slightly over time. Among students graduating high school in 2018-2019, 41% had completed the A-G course requirements for eligibility to apply to the California State University and University of California systems.⁸⁰ By 2020-2021, this proportion increased to 44%.⁷⁹ Although course completion rates have increased by two to four percentage points between 2018-2019 and 2020-2021, racial differences persist. In 2020-2021, 31% of African American/Black students completed the A-G courses, compared to 24% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 73% of Asian students, 36% of Latino/a/x students, 50% of white students, and 50% of multiracial students. Ongoing efforts to reduce high school dropout rates show promise. The high school dropout rate in the US is steadily decreasing, from 7.4% in 2010 to 5.3% in 2020. Black and Latino/a/x students are showing remarkable progress. The Latino/a/x student dropout rate declined from 15.1% to 7.4%, and the Black dropout rate fell from 8.0% to 4.0%.⁸¹

The overall high school dropout rate in California has decreased from 11.5% in 2018-2019 to 9.4% in 2020-2021.⁷⁴ While African American/Black and Hispanic or Latino/a/x students are less likely to drop out than in the past, racial disparities persist (refer to **Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Percent of High School Dropouts by Ethnic/Racial Group from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021



Source: California Department of Education, (2022)

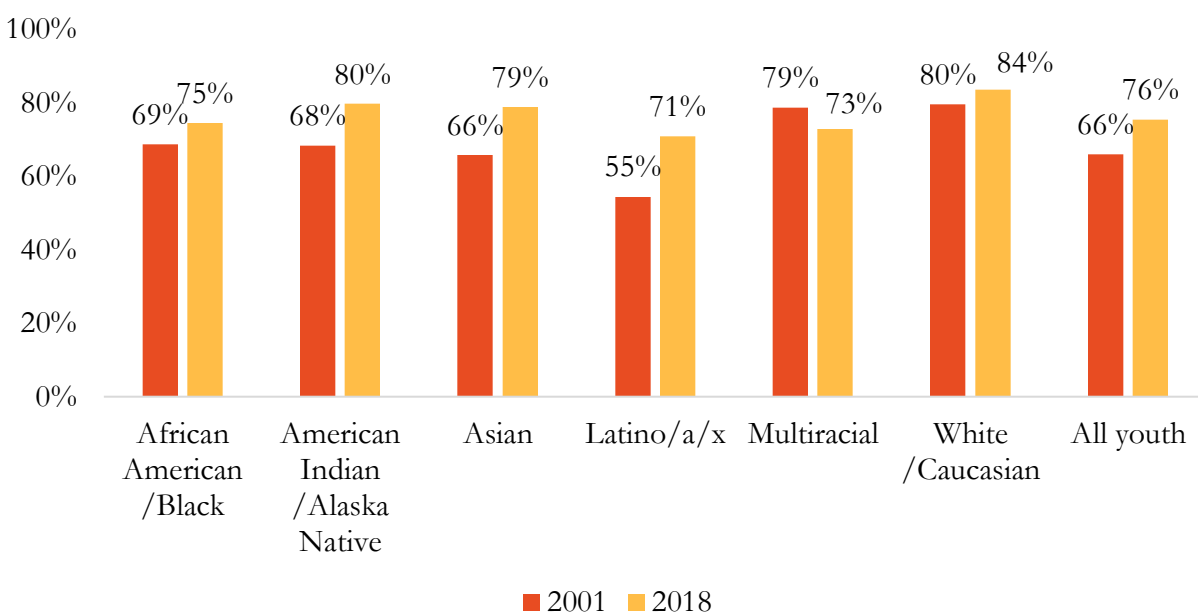
Social & Emotional Skills. Buoyed by a significant research base, there is a growing recognition of the inter-connected nature of learning and development, including social, emotional,

cognitive, and behavioral facets of youth thriving. More specifically, research has demonstrated the social and emotional skills (SEL), like empathy, teamwork, and self-awareness, are essential for helping young people to thrive in many aspects of their lives, including interpersonal relationships, achieving their goals, and other community/civic pursuits.³¹ Furthermore, SEL competencies are beneficial because researchers have consistently linked them to academic achievement/performance.⁸² Recognizing the importance of these skills, California has invested in enhancing opportunities for social and emotional learning (SEL) during both the school day and in expanded learning settings.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the largest district in California, survey reports from 2021-2022 show that most students agree to have enhanced their social and emotional skills during the academic year. Of the roughly 58,000 youth surveyed, 70% of students reported having a growth mindset, believing that people can get better at things with hard work. Similarly, 64% of students reported high levels of self-efficacy. Seven in ten (70%) students reported high levels of overall self-management. Finally, 68% of 60,635 students reported high overall student social awareness levels.⁸³

Mental & Physical Health. The proportion of children ages 0-17 in “excellent” or “very good” physical health has risen steadily since 2001. Among children in low-income households, the proportion in excellent or very good health increased from 53% to 65% between 2001 and 2018. Concurrently, the proportion of youth in low-income households in fair or poor health declined from 14% to 9%.⁸⁴ During this same period, youth from marginalized backgrounds reported improved health, lessening longstanding disparities (refer to **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Youth in Excellent or Very Good Health by Race/Ethnicity, 2001 and 2018



Source: KidsData: Health Status by Race & Ethnicity, 2022

The global COVID-19 pandemic and racial reawakening in the US have prompted a steep escalation of mental health challenges for young people worldwide; California is no exception. Despite positive trends in physical health, California's kids have experienced rising depression and anxiety, rising from 7% in 2016 to 12% in 2020. In 2020, the rate of hospitalization for mental health issues ranged from 2.5 per 1,000 children ages 5-14 to 9.1 per 1,000 youth ages 15-19. As of July 2022, about 214,000 U.S children have lost a parent to COVID-19, causing widespread grief.⁸⁵ In California, one in 330 children lost a parent or caregiver due to the pandemic.⁸⁶

An April 2022 poll showed that three-quarters of parents and caregivers felt that mental health counseling would benefit their child, up from 68% in 2021. A third of surveyed parents and caregivers stated that their child had demonstrated symptoms of mental health issues, including depression (13%) and anxiety (19%). Recent school surveys found that 7 in 10 public schools saw an increase in children seeking mental health services in 2021.⁸⁵



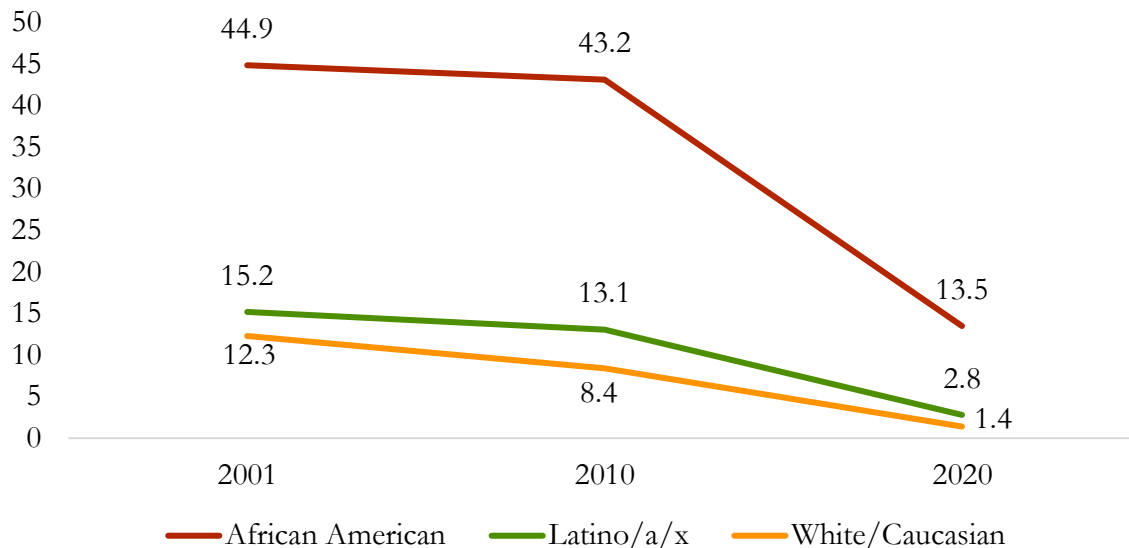
California youth have also reduced their engagement in several negative or risky behaviors since the introduction of Proposition 49.

Youth Arrests & Incarceration. Although there is no statewide evidence showing that increased participation in expanded learning programming *causes* reduced arrests or incarceration, the proportion of California youth arrested and incarcerated has declined steadily throughout the 2000s. Substantial policy shifts have contributed to this decline. California revised the youth arrest and incarceration criteria to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, especially for marginalized youth.

The hours between 3-6 pm are the most likely time for kids to be involved in crime, either as victims or perpetrators. Pro-social, youth-friendly expanded learning programs provide a safer alternative for youth during these hours. However, studies in California with the LA's BEST program have linked after-school programming to a lower likelihood of engaging in crime.⁴¹ The factors affecting incarceration rates touch multiple facets of our society, with policing and criminal justice policies having the most significant influence over who is arrested and incarcerated and why.

California's juvenile felony arrest rate was 15.3 per 1,000 youth aged 10-17 in 2001 and decreased to 12.3 per 1,000 in 2010. By 2020, the rate fell to 2.7 arrests per 1,000 youth.⁸⁷ Stark racial disparities continue (see **Figure 6**); Black/African American youth are 9.6 times more likely to be arrested for a felony than their white peers.

Figure 6. Felony Juvenile Arrests per 1,000 youth from 2001, 2010, and 2020 by Race/Ethnicity



Source: KidsData: Juvenile Felony Arrest Rate, 2022.

Girls are also less likely to be arrested than their male counterparts. The female youth felony arrest rate has declined from 5.5 per 1,000 in 2001 to .9 in 2020.

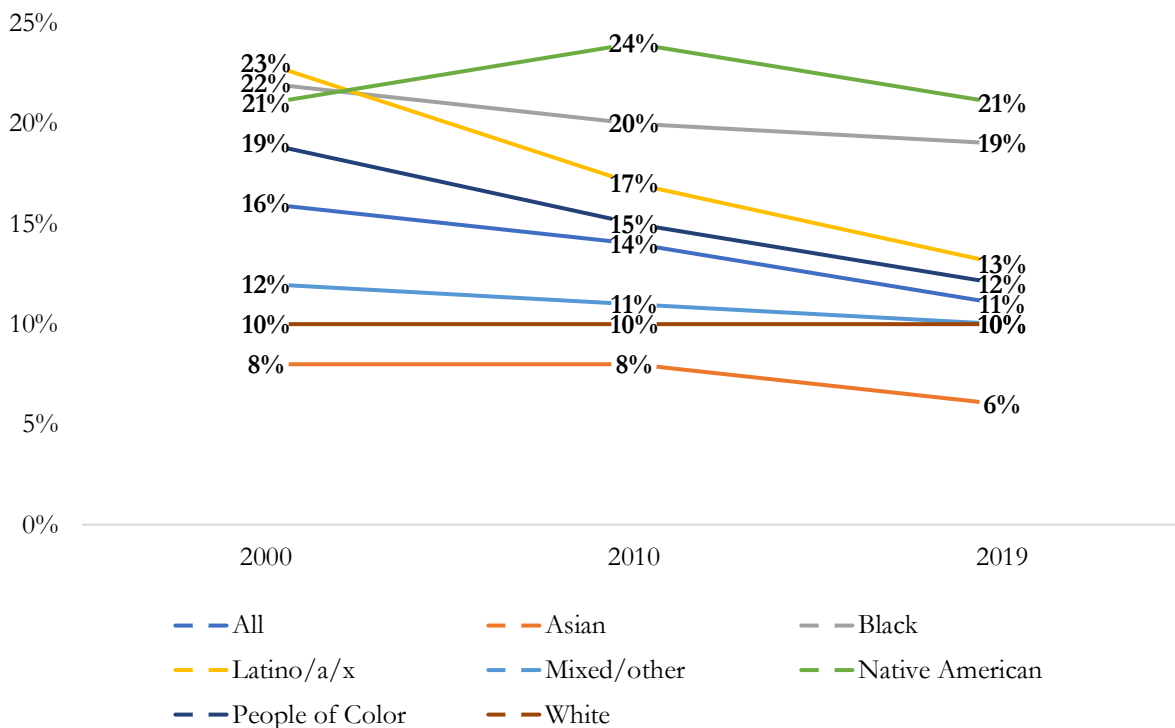
Mirroring declines in arrest rates, juvenile incarceration rates have fallen by more than half since 2001, decreasing from 143 incarcerated youth per 100,000 to 50 juvenile incarcerations per 100,000 in 2019. Racial disparities persist, however. The White juvenile incarceration rate dropped from 90 per 100,000 in 2001 to 21 per 100,000 in 2019. The African American/Black juvenile incarceration rate dropped from 459 in 2001 to 250 for every 100,000 youth in 2019. The Latino/a/x juvenile incarceration rate dropped from 157 in 2001 to 51 for every 100,000 youth in 2019. The Asian juvenile incarceration rate dropped from 46 in 2001 to 7 for every 100,000 youth in 2019.⁸⁸

Use of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Other Drugs. California’s teenagers, aged 12-17, are less likely to smoke or to drink alcohol than in the past. The annual average percentage of cigarette use decreased between 2002-2004 and 2017-2019 from 8.2% to 1.4% (about 43,000 youth) and was lower than the national average (2.7%). Despite overall reductions in tobacco use, estimates in 2019-2020 in California suggest that vaping (or flavored e-cigarette) use is driving current tobacco use, with vape use accounting for 8.2% of the 9.6% of youth who commonly use tobacco.⁸⁹ Approximately 51% of California youth have used vaping devices.⁸⁹ Alcohol use decreased from 16.3% youth in 2002-2004 to 8.9% (or 268,000 teens) from 2017-2019. Marijuana use has decreased slightly, from 8.3% in 2002-2004 to 8.0% (or 243,000) in 2017-2019. However, illicit drug use increased from 2015-2017 and 2017-2019 by 1.2% of youth, to 9.6%, above the national average (8.2%).⁹⁰

Teen Pregnancy. The rates of teen pregnancy have been decreasing across the state of California since the late 1980s. In 2000, approximately 55 teens (ages 15-17) in every 1,000 women became pregnant; this rate dropped to 32 in 2010 and 13 in 2017.⁹¹ These teen pregnancy rates were slightly lower than the national average for 15- to 19-year-old youth in 2017 (28.7%, compared to the national average of 31%). These reductions have been attributed to better access to contraceptives and other pregnancy prevention efforts.⁹²

Disconnected Youth. Young people ages 16-24 who are neither in school nor working are substantially more likely to experience serious mental health and addiction issues and to be the victims of crime.⁹³ Fortunately, the proportion of California youth ages 16-24 who were disconnected has declined, from 16% (about 688,829 youth) in 2000 to 14% (673,685 youth) in 2010 and 11% (540,610 youth) in 2019.⁹⁴ Marginalized youth in California are more likely to be disconnected from school and work, reflecting national trends. In California, there are promising signs that these differences are declining over time. However, Black, Latino/a/x, and Native youth are far more likely to be disconnected than their White and Asian peers (refer to **Figure 7**).

Figure 7. Percent of Disconnected Youth from 2001, 2010, and 2019 by Race/Ethnicity



Source: National Equity Atlas, 2022.

The data also revealed that the proportion of girls neither working nor in school decreased from 18% in 2000 to 14% in 2010 and 11% in 2019. Similarly, the proportion of boys considered disconnected youth decreased from 14% in 2000 to 13% in 2010 and 11% in 2019.



In addition to these positive trends, many challenges persist for California's children and youth, particularly those in vulnerable groups.

Along with acknowledging the incredible progress in the state of California concerning the promotion of skills, competencies, and well-being among our youth and the reductions in negative and risky behaviors, it is also essential to acknowledge that there are groups of California's youth who need continued and bolstered support to thrive.⁹⁵ Although the general trends noted in this section suggest improvements in youth thriving since 2002, California was ranked 35th in the nation for overall child well-being in 2019 based on economic, education, health, and family/community measures.⁹⁶ As noted in this ranking, some of the biggest issues for California include children in poverty, children whose parents lack secure employment, limited access to pre-school, children in single-parent households, and more. California Children's Report Card noted several groups of children and youth in California that are particularly vulnerable according to the recent data about well-being, particularly considering the prevalence of available support for these children.⁹⁵

Groups of Children & Youth in CA who Need Additional Support:

- Children from low-income families
- Children with limited English proficiency
- Children from families of color
- Unhoused children and youth
- LGBTQ+ children and youth

Relatedly, research suggests that youth in California are experiencing a significant number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs include three types of experiences that have harmful implications on lifetime health and well-being: (1) abuse, (2) neglect, and (3) forms of household dysfunction. The three most common ACEs reported in California are emotional/verbal abuse, parental separation or divorce, and substance abuse by a household member.⁹⁷ Nearly everyone will experience at least one ACE in their life. Specifically, about 62% of California adults have experienced at least one ACE, and 16% have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences.⁹⁸ Although ACEs are common, racially marginalized people are more likely to experience multiple ACEs and have less access to protective factors.⁹⁹ In California, 21% of children have experienced one ACE, and 4% of children experienced four or more ACEs (for comparison, this is slightly lower than the national data: 22.9% experienced one ACE, and 5.5% experienced four or more ACEs).¹⁰⁰



Most alarmingly, adverse experiences during childhood are associated with severe health impacts later in life. Adults who experienced four or more ACEs are many times more likely to suffer from serious health conditions (e.g., heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, depression) and have a higher risk of negative behaviors (e.g., use

of injection drugs and attempting suicide).¹⁰¹ In the near term, children exposed to trauma and toxic stress experience many immediate consequences to their healthy development, like anxiety, depression, inability to concentrate, difficulty sleeping, relationship challenges, poor emotional regulation, impulse control, aggression, and language delays, to name a few.¹⁰²

Despite the fact there is much hope about the current status of children and youth in California, groups of children and youth continue to need enhanced supports provided by the adults in their lives. This support is vital given that many of the remaining challenges faced by California's youth are not the result of a child's actions but rather the circumstances of the lives they were born into and their exposure to traumatic life events. Furthermore, these remaining challenges for our most vulnerable youth were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Children in California and worldwide experienced stress, isolation, mental and physical health challenges/emergencies, and food insecurity as the pandemic ravaged our communities.¹⁰³ California youth were hit particularly hard as Latino/a/x children, who make up approximately half of California's youth, tested positive for COVID-19 at higher rates than other groups of children.¹⁰⁴



Expanded learning programs are an ideal environment for building critical protective factors that buffer California's youth from stress and trauma.

On a more positive note, research has suggested that these challenges and negative experiences do not have a one-to-one link to a lifelong battle with challenge and struggle. We can offer many positive and protective experiences to children and youth from particularly vulnerable groups to mitigate the potentially harmful implications and consequences. Protective and promotive factors are characteristics, conditions, and processes that buffer children against adversity and build their resilience to negative experiences and trauma.¹⁰⁵ Protective/promotive factors include:

**Protective
& Promotive
Factors:**



- Positive and caring relationships in their families, peer networks, schools, and communities
- Feeling safe at school, in school, and in their community
- Having clear rules and expectations from caregivers
- Possessing coping skills
- Having high self-esteem, positive self-concept, and self-efficacy
- Possessing problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal skills
- Feeling a sense of meaning in their lives through beliefs, goals, and dreams
- Developing a unique skill or talent

Fortunately, protective and promotive factors can be present and built in expanded learning spaces, offering critical opportunities to support resilience for California's children.¹⁰⁶ Harkening back

to the previous section, high-quality expanded learning programs provide children and youth with many opportunities for supportive social relationships with adults and peers, physical and psychological safety, concrete support for daily challenges, and explicit program goals related to building social and emotional competence among participants.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, several evidence-informed practices in expanded learning have been shown to bolster protective and promotive factors. These expanded learning practices include.¹⁰⁸

Expanded Learning Practices that Build Protective Factors

<i>Engaging in intentional organization practices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intentional staff hiring ▪ Fostering connections with the school-day ▪ Recruiting and retaining youth ▪ Intentional staff training
<i>Offering high-quality learning environments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharing ownership, choice, autonomy, and leadership with youth ▪ Maintaining a positive peer environment ▪ Promoting active skill development and enjoyment ▪ Having small group sizes and low adult-youth ratios ▪ Ensuring physical and emotional safety
<i>Supportive and nurturing staff-youth interactions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Celebrating youth contributions, effort, and successes ▪ Offering support for identity discovery ▪ Communicating care, warmth, and support ▪ Setting clear rules and expectations ▪ Creating norms for prosocial behavior
<i>Intentional and explicit focus on skill development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting youth development of emotional awareness/management, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills

These features of expanded learning programs are highly aligned with the CDE’s Quality Standards for Expanded Learning. High-quality expanded learning programs, characterized by these features, certainly have the potential to offer and build protective factors that can mitigate the impact of the remaining roadblocks to wellness and thriving among California’s youth who are most in need.¹⁰⁹ Taken together, continued and expanded access to high-quality expanded learning is as essential in California today as ever, as we work to further reduce disparities in thriving and wellness among youth in vulnerable groups.



Section Summary: Looking Forward

California is home to a diverse and vibrant youth population, including approximately half the population identifying as Latino/a/x and about 20% of youth speaking a language other than English. Overall, data suggest that California’s young people are doing better than previous generations.

Since the early 2000’s, California’s youth are ...



More likely to **graduate from high school** (and less likely to dropout)



More likely to complete the **A-G requirements** giving them access to the state’s public colleges/universities



More likely to be in **good physical health**



Less likely to be **arrested or incarcerated**



Less likely to **become pregnant as a teen**




Less likely to be **disconnected from school and work**



More likely to **avoid drinking and smoking tobacco**

Despite some remarkable progress in reducing gaps in some cases, there are still many racial/ethnic disparities in these trends, including graduation/dropout rates, A-G requirement completion, arrest and incarceration rates, and disconnection that favor White and Asian youth over Black and Latino/a/x youth. Furthermore, there is a less favorable story concerning increases in mental health challenges and illicit drug use in recent years.

Expanded learning programs offer young people the chance to be active, build relationships, stay safe, learn new skills, and get help with schoolwork. These experiences in expanded learning programs have certainly contributed to the overall well-being of California’s kids. Continued access to high-quality programs is essential to support all our youth. Although there are several limitations to the information available about youth thriving (e.g., data is not causal, and there is an incomplete picture of wellbeing/thriving) and how it relates to expanded learning programs, there are several positive trends in youth thriving in California since the passage of Proposition 49.



The COVID-19 pandemic, increasing political polarization, and persistent racial injustice have affected all Californians. Recent reports have highlighted rapid rises in economic instability, mental health crises, and academic disengagement among California’s young people. The critical question is how our expanded learning opportunities and other developmental systems can synergize to support young people in recovering from these challenges and moving forward. Those in the most marginalized communities have fared the worst with the least access to resources and opportunity. Longstanding well-being disparities between marginalized youth and their peers are decreasing, though some persist. Sustaining and deepening these supports – including high-quality, free expanded learning programs -- is essential.

Chapter 4. Moving Expanded Learning Programs Forward

California has made remarkable progress in ensuring access to expanded learning programs for youth across the state since the passage of Proposition 49 in 2002. At the same time, there is more to do to ensure these investments reach their fullest potential. This section outlines future directions for California’s expanded learning field to meet the demands of our youth and families by offering the most relevant, practical, and beneficial expanded learning offerings. Our opinions are informed by a review of the existing research and program evaluations, our experiences from being in the expanded learning field for more than 20 years, and our discussions with experts in the expanded learning field in California and nationally.

1

Support, enhance, and protect funding for expanded learning. In addition to the history of investments in expanded learning, recent investments in the California through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program mark an exciting new chapter for the state. Yet expanded learning providers face steadily rising costs of offering, not only access to programming, but access to high-quality programs operated by trained staff.⁷ The rising costs of program operations are driven by local living wage mandates, inflation, and other national financial trends, but also by the need to offer higher pay levels to attract and retain staff members to provide this programming. To maintain this growth, expansion, and elevation of expanded learning programming, these funding sources must be protected and increased as costs continue to rise. Luckily, there is historical precedent, momentum, and widespread support across California for expanded learning access for all children and youth.

2

Recruit and retain a high-quality workforce to provide expanded learning programming. The investments and infrastructure built around expanded learning in California are futile if programs cannot attract, train, and retain highly qualified staff members. California’s expanded learning programs must continue to offer livable wages and benefits to maintain both full-time and part-time positions in programs and invest in meaningful training and professional development to ensure staff members feel prepared and supported in their work with youth. Currently, expanded learning programs in California and throughout the nation are experiencing a critical shortage of available staff members to lead expanded learning offerings and maintain appropriate youth-to-staff ratios at sites (20:1).¹¹⁰ A January 2022 report from the Afterschool Alliance found that of the 1,048 afterschool program providers surveyed in late 2021, 51% of providers were “extremely concerned” about finding staff or staff shortages, and 93% reported that it was difficult to hire and retain staff in their program.¹¹¹

Providers cited staff stress and burnout as significant factors driving this shortage. These findings highlight the need to support staff's mental health so that they can collectively “show up” for youth. Further, failing to retain staff reduces the likelihood that children and youth have high-quality and beneficial experiences, despite expanded access. As investments lead to more open spaces for children and youth in expanded learning programs, there is an even greater need to attract motivated staff members who can work in expanded learning programs.

Additionally, it is vital to consider the long-term potential of retaining program staff as they gain experience and competence in expanded learning programs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this experience is essential for success in their expanded learning roles and relevant to many other employment opportunities involving interactions with young people and their knowledge of positive youth development, like education and other social services. Indeed, expanded learning can offer a fruitful pipeline to meaningful employment in related fields if a thoughtful strategy and appropriate structures are in place to train and develop a workforce with the skills and competence to succeed in expanded learning and beyond. Fortunately, California has built a workforce strategy committee who have put forth a detailed vision for expanded learning in California to achieve this goal over the next several years.⁶⁶



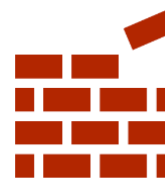
Furthermore, California should invest in systems to gather important information about the staff who work at expanded learning programs across the state. This information was absent from our review of the landscape of expanded learning in California because there is no consistent source of information about the staff numbers apart from some rough estimates. Understanding the staff who are implementing these programs, their characteristics, needs, and goals is essential for informing recruitment/retention efforts, staff professional development, and other support. Information about the current workforce is also vital as programs aim to ensure minimal relational distance between the staff and youth being served in terms of shared interests, characteristics, experiences, and cultures.¹⁰⁸ For example, because California's programs primarily serve youth of color, it is essential to build a pipeline for diverse leadership in expanded learning programs.¹¹² One promising opportunity to enhance the expanded learning workforce is through career pathways, structured “onramps” for aspiring professionals interested in working with young people. For professionals already in the expanded learning workforce, the Leadership Development Initiative fellowship¹¹³ is a yearlong community of practice for professionals of color who aspire to leadership positions.



Continue to offer support and structures for building and maintaining program quality.

Consistent with the findings presented in this paper, program quality is vital. California has a network of program quality supports for expanded learning; they will need to keep pace with the emerging needs of the state's programs. We see three interconnected needs. First, as ELO-P funds are distributed across the state, school districts that are newer to the expanded learning and youth

development fields need clear guidance about how to design and staff high quality programs, so that these dollars are invested in line with what we know works well. Second, quality support resources must take California’s rich diversity into account. Helping staff create spaces where *all* children and youth feel welcome, engaged, and safe is paramount. Third, we recognize that sustained program quality requires consistent effort; funding structures that support continuous quality improvement (CQI) among expanded learning programs are therefore necessary.



Robust CQI resources for expanded learning programs are available, including self-assessments and guides offered by the California Afterschool Network, the CDE Expanded Learning Division, the California School-Age Consortium, and national experts like the National Institute for Out of School Time and Forum for Youth Investment. This will require *time* for staff to reflect on their practices, access to *information* they need, and the development of *skills* to make informed shifts in their practice. Ensuring that California’s expanded learning programs are high-quality is essential to meeting the promise of these investments to bolster youth success, well-being, and thriving.

4

Build programs to address disparities in thriving for youth from historically marginalized groups.

The information presented in Chapter 3 of this paper is clear – some groups of children and youth could benefit significantly from expanded learning opportunities programs to combat stress, trauma, and disconnection. Whereas the first step is indeed access to expanded learning opportunities, access is not enough. Youth need to participate in high-quality programs offering evidence-derived experiences to build their skills and bolster their unique strengths. Furthermore, many are looking to the expanded learning field to address unfinished learning and opportunity gaps across unique groups of youth; in particular, communities of color were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may be experiencing the academic consequences of school and program closures more acutely. These youth can be respectfully served by improving equity and inclusivity in programs through culturally responsive practices. Supporting the unique experiences of youth and their families through culturally responsive practices could look like hiring staff members who reflect local diversity, offering staff training to ensure they are prepared to engage with youth and families, improving the accessibility of activities, environments, and communication, designing activities that are meaningful and relevant to participants, maintaining a safe and inclusive program culture, and co-creating program features with youth and families.¹¹⁴ Moving forward, it is imperative to reach, engage, and retain youth most needing expanded learning support.

5

Invest in evaluation for learning and continuous quality improvement (CQI).

Continuous Quality Improvement is a mechanism for the ongoing and iterative use of inquiry, experimentation, and data-driven reflection to improve practice.¹¹⁵ Effective CQI cycles need data, both quantitative and qualitative. Currently, there are few systemic supports for expanded learning programs in California to generate and access actionable information about their



services, such as program quality, youth outcomes, family/caregiver satisfaction, and staff engagement. Required reports to the CDE are limited to program participation, attendance, and CQI indicators. Publicly funded programs may independently choose to invest in collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data to support CQI, limiting the ability of smaller districts or those with fewer discretionary funds to gather this information. As the expanded learning space in California grows, there is an even greater need for state-level evaluation data and systems that measure expanded learning program quality and associated youth outcomes. Although expanded learning programs are required to submit information about their site-level CQI efforts, this information is not being analyzed nor shared in support of state-level discussions about program quality. Additionally, California should consider funding more widespread access to fee-for-service CQI and evaluation data tools, so that all publicly funded expanded learning programs can access actionable information. Future evaluation efforts in expanded learning should be designed with simplicity in mind, consider the staff's capacity to engage in the evaluation process, assess experiences and outcomes that are aligned with the program's intended models, and offer actionable findings to inform CQI. Now that the state has grown access, there is an excellent opportunity to support program quality at scale – robust and meaningful engagement in CQI can be the mechanism for achieving this central goal.

6

Fund and conduct additional research and evaluation studies to inform a more nuanced understanding of how the benefits of expanded learning are promoted.

The expanded learning field benefits from a rich body of research; future studies can build upon this foundation to further enhance our collective understanding of what works. First, an estimate of the return-on-investment for expanded learning in California would underscore the value of significant public investments in youth. Second, the expanded learning field needs a more sophisticated understanding of the programmatic conditions that are most likely to benefit youth, especially young people from historically marginalized communities. Third, we see an opportunity for an analysis of Proposition 49 from a policy change lens to clarify the lessons that other advocates can apply to their communities.

7

Partner with schools, communities, and other youth development organizations to build comprehensive support systems for youth thriving.

A community learning approach acknowledges that learning and development occur in all settings and spaces, including school, home, expanded learning programs, libraries, museums, and more. Consistent with ecological system theories, our ability to create bridges and synergies across these spaces is essential to leveraging our combined resources to support California’s youth. These synergies proved helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many schools were closed, and families struggled to meet their children's needs. At this time, expanded learning programs shifted their typical offerings to provide food, COVID screenings, virtual learning resources, and more to meet student needs. In some cities, expanded learning programs became community hubs where children and youth had a safe and nurturing space to engage in virtual schooling with adult supports; this was particularly important for children with parents who were essential workers. As the future of expanded learning unfolds, it will be necessary for all those working in the youth development space to collaborate and innovate to build a coordinated, comprehensive system that supports youth thriving.



Author's Note

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References & End Notes

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