California Department of Education
Report to the Legislature, Legislative Analyst's Office, and the Governor: Characteristics of Schools and Students Participating in Expanded Learning Programs 2023 Report

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Description: Senate Bill (SB) 1221 (Hancock), Statutes of 2014, Section 9, and California *Education Code* (*EC*) Section 8428 require that the California Department of Education (CDE) report to the Legislature biennially on the type and quality of its After School Education and Safety (ASES) and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) programs and the characteristics of the students participating in them.

Authority: California *EC* Section 8428
Recipient: Legislature
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Contents

Executive Summary

The California Department of Education (CDE) oversees the most extensive system of high-quality expanded learning programs (ELPs) in the nation through three initiatives: (1) the state-funded After School Education and Safety (ASES) program for students in grades kindergarten through nine; (2) the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program for grades kindergarten through nine and the After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) program for grades nine through twelve; and (3) the state-funded Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Program established in July of 2021 for students in grades kindergarten through six. In the 2020–21 school year, prior to the establishment of the ELO Program, California's ASES and 21st CCLC programs alone operated at 4,316 sites and served 447,149 students in grades kindergarten through twelve.

Senate Bill 1221, Chapter 370, Statutes of 2014, signed by the governor on September 16, 2014, added Section 8428 to the California *Education Code* (*EC*), requiring the CDE to submit a biennial report to the California State Legislature regarding the type, distribution, and quality of California's ASES and 21st CCLC ELPs and the characteristics of the students participating in them, including participation numbers and demographics, program attendance, academic performance, behavior, and skill development. As it is currently, this statute does not include the collection or evaluation of ELO Program data. *EC* Section 8483(c)(1)(A) identifies the programs target populations as socioeconomically disadvantaged students and homeless and foster youths; however, as this report will show, California ELPs also serve students of color.[1]

The 2017 Biennial Report, the first report submitted in compliance with this statute, summarized analyses of the 2015–16 school year data, which had become available through the CDE's improved data collection efforts. The analyses compared schools that received CDE grant funding for California ELPs (grantees) to schools that did not receive ELP funding (nongrantee schools).[2] The analyses also compared students participating in California ELPs to nonparticipating students. The evidence documented in that report indicated that California ELPs served two of the programs' target populations—socioeconomically disadvantaged students and homeless students, as well as students of color—and had a positive impact on an important outcome indicator: school attendance. Data on foster youths was not included in the 2015–16 school year data file and thus was not reported on.

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[1] In the 2017, 2021, and 2023 Biennial Reports, the term "students of color" is being used synonymously with "non-White students." Students of color include those who are African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, Filipino, and of two or more races from DataSource.

[2] California ELPs may operate a before school component of a program, an after school component, or both the before and after school components of a program awarded by the Expanded Learning Division (EXLD).

The 2021 Biennial Report summarized analyses of the 2018–19 school-year data (Wendt, Austin, and Lewis 2021). Improvements to data collection efforts resulted in enhancements to data quality, enabling more detailed data analyses. Specifically, in addition to showing that the CDE continued to provide funding to ELPs that served the target student populations—socioeconomically disadvantaged students, homeless students, and foster youths, as well as students of color—it showed the statistical impact on school attendance: participants attended an average of up to 1.5 percent more school days compared to their nonparticipating peers, findings that aligned with results from the previous report.

The 2023 Biennial Report includes a comprehensive historical overview of ELPs in California. Following this historical overview, the report presents findings from the 2020–21 school year, including a comparison of results across the 2017, 2021, and 2023 Biennial Reports. The 2023 Biennial Report also includes information regarding the impacts of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic as they relate to ELPs in California and the obstacles, efforts, and personal experiences of ELP staff, students, and families. Among the countless impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was the disruption in collection of student education data, specifically for the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years. Consequently, student outcome measures were not included in the 2023 Biennial Report analysis. To help compensate for the absence of quantitative data, qualitative interviews and a focus group were conducted with a sample of California ELP directors (administrative personnel who generally oversee the entire grant), site coordinators (direct services providers to program staff and students), and youth participants to provide insight on the importance of California ELPs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on data from the 2020–21 school year, the results from the 2023 Biennial Report revealed the following key findings:

- As intended, schools that received ELP funding served socioeconomically disadvantaged students, homeless students, foster youths, and students of color. Almost one-third of students (30.9 percent) in grantee schools were also English learners.

- Within grantee schools, an average of 18.5 percent of students participated in California ELPs. Program participants were representative of the larger student body.

- California ELPs played a critical role in supporting students most in need by providing innovative, high-quality virtual and in-person programming that met the ever-changing needs of students and families throughout the 2020–21 school year.

Report Purpose

SB 1221 (Hancock), Chapter 370, Statutes of 2014, signed by the governor on September 16, 2014, added Section 8428 to the California *Education Code* (*EC*) requiring the California Department of Education (CDE) to submit a biennial report to the Legislature regarding the type and quality of the After School Education and Safety (ASES) and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs and the characteristics of the students participating in them. *EC* Section 8483(c)(1)(A) identifies the programs' target populations as socioeconomically disadvantaged students and homeless and foster youths; however, as this report will show, California ELPs also serve and have a positive impact on students of color. Specifically, the CDE biennial report must provide the following information about these programs and program participants, based on currently available data:

- number, geographical distribution, and types of sites and grantees
- pupil demographics and characteristics
- pupil program and school day attendance
- statewide test and assessment scores
- pupil behavior changes and skill development
- quality of the programs

The CDE submitted the 2017 Biennial Report to the Legislature in December 2018. Due to improvements in data collection efforts leading up to the 2021 Biennial Report, the CDE was able, for the first time, to report detailed characteristics of youths served by ASES and 21st CCLC and ASSETs grantees. While the 2023 Biennial Report includes reporting on those same youth characteristics, poor data quality resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique set of methodological challenges that likely impacted the findings presented in this report.

Among the countless impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was the disruption of collection of student education data, specifically for the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years. While student outcome data may have been collected by some schools and California expanded learning programs (ELPs) during this time, these measures, including three of the main student outcomes analyzed in the 2017 and 2021 Biennial Reports (student attendance, student discipline incidents, and student achievement), were unreliable given school building closures, online instruction, and the overall disruption to education during these pandemic years. For this reason, student outcome measures were not included in the 2023 Biennial Report analyses. Due to the absence of quantitative data, qualitative data was collected to assess the functioning of ELPs during the pandemic. This data was collected via a sample of California ELP program directors and site coordinators and a focus group with ELP youth participants.

Based on data from the 2020–21 school year, the results from the 2023 Biennial Report revealed the following key findings:

- As intended, schools that received ELP funding served socioeconomically disadvantaged students, homeless students, and foster youths, as well as students of color. Almost one-third of students (30.9 percent) in grantee schools were also English learners.

- Within grantee schools, an average of 18.5 percent of students participated in California ELPs. Program participants were demographically representative of the larger student body.

- California ELPs played a critical role in supporting students most in need by providing innovative, high-quality virtual and in-person programming that met the ever-changing needs of students and families throughout the 2020–21 school year.

The purpose of the 2023 Biennial Report is to provide an update using the most recently available data from the 2020–21 school year. The report starts with a comprehensive historical overview of ELPs in California. Following the historical overview, the report details findings from the 2020–21 school year and compares these findings with those from the 2017, 2021, and 2023 Biennial Reports.

The Importance of Expanded Learning Programs

Historically, the term “after school” has been applied not just to programs that occur after the school day but also to programs that occur before school, between school terms, and during the summer. This lack of specificity led to the adoption of the term “expanded learning” to refer to this broader array of programs. Regardless of the label, a common trait that keeps these programs from being simply a collection of extracurricular activities is that they are, by intent, regular, structured, or semi structured programs with the minimum goal of providing youths with a safe, supervised environment beyond the school day.

Research shows that youths with unstructured and unsupervised time before school, after school, during intersession periods, and during the summer are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including substance use and criminal actions, and are less likely to be safe and to do well academically in school (Budd et al. 2020; D’Agostino et al. 2019; Kremer et al. 2015; Lee and Vandell 2015; Peterson 2013; Vandell 2013).

Historical Overview

The origins of ELPs date back to the early twentieth century, as the implementation of compulsory education and child labor laws generated a greater need for a safe and supervised place for youths to be when school ended. In the last decades of the

twentieth century, interrelated developments related to socioeconomics, education, culture, and family fueled calls for the expansion of ELPs, both in number and in purpose. These developments included

- growth of women participating in the labor force and of single-parent families, resulting in a rising number of “latchkey” youths under self-care after school;
- concerns about the decline in academic achievement and graduation rates, particularly the widening disparities across racial and ethnic groups;
- escalation of adolescent involvement in risk behaviors, such as substance use, early sexual activity, crime, and violence—especially among unsupervised youths in the hours between the end of school and when parents returned home from work; and
- research findings highlighting the ineffectiveness of current prevention approaches and the importance of providing youths with developmental supports (such as positive adult relationships and opportunities for meaningful participation) and building social–emotional competencies (such as interpersonal skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making) that promote resilience and positive educational, behavioral, and health outcomes.

In response to these developments, a transformation in the perception and goals of ELPs occurred by the end of the twentieth century. ELPs were rightfully perceived as an important means of addressing these developments by helping to support working families, reduce involvement in substance use and other risk behaviors, improve safety and lower victimization, and provide additional academic and developmental enrichment. In 1994, the federal government’s 21st CCLC program legislation prioritized ELPs as a way of assisting high-poverty, low-performing schools. These programs served as a model for expanding the learning that occurs in school by offering tutoring, homework assistance, and other more exploratory educational supports.

At the same time, ELPs were highly influenced by the youth development framework, which emphasizes the need to offer developmental supports, meaningful opportunities for youth participation, and the development of social–emotional skills. These areas were not the primary focus of the traditional school system.

Although ELPs vary in scope, activities, and strategies, the overarching goal of the field today is not only to keep youths safe but also to provide a structured place that offers educational and developmental support. Typically, high-quality ELPs aim to provide positive activities and interactions with adults, peers, and role models; to foster a sense of value and connectedness with students’ schools and communities; and to build the academic and personal skills and values that youths need to succeed in school, career, and life to become productive, contributing citizens. These goals and program characteristics have guided the work of California ELPs.

What Research Tells Us

Positive Youth Benefits

A growing body of research finds that high-quality ELPs that purposely provide academic and developmentally enriching services have positively impacted a wide range of student outcomes, including

- school attendance and academic motivation;
- academic work habits, homework completion, English language development, and academic achievement (such as student grades and test scores); and
- social–emotional development, behavior, and discipline.

In a review of 68 studies, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) found that certain types of ELPs were associated with significant improvements in school connectedness, academic indicators (such as test scores, grades, and attendance), and positive social behavior, along with reductions in problem behaviors. These effective programs focused on sequenced activities to explicitly teach and actively engage students in learning social–emotional and other skills.

Further, in a series of studies, Deborah Vandell and colleagues have demonstrated that high-quality ELPs hold promise for closing the achievement gap (Vandell 2013, 2014; Vandell, Reisner, and Pierce 2007; Vandell et al. 2020). In a study of programs serving low-income, ethnically diverse children, students who regularly attended a high-quality ELP alone or combined with extracurricular activities demonstrated higher academic performance, improved work habits, and enhanced task persistence. Additionally, they exhibited reduced aggression toward peers and less misconduct compared to children whose after school hours combined unsupervised time with extracurricular activities (Vandell et al. 2020).

Participation in ELPs has also been linked to pro-social outcomes such as positive social and behavioral outcomes. Examples of these outcomes include improved social skills with peers, pro-social behavior, student engagement, intrinsic motivation, concentrated effort, and positive states of mind. Participation has also been linked to reductions in aggression, misconduct (such as skipping school and getting into fights), and substance use (Augustine, Smith, and Witherspoon 2022; Marttinen et al. 2020; Vandell 2013). Vandell (2013, 4) concludes the following:

> These findings are significant because the social and emotional outcomes that are fostered through high-quality after school programs lay the psychological groundwork for the kinds of cognitive processes that are required for mastery of academic content knowledge and skills to apply that knowledge.

A groundbreaking compendium (Peterson 2013) of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 prominent researchers and thought leaders demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to

- promote student success in college and career readiness;
- build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;
- foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and
- engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.

The culmination of this extensive body of evidence has brought Peterson, Fowler, and Dunham (2013, 4) to a resounding conclusion:

> Now we know: quality after school and summer learning opportunities work. We know that quality ELPs are associated with increased academic performance, increased attendance in school, significant improvement in behavior and social and emotional development, and greater opportunities for hands-on learning in important areas that are not typically available during the school day.

McCombs, Whitaker, and Yoo (2017) found evidence that multipurpose programs that were deliberately focused on social–emotional skill development were linked to reduced risk behaviors. Additionally, programs specifically targeting academic instruction and skill development can improve student achievement and youths' feelings of safety. The study concluded that "OST [out-of-school time] programs are generally effective at producing the primary outcomes that would be expected based on their content and design. … [We] consider these programs worthy of continued public investment" (McCombs, Whitaker, and Yoo 2017, 2).

While research using data from before the COVID-19 pandemic period demonstrates the positive effects of high-quality ELPs on a range of youth outcomes, more recently, empirical studies using data from the COVID-19 pandemic period are reporting difficulty in drawing conclusions from quantitative results. Students missed school for reasons that are not always specified, causing attendance data during the pandemic to be "spotty" or "nonexistent" (Cohodes et al. 2022). Losen et al. (2022) caution that student discipline rates reported as annual totals during the pandemic are artificially low and need to be adjusted to reflect school closures later in the year—a methodology that might yield better but imprecise or inaccurate results.

Because all standardized testing was suspended in the 2019–20 school year, very few studies have been able to measure the effect of ELP participation on academic outcomes. These challenges continued in the 2020–21 school year, as some California students returned to the classroom in person while others continued learning virtually. As a result, only 736,192 of the state's 3 million students have assessment data available through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System

(CALPADS) in 2020–21. While many schools made efforts to return to pre-pandemic standardized testing, other measures of student outcomes from the 2020–21 school year may also be unreliable given the wide variety of decisions made by local school boards to suspend the collection of administrative data for reasons related to hybrid learning and quarantine periods. The absence and unknown quality of assessment data present unique challenges in the use of panel data (Feller and Stuart 2021), which uses variation across time to estimate the effects of initiatives such as California ELPs.

Although these methodological challenges introduced limitations to the type of research conducted, those empirical studies published during this period found positive impacts of youth ELP participation on social–emotional skills such as self-control and assertion skills (de Oliveira Major, Palos, and Silva 2023). While older meta-analyses often identified outcomes primarily related to academic achievement and other school-related behaviors, a 2023 meta-analysis of studies from 2014 through 2019 investigating updated literature and a wider range of outcomes and moderators showed that ELPs have a small yet significant effect on positive youth outcomes across various developmental domains including social–emotional/interpersonal skills, mental and behavioral health, and identity development (Christensen et al. 2023).

Improving Opportunity for Underserved Youths

Safety, connectedness, caring adult relationships, high expectations, and participatory opportunities are fundamental developmental supports that have a profound influence on school success, overall well-being, and whether youths thrive, especially in communities challenged by adversity and marginalization. ELPs are one method to address the opportunity gap because they provide additional educational and developmental enrichment.

High-quality ELPs offer vital support and opportunities for students to succeed and thrive, filling gaps that may not be fully addressed during the school day. This support is particularly crucial for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, foster youths, homeless students, and students of color who often face significant academic achievement disparities compared to their peers. Notably, nationwide a disproportionate number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students are also students of color, highlighting the interconnectedness of these disparities (Henry, Votruba-Drazal, and Miller).

At a national level, it has been estimated that youths from higher-income families are twice as likely to access enrichment and skill-building opportunities compared to those from lower-income families (Loesch 2018; Putnam, Frederick, and Snellman 2012). Data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) consistently reveals lower levels of school safety, connectedness, and developmental support reported by African American, Native American or Alaska Native, and Hispanic or Latino students compared to their White and Asian peers. Moreover, schools serving predominantly African American and Hispanic or Latino students tend to have lower overall positive school climate ratings than those serving mostly White and Asian students, even after adjusting for student socioeconomic status (Austin, Nakamoto, and Bailey 2010; Voight 2013).

Further exploring this opportunity gap, a survey conducted in 2016 documented a high need and demand for high-quality ELPs in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Parents in these communities reported that ELPs provide essential services that their communities otherwise lacked: a safe, supportive, and enriching environment; enhanced opportunities for physical activity, extra learning, and homework assistance; and healthy snacks and meals (Afterschool Alliance 2016a, 2016b). More recent research found that one reason parents enrolled their child in ELPs during the COVID-19 pandemic was related to their child's safety (Afterschool Alliance 2022a; de Oliveira Major, Palos, and Silva 2023).

In their article, Auger, Pierce, and Vandell (2013) state that the array of services offered by ELPs that focus on both educational and developmental support helps explain why consistent participation in ELPs closed an achievement gap in math between low-income and high-income students in grades kindergarten through five.

Promoting Positive Youth Development

Research has also particularly stressed the importance of all youth-serving adults and systems implementing strategies that promote positive youth development, protective factors, and social–emotional learning (SEL). For example, a report by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2023) recommended integrating SEL and academics through inquiry-based learning, an approach that invites students to engage in critical thinking and reflection around a topic. By doing so, it simultaneously supports students' academic and long-term success as well as their coping, resiliency, and emotional regulation skills. A consensus has emerged within educational research and the science of learning and development that both processes (learning and development)

> are shaped by interactions among the environmental factors, relationships, and learning opportunities [that] youth experience, both in and out of school, along with physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional processes that influence one another—both biologically and functionally—as they enable or undermine learning. (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy and the Brookings Institution Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity 2015)

The central implication for education is that learning "is optimally supported when all aspects of the educational environment support all of the dimensions of children's development"—that is, when schools holistically support the whole child's social, emotional, and cognitive development and their health and well-being (Darling-Hammond et al. 2019, 98). Increasingly, schools are focusing on fostering positive school climates and conditions that build strong, developmentally supportive relationships and a sense of safety, equity, respect, and connectedness (social bonding); incorporating SEL strategies; and providing personalized opportunities and responses that address each individual child's needs, interests, and culture. In short, research and professional organizations indicate that it is not only possible but necessary for schools to support both productive learning and development for all youths, enable all children to overcome any existing adversities, and find positive

pathways to adulthood (American Institutes for Research 2019; Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development 2019; Cantor et al. 2019; Darling-Hammond et al. 2019; Osher et al. 2020).

Supporting the learning and development of the whole child is particularly important because the effects are cumulative—the more youths receive support throughout their lives, the more likely they will experience positive outcomes. ELPs have also been identified as particularly well-suited for fostering support, arguably as an even more effective delivery system than schools, precisely because they have expertise in and a long history of prioritizing youth development and addressing the needs of the whole child as a central part of their mission (Afterschool Alliance 2018, 2019; American Institutes for Research 2019; Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development 2018; Austin, Wendt, and Klinicka 2021; Benavides et al. 2020; Deutsch et al. 2017; McDowell Group 2018; Smith, Witherspoon, and Osgood 2017). Surveys that have examined public attitudes toward ELPs consistently list these factors among the most important perceived benefits, especially within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Afterschool Alliance 2014, 2016a, 2016b).

Social Return on Investment

In addition to a range of positive student benefits from ELPs, there are wide-ranging socioeconomic benefits as well. ELPs benefit working families while also saving taxpayer dollars by improving academic performance, developing skills, lowering juvenile crime and welfare costs, and increasing students' future earning potential (Eisenberg and Hutton 2016).

Based on findings from studies conducted in states including California, Georgia, Maryland, Oklahoma, and Vermont, Afterschool Alliance estimates that every $1 invested in ELPs saves $3 by increasing youths' earning potential, improving kids' performance at school, and reducing crime and welfare costs (Afterschool Alliance 2023a).

High Public Support

The multiple benefits of ELP participation explain why there is such strong and broad public support for ELPs and why California voters in 2002 approved Proposition 49, a major expansion of ELP funding. In a 2014 survey (Afterschool Alliance 2014), 84 percent of parents nationally, and 86 percent in California, supported public funding for ELPs. Eight in 10 parents nationally agreed that ELPs helped working parents keep their jobs. This support cut across political, racial, and ethnic lines.

A Phi Delta Kappa (2017) public poll found strong agreement that schools should provide support outside of the typical school day, with 77 percent strongly supporting schools providing ELPs. Moreover, 70 to 80 percent of respondents felt that schools

should be doing more to help students in two specific areas that high-quality ELPs target: developing interpersonal skills and participating in extracurricular activities.

In a 2020 study by the Afterschool Alliance, parents reported that ELPs are a lifeline for working families, and 77 percent of parents agree that Congress should fund ELPs to serve students when there is a need for virtual school days. Moreover, support for public funding of ELPs is strong and bipartisan, with 91 percent Democratic support, 87 percent Independent support, and 85 percent Republican support. A more recent survey in 2022 by the Afterschool Alliance found that support for public funding for ELPs has reached an all-time high (Afterschool Alliance 2023b).

High Unmet Need

A national survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance in 2022 highlights the high unmet need for ELPs following the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey indicates that while ELP participants report high levels of satisfaction, for every child in an ELP, there are four more who are waiting for an available program (Afterschool Alliance 2022a).

The Afterschool Alliance estimated that in 2022, there were 24.6 million children nationwide who were not in an ELP but would be enrolled if a program had been available to them, a number higher than estimates generated from surveys conducted prior to COVID-19. Further, this unmet need is highest for Hispanic or Latino (60 percent) and African American (54 percent) students. In a companion national survey of after school and summer program providers in 2022, the Afterschool Alliance found that 80 percent of program providers were concerned that children in their community need expanded learning programming but are unable to access it (Afterschool Alliance 2022b).

The Features of High-Quality Programs

High-quality ELPs can have multiple benefits for youths and society, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities lacking in resources, resulting in a high level of program appreciation and calls for program expansion. A large and growing body of research shows that the programs that have the most positive outcomes are those that do not simply provide a safe, supervised place for students beyond the end of the typical school day (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan 2010; Little, Wimer, and Weiss 2008; McCombs, Whitaker, and Yoo 2017; Vandell 2014; Washington State Department of Early Learning, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction 2017). Successful programs intentionally aim to enhance the learning that occurs in the classroom and provide youths with the developmental supports, opportunities, and skills that are central to success in school, career, and life. This includes enhancing social–emotional and twenty-first-century competencies, a sense of personal empowerment, and relationships and connectedness to adults. Successful programs do not simply “extend” the hours of youth supervision beyond the school bell but aim to expand what youths learn and experience and build the competencies they need to succeed with clear, intentional programming that targets specific outcomes (American Institutes for

Research 2019; Austin, Wendt, and Klinicka 2021; Brel-Fournier 2022; McCombs, Whitaker, and Yoo 2017).

Research points to three interrelated implementation factors that are critical for creating positive settings and outcomes: (1) access to and sustained participation in the program; (2) quality staffing, including appropriate supervision and structure and well-prepared staff; and (3) strong partnerships between the program and the schools and other places in which students are learning (Little, Wimer, and Weiss 2008).

The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development explains that "every young person needs access to high-quality after school programs that work in partnership with schools and community-based organizations to address the needs of the whole child and give them the social, emotional, and cognitive skills they need to succeed in school and beyond" (2018, as quoted in Austin, Wendt, and Klinicka 2021, 6). The California Partnership for Children and Youth (2017, 2) emphasized that expanded learning and school day programs "can and must work together to ensure that our investments result in real and equitable gains in young people's success … by consistently and coherently prioritizing students' SEL and character development."

Philp and Gill (2020, 9) even called for expansion of these supports in ELPs as a corrective to the prior overemphasis on academics, especially for disadvantaged youths:

> An increasing focus on academics in after-school programs overlooks the substantial potential for such spaces to support populations of students who are also most likely to disengage from traditional schooling, including low-income students of color. This misplaced focus further ignores significant disparities in the types of services offered after-school. For wealthier students, after-school programs often serve as enrichment experiences in preparation for college and career, not as extended forms of child care or schooling. All students deserve access to after-school spaces that support individual interest and identity development and link them to the social resources that can promote upward mobility. Given their non-academic benefits, we recommend that policy makers [*sic*] and researchers reframe their understanding of after-school programs to support more equitable outcomes for marginalized youth.

Analyzing 2016–18 data from the CHKS, Austin, Wendt, and Klinicka (2021) further found that, both in middle schools and in high schools, respondents who participated in California ELPs reported receiving more developmental supports in their schools than nonparticipants. The differences were generally greater among high school students. Students who attended ELPs reported significantly higher levels of meaningful participation in school as well as greater levels of school connectedness, caring adult relationships, and high expectations. In other words, California's ELPs appear to have a crossover effect on student perceptions of, or experiences with, protective factors in the school environment.

The large body of research on ELP quality that has been presented throughout this section guides the CDE's support and oversight of its ELPs. Recognition of the importance of these quality factors underlies the adoption by the CDE of the term "expanded learning" rather than "after school" and the establishment of a division within the CDE. The Expanded Learning Division's (EXLD's) purpose for using the term "expanded learning," in lieu of "after school," is to intentionally communicate that the goal of the state's programs is to expand the learning of youths both in hours and in nature. This is the vision captured in the CDE's definition of "expanded learning," included in *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.

The CDE EXLD, working with the California Afterschool Network (CAN) and other leaders in the field, identified the 12 most important research-based quality standards, summarized in Exhibit 1 below, and provided guidance and technical assistance (TA) to its grantees on their implementation. To help California narrow its persistent achievement and opportunity gaps, California ELPs specifically target, and successfully reach, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, homeless students, foster youths, and students of color to provide them with learning and developmental enrichment.

California's Commitment to High-Quality Expanded Learning Programs

> [California ELPs] are created through partnerships between schools and local community resources to provide literacy, academic enrichment and safe constructive alternatives for students in transitional kindergarten through ninth grade (K–9). (CDE EXLD 2023, para. 1)

While the primary focus of ELPs is on academic enrichment, the CDE also emphasizes the importance of fostering positive youth development and well-being in achieving school and life success. California ELPs are further focused on providing high-quality services to socioeconomically disadvantaged and low-performing students who are most in need of these enrichment opportunities.

The commitment of the State of California and the CDE to promote high-quality expanded learning dates back to the establishment and funding by the Legislature of the Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program (BASLSNPP 2002). In 2002, the BASLSNPP funded school-based before and after school programs for students in grades kindergarten through nine that, working in partnership with city, county, and community organizations, aimed to improve student

academic performance and offer students a safe and enriching environment. The first funding ($50 million) from the state budget for school-based after school programs resulted from three bills passed in 1998: AB 2284 (Torlakson), AB 1428 (Ortiz), and SB 1756 (Lockyer).

In 2002, this commitment was extraordinarily boosted by two milestone events: (1) the passage of Proposition 49, the ASES Act of 2002, and (2) the transference of the federal 21st CCLC program administration to the state, which cumulatively amounted to $122 million in state funding.

The After School Education and Safety Program

In 2001, an estimated 42,200 children were on waiting lists for existing ELPs in California. In response, voters approved Proposition 49 in 2002, which provided $550 million in annual state funding (released in 2006) for ELPs in elementary and middle schools and replaced the BASLSNPP with the new ASES program. Proposition 49 represented the first attempt by advocates of a particular program to earmark funds within the Proposition 98 general state education funding guarantee, and its passage reflected public awareness of the value of and need for expanding ELPs.

The ASES program, as administered by the CDE, allocates funding to eligible entities including school districts; county offices of education; the California School for the Blind; the California School for the Deaf; direct-funded charter schools; and city, county, or nonprofit organizations (in partnership with, and with the approval of, at least one LEA) that serve some combination of students in kindergarten through ninth grade. The purpose of this program is to create incentives for establishing locally driven before and after school enrichment programs during school days and summer, intersession, or vacation days to provide academic and literacy support and safe, constructive alternatives for youths. The key focus lies in fostering partnerships between schools and communities. Priority for funding is directed toward schools where at least 50 percent of students qualify for the federal Free or Reduced-Price Meals (FRPM) program (*EC* Sections 8482–8484.6). Each ASES program is required to incorporate two essential elements:

- an educational and literacy element that provides tutoring or homework assistance designed to help students meet state standards in one or more core academic subjects (reading and language arts, mathematics, history and social studies, or science)

- an educational enrichment element that reinforces and complements the school's academic program, such as fine arts, prevention activities, and career and technical education; an emphasis is also placed on providing opportunities for physical activity and a healthy snack or meal

The ASES programs are tasked with collaborating with school site principals and staff, which can lead to the seamless integration of these elements into the school's

curriculum-, instructional-, and learning-support activities. Furthermore, ASES programs must address local student needs and interests. It is important that these programs align with, and not repeat, what students experience during the school day.[3]

21st Century Community Learning Centers Program

On January 8, 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB 2002) went into effect, which transferred the authority for the administration of the 21st CCLC program to state education agencies. In fiscal year (FY) 2020–21, the CDE received approximately $148 million dollars in funding for its program (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education 2023).

The 21st CCLC program specifically targets students in high-poverty and low-performing schools.[4] In California, funding is reserved for schools eligible for Title I, Part A (Title I) schoolwide programs or those that serve a high percentage of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Priority is given to schools designated as in need of intervention and support (also Title I) to improve student academic achievement and other outcomes. Grantees of the 21st CCLC program are primarily charged with enriching academic opportunities with an aim to close the achievement gap. They are required to implement research-based strategies to improve academic achievement and meet state and local academic standards in core content areas such as reading and math. Additionally, they must provide enrichment services that complement and reinforce the academic program as well as offer educational services to the families of participating children.

As part of the state's 21st CCLC program, the reach of the CDE's expanded learning funding extends into high schools with the After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) program (AB 1984, After School Programs: High School Pupils 2002). Because California provided a large amount of funding via the ASES program to students in grades kindergarten through nine, the state was unique in earmarking half of its 21st CCLC funds specifically for the design, development, and evaluation of high school programs. Initially (beginning in 2003), the CDE awarded 43 grants—one-year grants renewable for five years—for programs at 57 high schools.[5]

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[3] The ASES program description (background information, program objectives, and requirements) can be accessed on the CDE Funding Opportunities web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/fundingop.asp#asesand21stcclcrfa.

[4] More information about the 21st CCLC program can be accessed on the US Department of Education Programs web page at https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/21st-century-community-learning-centers/.

[5] The CDE 21st CCLC program funding chart can be accessed on the CDE's 21st CCLC Elementary/Middle and 21st CCLC ASSETs Funding Results web page at Funding Results: 21st CCLC Elementary/Middle & 21st CCLC ASSETs (CA Dept of Education).

The passage of SB 638 (Before and After School Programs 2006) created additional funding for ASES, 21st CCLC, and ASSETs programs. The release of state funding for the ASES program alongside the federal 21st CCLC program fostered an explosion in the number and variety of ELPs in California. California's investment was more than all other states combined, making the state a leader in the nation, as it continues to be to this date. In 2008, the combined funding from the three programs enabled the CDE to support grantees in more than 4,000 schools.

Development of Expanded Learning Program Supports and Standards

In 2011, the newly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI), Tom Torlakson, elevated ELPs as a statewide strategy aimed at fostering academic achievement, promoting positive youth development, and narrowing the state's persistent achievement gap. This new emphasis was articulated as follows:

> It is widely agreed that many students need more time for learning and that additional time for learning needs to happen in engaging and relevant ways. High-quality after school and summer programs can be particularly effective in engaging students who have not succeeded in school because these programs offer them a different learning environment that caters to their interests, are staffed by people who can pay close attention to relationships, can focus on project-based activities, and can often work more closely with families. After school and summer learning opportunities play an important and unique role by providing learning opportunities that are active, collaborative and meaningful, that support mastery, and that expand young people's horizons. Research on California ELPs has shown positive impacts on school day attendance, reduced high-school dropout rates, reduced juvenile crime, and increased academic success. (Torlakson 2011, 19)

The CDE intensified its efforts to raise awareness of the importance of expanded learning while providing support for staff professional development and for program quality improvement and accountability. The SSPI encouraged school district superintendents to actively seek out and support programs that engage students in a year-round cycle of learning, including after school, intersession, and summer programs. To highlight the significance of these programs and exert greater leadership, quality oversight, and accountability, the SSPI established a new After School Division (ASD) that later changed its name to the EXLD.

Strategic Planning Process

In 2012, the ASD embarked on a strategic planning process with the immediate goal of developing and implementing a plan to enhance systems and programs, ultimately maximizing outcomes for children, youths, families, schools, and communities. This integrated and collaborative process was initiated in March 2012, bringing together CDE staff and field interest holders to identify optimal approaches for improving the lives of

California's youths. Drawing from insights gathered from over 450 interest holders—including ASD staff, field representatives from kindergarten through grade twelve education, and TA providers—the ASD unveiled the *Statement of Strategic Direction: Strategic Plan, 2013–15* in April 2013. This was followed a year later by further implementation guidelines in the form of *A Vision for Expanded Learning in California: Strategic Plan, 2014–16*.

At the end of 2017, just after the ASD became the EXLD, the division conducted a thorough review of *A Vision for Expanded Learning in California: Strategic Plan, 2014–16* and implementation efforts to date, identifying work completed, in progress, or unaddressed, as well as opportunities to apply a continuous quality improvement (CQI) lens to some of the previously completed work. An aggressive work plan for 2018 was developed to address outstanding work. In addition, recognizing that much of the work set out in the original strategic plan had already been completed or was nearing completion, the EXLD launched a new strategic planning process with field interest holders, culminating in the release of the Strategic Plan 2.0 (SP2.0), which identified goals and objectives for four outlined strategic initiative areas:

- **Quality Programs.** Deepen and broaden supports so that participants have equitable access to consistently high-quality programs.
- **Policy and Grants Administration.** Create or change policy guidelines, program requirements, and system elements to increase program sustainability and quality.
- **Collaborative Partnerships.** Promote collaborative partnerships to support the development and sustainability of programs that are an integral part of the education system.
- **Workforce.** Develop a diverse expanded learning workforce that is prepared to support the growth of children and youths and deliver high-quality programming.

Fostering Quality Standards Implementation

Based on research on program quality and advice from field experts, the CDE, in partnership with the CAN, identified 12 Quality Standards published in CDE's *Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California: Creating and Implementing a Shared Vision of Quality* (CDE and CAN 2014b). This publication includes descriptions of what each quality standard should look like at the programmatic, staff, and participant levels and how the quality standards should be implemented by California's ASES, 21st CCLC, and ASSETs programs to guide CQI efforts at the local level.

The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California are intended to be used not as a compliance tool but to provide the CDE and field leaders a shared vision of quality. They serve as a well-articulated framework with explicit expectations for program improvement and guidance on the implementation of its standards. This includes informing the CDE's funding and monitoring decisions regarding programs, guiding

program providers in assessing their own initiatives, and helping parents and students in identifying and choosing high-quality programs.

The identification of the 12 Quality Standards was heavily influenced by five interrelated Learning in Afterschool and Summer Principles. These five principles were derived from research (Piha, Cruz, and Karosic 2012) on brain development, learning, and the importance of social–emotional and workforce skills for success in college and career. These principles require the following:

- learning that is active (hands-on)
- learning that is collaborative (for example, derived from team learning)
- learning that is meaningful
- learning that supports mastery
- learning that expands horizons (provides exposure to new experiences, ideas, and cultures)

Exhibit 1. Twelve Essential Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs in California

1. **Safe and Supportive Environment.** The program provides a safe and nurturing environment that supports the developmental, social–emotional, and physical needs of all students.
2. **Active and Engaged Learning.** Program design and activities reflect active, meaningful, and engaging learning methods that promote collaboration and expand student horizons.
3. **Skill Building.** The program maintains high expectations for all students, intentionally links program goals and curricula with twenty-first century skills, and provides activities to help students achieve mastery.
4. **Youth Voice and Leadership.** The program provides and supports intentional opportunities for students to play a meaningful role in program design and implementation and provides ongoing access to authentic leadership roles.
5. **Healthy Choices and Behaviors.** The program promotes student well-being through opportunities to learn about and practice balanced nutrition, physical activity, and other healthy choices in an environment that supports a healthy lifestyle.
6. **Diversity, Access, and Equity.** The program creates an environment in which students experience values that embrace diversity and equity regardless of race,

color, religion, sex, age, income level, national origin, physical ability, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity and expression.

7. **Quality Staff.** The program recruits and retains high-quality staff and volunteers who are focused on creating a positive learning environment and provides ongoing professional development based on assessed staff needs.

8. **Clear Vision, Mission, and Purpose.** The program has a clearly defined vision, mission, goals, and measurable outcomes that reflect broad stakeholder input and drive program design, implementation, and improvement.

9. **Collaborative Partnerships.** The program intentionally builds and supports collaborative relationships among families, schools, and communities to achieve program goals.

10. **Continuous Quality Improvement.** The program uses data from multiple sources to assess its strengths and weaknesses in order to continuously improve program design, outcomes, and impact.

11. **Program Management.** The program has sound fiscal and administrative practices supported by well-defined and documented policies and procedures that meet grant requirements.

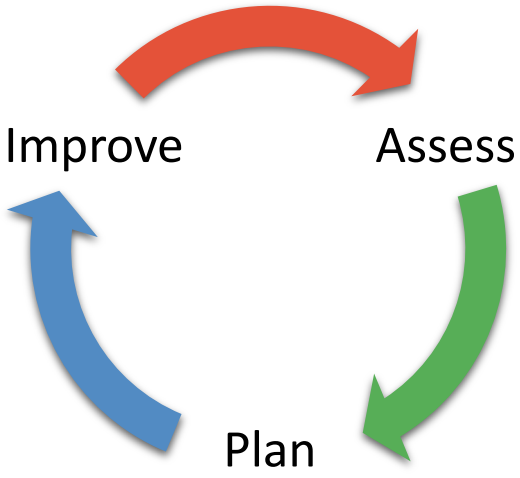
12. **Sustainability.** The program builds enduring partnerships with the community and secures commitments for in-kind and monetary contributions.

Source: CDE and CAN 2014b.

Data-Driven Continuous Quality Improvement

Quality Standard 10, summarized in Exhibit 2 below, calls for implementing a data-driven process of CQI based on (a) a quality needs assessment; (b) development of a data-driven plan to meet those needs; and (c) plan implementation, monitoring of outcomes, and revision as needed to improve the program (that is, Assess, Plan, Improve). The CDE's program improvement efforts are anchored in the CQI process, which was mandated by the Legislature through SB 1221 (After School Programs 2014; see *EC* Section 8484[a][2]).

Exhibit 2. Quality Standard 10, Continuous Quality Improvement



Beginning in fall 2015, SB 1221 requires recipients of ASES and 21st CCLC funding to conduct program assessments; to follow a continuous cycle of program improvement; to deliver high-quality, year-round programs; and to submit program-based outcome data to the CDE. This legislation updates reporting requirements, emphasizing the use of data to enhance program quality. It also stipulates that programs develop a plan outlining a data-driven process to improve program quality based on the CDE's guidance on quality standards.

One important goal of the CDE is to support and empower the local school community in utilizing data to ensure high-quality learning opportunities and to promote emotional development among students. While grantees are not required to submit their plans to the CDE, they must make them available for review upon request. These plans are also reviewed as part of the EXLD Federal Program Monitoring process to ensure that LEAs have a CQI process in place and are working toward program improvement. In this way, engagement in the CQI process is mandatory, but the implementation approach remains a local decision; the CDE provides considerable flexibility while still holding grantees accountable. Additionally, *EC* Section 8483.7 requires the CDE to offer TA and support to grantees to help them achieve their goals.

Accountability

Since the inception of the ASES and 21st CCLC initiatives, the CDE has placed significant emphasis on data-based accountability in administering these programs. As mandated by *EC* Section 8484, ELPs are required to submit an Annual Outcome-Based Data Report for Evaluation (AOBDE) and evidence of CQI. The AOBDE report encompasses an account of the number of days an individual student attends each component of a California ELP. In addition, the CQI report provides self-reported details on the level of implementation of each of the 12 Quality Standards.

The System of Support for Expanded Learning

Since the inception of the BASLSNPP in 1998, the CDE has been instrumental in providing TA to local programs, ensuring compliance with program requirements and fostering program quality improvement in accordance with *EC* Section 8483.55 and Title 20 United States Code Section 7172(c)(3). At the core of the early efforts was the establishment of a Regional After School TA System. In addition, the CDE allocated funding for the development and implementation of program staff training focused on principles and research-based strategies for promoting youth development and resilience in after school settings. Over 6,300 ELP staff throughout California were trained.

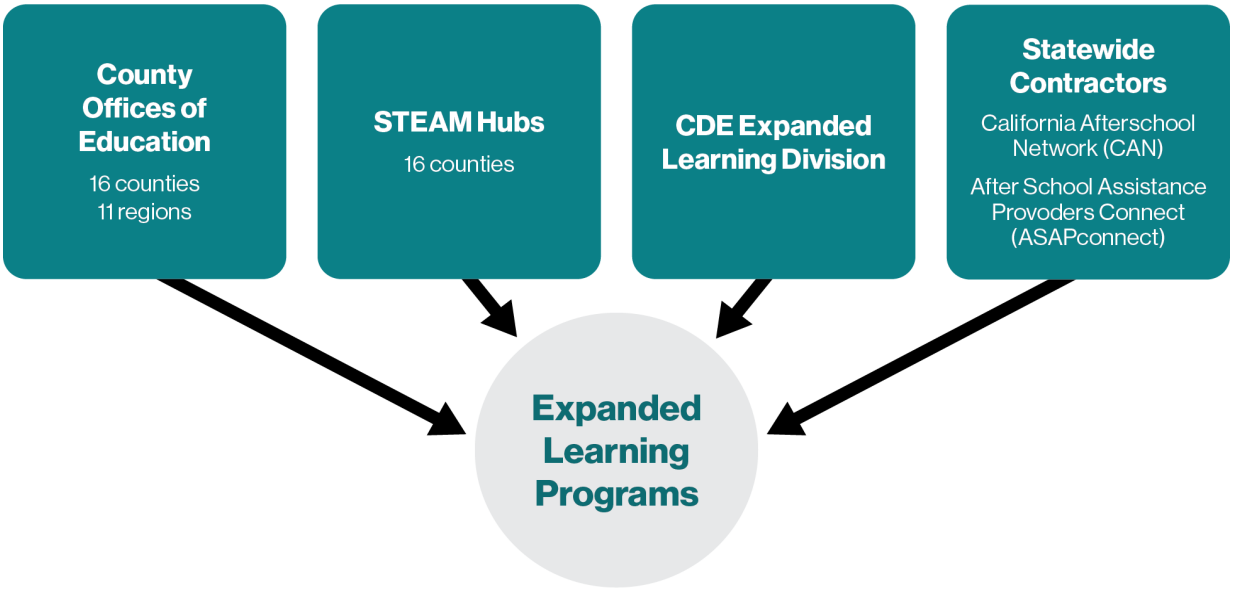
SB 638 (Before and After School Programs 2006) amended *EC* Section 8483.55, stipulating that, starting with FY 2006–07, 1.5 percent of the appropriated ASES funds were to be made available to the CDE to provide TA, evaluation, and training services and to provide local assistance funds to support program improvement. In addition, the US Department of Education authorizes 3 percent to 5 percent of 21st CCLC funds for providing TA to grantees.

One of the strategic initiatives articulated by the CDE in its first strategic plan, *A Vision for Expanded Learning in California: Strategic Plan, 2014–16* was "providing a comprehensive and coordinated system of support and accountability to maintain and improve program quality while encouraging creativity and innovation in the field" (CDE After School Division 2014, 4). In line with this goal—and specifically to support grantees in implementing CQI and the 12 Quality Standards—the CDE enhanced its existing TA efforts to form a statewide, comprehensive System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL),[6] illustrated below in Exhibit 3.

The EXLD identified TA as one of the four strategic initiatives in the second strategic plan, SP2.0, aiming to "deepen and broaden supports, so participants have equitable access to consistently high-quality programs" (CDE 2018; CDE EXLD 2018, 16). SP2.0 specifies that this will be accomplished through supporting the SSEL in continuously improving TA for grantees. The CDE EXLD has set two objectives in the SP2.0: to "support the SSEL in developing and implementing a data-driven TA plan that prioritizes critical TA to grantees/sites needing extra support to meet attendance targets and improve program quality" and to "continue to strengthen the CQI of the SSEL through an ongoing community of practice" (CDE EXLD 2018, 20).

[6] A description of the SSEL can be accessed on the CDE Statewide System of Support for Expanded Learning web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/stsystemofsup.asp.

Exhibit 3. System of Support for Expanded Learning



The SSEL provides field-based, comprehensive TA, training, and support across California's 11 service regions under the California County Superintendents (CCS). This assistance is focused on meeting program requirements and enhancing capacity within each region to establish, execute, and maintain high-quality California ELPs and a CQI process. The SSEL offers a diverse range of tools and resources to aid in this process.

In each region, TA is provided by at least one regional county lead from a county office of education (COE), at least one CDE Education Programs Consultant (EPC), and a fiscal analyst. All but one region also includes a COE Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) Hub Lead. The system is designed to ensure that TA is comprehensive and seamless offering support in both program compliance and quality to ensure that grantees meet state requirements and maintain high standards of quality.

Specifically, each county lead develops and executes an annual work plan and budget that outlines how they will identify the TA needs of programs within their service area; the tools, resources, and types of TA they plan to provide; and the way(s) in which they will measure their success. COE leads identify the specific universal, targeted, and critical TA strategies they might use, which could include coaching, mentoring, consultation, and the provision of relevant resources, based on individual TA needs. TA often includes supporting the understanding and implementation of the laws, policies, and best practices, including that of the expanded learning standards and CQI process, to support the development and sustainability of high quality ELPs. COE leads are the subject matter experts in their service area and therefore are the first point of contact for ELPs within the counties they support. Specific needs are discovered through an array of methods such as informal needs assessments, site visits, and word of mouth, as well as through more formal activities such as CDE Federal Program Monitoring and

independent fiscal and programmatic audits, which discover findings of noncompliance. Accountability is measured through quarterly progress reports, submitted by COE leads to their CDE regional EPC, which note the activities conducted and services provided during that quarter and expenditure reports that should align with their previously approved annual budgets.

CDE EPCs are assigned to one or more CCS regions and tasked with advising and providing guidance and support to the COE lead(s) and grantees within those regions, ensuring comprehensive and seamless TA to all ELPs across the state. Specifically, EPCs provide guidance in the interpretation and compliance of the legal requirements and guidelines that govern California ELPs. They support the understanding of the applicable laws, policy, and accountability and reporting requirements to ensure grantees within their region(s) have the capacity to operate their ELPs with fidelity and quality. EPCs review the COE lead(s)' annual work plans and budgets and quarterly progress and expenditure reports to ensure consistency and compliance and that the supports and resources being delivered are appropriate for the specific needs of the ELPs they serve. EPCs often work alongside the CDE analyst assigned to the same CCS region(s) because they provide programmatic fiscal support to the grantees within those regions.

The CDE also allocates funding to two nonprofit, statewide TA partners, CAN and the After School Assistance Providers Connect (ASAPConnect) to identify needs and types of services to provide through the SSEL, including, but not limited to, trainings, needs assessments, and other resources to build quality programs:

- CAN's partnership exists to increase access to high-quality OST programs that support success for all children and youths. In addition, CAN provides professionals, advocates, and community members the tools and resources necessary to build high-quality OST programs in California.[7]

- ASAPConnect builds the capacity of TA providers to better support the diverse needs of after school programs across the state of California by increasing collaboration, access to quality trainers, and support to California's SSEL.[8]

In addition, the CDE EXLD has generated a wide range of tools and resource materials to guide and assist the work of California's expanded learning county leads, TA providers, grantees, and programs throughout the state, as shown below in Exhibit 4. Finally, the CDE contracted with WestEd, an education research and TA organization, to analyze data on the California ELP schools and participants and to assist the CDE in building an effective data system to support EXLD CQI efforts and determine program outcomes. WestEd's primary responsibility is to produce biennial reports to the

[7] For more information, visit the CDE Statewide Technical Assistance Partners web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/statewidtaproviders.asp.

[8] For more information, visit the CDE Statewide Technical Assistance Partners web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/statewidtaproviders.asp.

Legislature to meet the reporting requirements outlined in *EC* Section 8428 and Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA 2015), Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Section 4203(a13–14).

Exhibit 4. Resources Developed by the California Department of Education to Support Program Quality Improvement

- ***A Crosswalk Between:* The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning *and Program Quality Assessment Tools*** highlights seven exemplary tools for assessing and improving program quality. Aligned with the 12 Quality Standards, it aids programs in the CQI process. Each tool is described in detail, including its purpose, properties, cost, and available training support. This document is available through the CAN website at https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/post/crosswalk-between-quality-standards-expanded-learning-and-program-quality-assessment-tools

- **Guidance for Developing and Implementing a Data-Driven Program Quality Improvement Process for ELPs** provides guidance for implementing the quality improvement process (Assess, Plan, Improve) for kindergarten through grade nine programs. The CDE Guidance for a Quality Improvement Process web page is available at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/cqiguidance.asp.

- **Annual Outcome-Based Data Report and CQI** is an online tool that includes a CQI tab. Here, each grantee school site indicates which quality standard(s) it is engaged to improve, along with its progress, marked on a four-point scale. Grantees must indicate the types of interest holders involved and summarize overall engagement progress. For more information, go to the CDE Annual Outcome-Based Data Report and CQI web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/aobdandcqiinstrucem.asp.

- **Quality Program Improvement Tool Template and Instructions** provides grantees with a template for organizing and documenting their CQI plans. While its use is not mandated, this template helps summarize assessment data and outline site-level goals, objectives, and activities. The Instructions for Completing a Quality Program Improvement Plan for California ELPs provides grantees specific guidance for reflection and strategy implementation. This document is available on the CDE Quality Program Improvement Plan Instructions web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/qualityimprovinstuct.asp.

- **The CDE Strategic Plan 2.0** web page outlines the strategic planning goals and objectives for the Quality Programs strategic initiative area. This web page provides access to information about the strategic plan and is available at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/strategicplanimplement2.asp.

As hoped, research has demonstrated that the SSEL has had a positive impact on expanded learning implementation. In a study (Informing Change 2016)[9] of the experiences and needs of ASES and ASSETs, almost all (96 percent) after school programs and 79 percent of summer learning programs reported that they received some form of TA between 2013 and 2015. Moreover, 60 percent of respondents reported an improvement in the TA system since 2009. Veteran program providers perceived a shift over the prior six years from a TA approach primarily focused on grant compliance to one focused on improving program quality. The study report highlighted this shift, stating, “Rather than seeing TA as a way to correct errors, more TA providers were asking, ‘How can we help you become a better program?’” (Informing Change 2016, 13). Reflecting this shift, the report also notes an increased demand from providers for TA around quality standards and program assessments.

The California Department of Education Guidance to Expanded Learning Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, California’s schools, including its ELPs, closed their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the complexities of the pandemic, the CDE remained committed to supporting its ELPs. Through collaboration with other CDE divisions and state agencies such as the CDE Nutrition Services Division, the California Department of Public Health, and the California Department of Social Services, the EXLD was able to provide vital guidance to its ELPs. The state began to leverage the unique skills and relationships of ELPs to provide immediate needs to students and families. Additionally, through a series of legislative and administrative actions, the Legislature provided critical flexibility to California ELP grantees to ensure service continuity for the most vulnerable student populations.

The first legislative action was taken on April 4, 2020, when the governor signed Executive Order N-45-20, addressing challenges concerning parents designated as essential critical infrastructure workers. Due to the important nature of their jobs, these individuals were required to continue working outside the home amid the COVID-19 pandemic, often leaving their children at home alone. EO N-45-20 granted significant flexibility to ASES grantees, authorizing them to provide in-person services to school-age children of essential critical infrastructure workers regardless of their school of enrollment, giving these students a safe place while their parents were at work. Furthermore, EO N-45-20 permitted ASES programs to operate during the hours that school is ordinarily in session, as long as it was outside of students’ mandated instructional minutes. It also suspended grant reduction calculations required under *EC* Sections 8483.7(a)(1)(C), 8483.7(a)(1)(D), and 8426(d)(2) and provided ELPs with access to students throughout the day (CDE EXLD 2020a).

[9] The study included surveys of California-based ELP providers (*n* = 258) and TA providers (*n* = 98); interviews (*n* = 68) with ELP providers, TA providers, field leaders, and funders; and a review, observation, and analysis of materials and gatherings from the field.

On April 30, 2020, in response to questions from ELP grantees, the EXLD issued guidance to expanded learning grantees (CDE EXLD 2020a), defining permissible services and supports for ELPs while schools were closed. These services and supports included

- providing federally approved after school meals or snack programs through grab-and-go food distribution;
- offering online programming tailored for youths and deemed reasonable and necessary;
- providing support for student and parent education and social–emotional well-being;
- gathering virtual offsite student materials and information to assist families;
- conducting virtual staff meetings using platforms such as conference calls, Zoom, or Skype;
- engaging in curriculum development and creating lesson plans;
- performing program data entry or validation tasks;
- participating in online professional development opportunities;
- undertaking systems planning work, such as preparing for summer programs, evaluating program effectiveness, ensuring sustainability, addressing safety concerns, and managing budgets; and
- fulfilling other expectations and job tasks outlined in job descriptions and deemed reasonable and necessary during the closure period.

The second legislative action was taken in June 2020 when the governor approved SB 98 (Education Finance: Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill 2020), granting the CDE the authority to waive sections of the California *EC* for ASES, 21st CCLC, and ASSETs grantees during the 2020–21 school year. These waivers aimed to provide flexibility in serving students during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically by extending the ability for programs to operate during traditional school hours and by suspending attendance-based grant reductions, ensuring continuity of services. SB 98 also waived *EC* Section 8483.4, related to the pupil-to-staff ratio, which allowed programs to serve more students (CDE EXLD 2020b).

Executive Order N-45-20 and SB 98 collectively provided crucial flexibility to ELP grantees that allowed them to provide the additional academic and social–emotional supports that students, teachers, and families greatly needed during the pandemic. This support was instrumental in enabling grantees to implement high-quality programs

tailored to meet the diverse needs of young people, especially those in low-income and underserved communities.

Quantitative Findings from the 2020–21 School Year

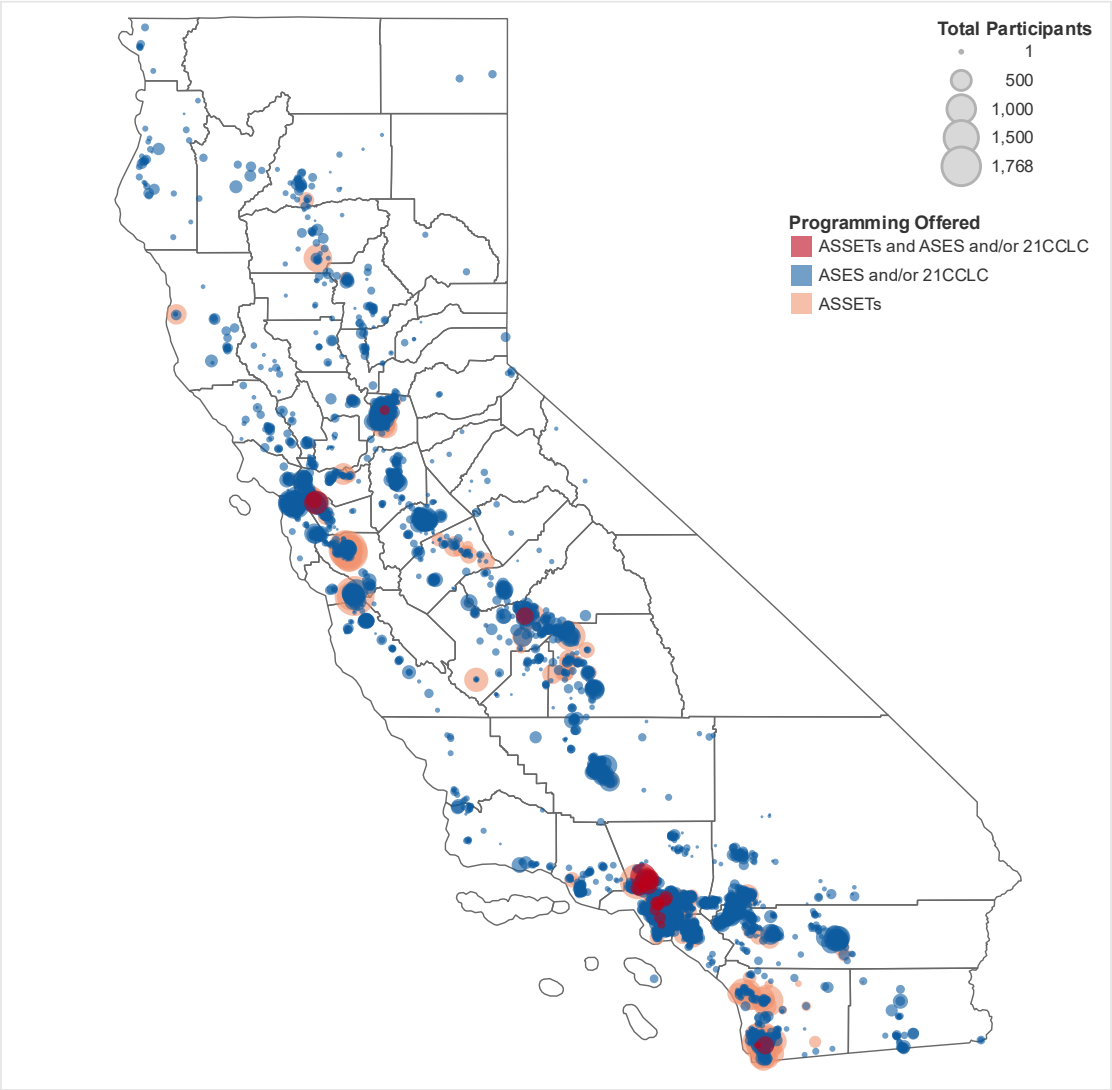
The following sections discuss quantitative findings from the 2020–21 school year. The sections address the number and geographical distribution of the California ELPs, the program type, the demographics and characteristics of students participating in the ELPs, and the program attendance of participating students. Details on how the analysis data files were created for all quantitative findings are provided in appendices A and B.

Expanded Learning Programs Serve Students Statewide

This analysis examined the breadth of participation in California ELPs across the state. Exhibit 5 below shows that the geographic reach of the California ELPs funded in the 2020–21 school year is inclusive of all regions serving students in California, including rural and urban communities, north and south, and coast to desert. There is a larger number of program participants in more populous regions of the state compared to less populous regions of the state. In total, 4,003 schools offered one or both of ASES and 21st CCLC programming; 292 offered ASSETs programming only; and 23 offered a combination of ASSETs programming and either ASES, 21st CCLC programs, or both.[10]

[10] As described in Appendix B, student demographic comparison analyses were possible for all 4,318 programs, while 4,287 of the 4,318 programs were able to be matched to latitudinal and longitudinal data for inclusion in the geographic representation analyses.

Exhibit 5. Geographic Representation of California Schools with ELPs in 2020–21, by Program Type and Sized by Number of Students Served[11]

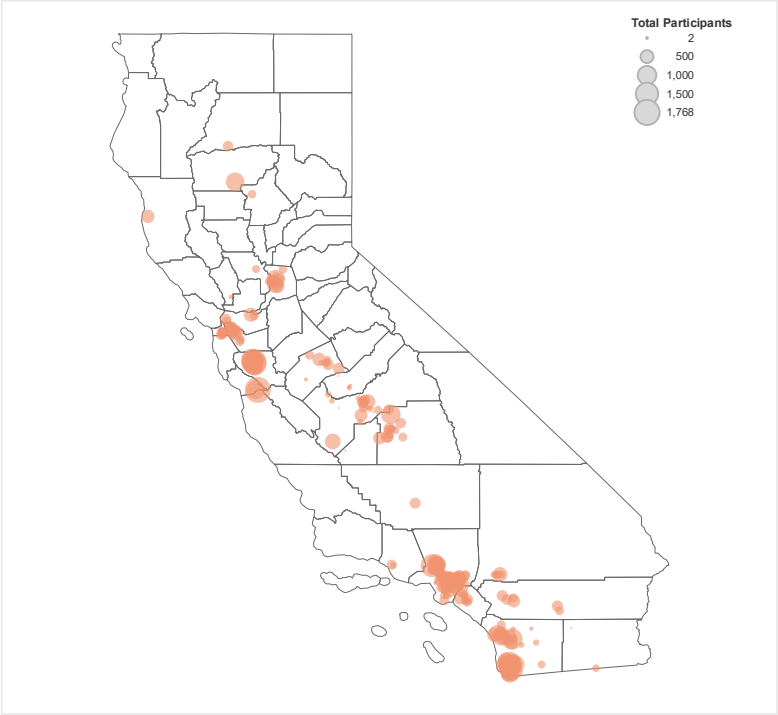


Exhibits 6 and 7 below separately show the geographic representation of the two main program types in the 2020–21 school year. Exhibit 6 represents ASES and 21st CCLC programs that serve elementary and middle school students, and Exhibit 7 represents ASSETs programs serving high school students. For both types of programs, programs span across the state but are mostly concentrated in or around urban populations. ASES and 21st CCLC programs are spread out further and are more numerous than ASSETs programs. ASES and 21st CCLC programs appear in more rural communities and in all but two counties, whereas ASSETs programs are less frequent in less-populated areas and not present in 29 counties.

[11] Exhibit 5 includes outlines of the 58 California counties.

Exhibit 6. Geographic Representation of California Schools with ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs in 2020–21, Sized by Number of Students Served[12]

Exhibit 7. Geographic Representation of California Schools with ASSETs Programs in 2020–21, Sized by Number of Students Served[13]



[12] Exhibit 6 includes outlines of the 58 California counties.

[13] Exhibit 7 includes outlines of the 58 California counties.

Exhibit 8 below shows the number of California ELPs offered by county in 2020–21. Programs were largely concentrated in Southern California, including the five counties with the largest number of total programs in the state: 1,241 programs in Los Angeles County, 352 in San Diego County, 232 in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and 222 in Orange County. Sixteen counties (not listed in Exhibit 8) offered fewer than 10 programs in 2020–21 that were all ASES and 21st CCLC: Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Lake, Marin, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, San Benito, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Yuba. Two California counties, Inyo and Siskiyou, did not offer California ELPs in 2020–21.

Exhibit 8. Geographic Representation of the Number of ELPs Offered by County in 2020–21

County	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASSETs Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs and ASSETs Programs	Total Number of California ELPs
Alameda	143	17	2	162
Butte	34	1	0	35
Contra Costa	70	4	0	74
Fresno	181	18	1	200
Glenn	11	0	0	11
Humboldt	31	0	0	31
Imperial	34	2	0	36
Kern	117	1	0	118

County	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASSETs Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs and ASSETs Programs	Total Number of California ELPs
Kings	26	1	0	27
Los Angeles	1111	113	17	1241
Madera	27	4	0	31
Mendocino	19	1	0	20
Merced	62	10	0	72
Monterey	60	0	0	60
Napa	17	1	0	18
Orange	209	13	0	222
Riverside	225	7	0	232
Sacramento	160	11	1	172
San Bernardino	227	5	0	232
San Diego	305	45	2	352
San Francisco	79	9	0	88
San Joaquin	92	0	0	92

County	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASSETs Programs	Number of Schools Offering ASES, 21st CCLC, or Both Programs and ASSETs Programs	Total Number of California ELPs
San Luis Obispo	12	0	0	12
San Mateo	37	0	0	37
Santa Barbara	44	0	0	44
Santa Clara	132	8	0	140
Santa Cruz	24	2	0	26
Shasta	36	1	0	37
Solano	25	0	0	25
Sonoma	36	0	0	36
Stanislaus	85	0	0	85
Sutter	14	0	0	14
Tehama	23	1	0	24
Tulare	105	13	0	118
Ventura	70	2	0	72
Yolo	16	1	0	17

Exhibit 9 below shows the number of California ELPs offered by geographic region and locale. Many programs were offered in urban regions, with 719 programs in Northern-Urban, 919 in Central-Urban, and 2,022 in Southern-Urban. The majority of California ELPs are concentrated in the overall Southern Region, which consists of Southern-Urban, Southern-Rural, and Southern-Non-Specified locale designations (2,317 programs).

Exhibit 9. Geographic Representation of California ELPs in 2020–21, Number of Programs Offered by Geographic Region and Locale Designation

Geographic Region and Locale	Total Number of California ELPs
Northern-Urban	719
Northern-Rural	93
Northern-Non-Specified	50
Central-Urban	919
Central-Rural	153
Central-Non-Specified	36
Southern-Urban	2,022
Southern-Rural	75
Southern-Non-Specified	220

Note. Geographic region designations for counties (Northern, Central, Southern) were provided by the CDE. Locale designations for programs (Urban, Rural, Non-Specified) were extracted from classifications provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) online tool accessible at https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/.

Exhibit 10 below shows 2020–21 school year California ELP participation and average attendance by program type. California ELPs served 401,767 unique students statewide during the 2020–21 school year.[14] Programs included before school, after school, and summer/supplemental program components at the elementary and middle school levels and ASSETs ELPs at the high school level.

In the 2020–21 school year, a total of 4,318[15] schools were served by before school, after school, summer/supplemental, or ASSETs California ELPs and had California ELP participant attendance and demographic data.[16] Within schools with California ELPs, an average of 16.7 percent of students attended one or more days of before school, after school, or summer/supplemental program components with a total of 401,767 participants across the state.[17] The greatest number of students were served by after school programs, and before school programs served the fewest number of students. A total of 314 schools were served by ASSETs California ELPs.

As shown in Exhibit 10 below, nearly 59 percent of after school elementary and middle school program participants (166,073 students) attended at least 30 days of programming, and 36 percent (101,981 students) attended at least 60 days. Nearly 20 percent (18.4 percent) of ASSETs program participants (16,325 students) attended at least 30 days of programming, and 7.6 percent (6,723 students) attended at least 60 days.

[14] There are a total of 447,149 students served across all programs as seen in Exhibit 10; however, students who participate in multiple programs in the same year are counted for each program in which they participate.

[15] There are schools that meet eligibility requirements per *EC* but are not funded. This could be for one of two reasons: (1) they did not apply, or (2) there was not adequate funding to fund them based on their FRPM percentage.

[16] Some schools received both ASES and 21st CCLC grants.

[17] This number only includes schools and students who had demographic data; missing data and resulting calculations are discussed in appendix A.

Exhibit 10. Program Attendance in 2020–21 School Year, by ELP Type

Measure	Before School in Elementary and Middle School	After School in Elementary and Middle School	Before School Summer/ Supplemental in Elementary and Middle School	3 Hour—After School Summer/ Supplemental Elementary and Middle School	6 Hour—After School Summer/ Supplemental Elementary and Middle School	After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) in High School
Number of students who attended at least one day of program	3,630	282,838	3,088	31,597	37,244	88,752
30 days or more program attendance	1,486 (40.9%)	166,073 (58.7%)	156 (5.1%)	311 (1.0%)	1,479 (4.0%)	16,325 (18.4%)
60 days or more program attendance	811 (22.3%)	101,981 (36.1%)	24 (.8%)	44 (.1%)	506 (1.4%)	6,723 (7.6%)
90 days or more program attendance	429 (11.8%)	74,303 (26.3%)	5 (.2%)	9 (.0%)	250 (.7%)	3,196 (3.6%)

Measure	Before School in Elementary and Middle School	After School in Elementary and Middle School	Before School Summer/ Supplemental in Elementary and Middle School	3 Hour—After School Summer/ Supplemental Elementary and Middle School	6 Hour—After School Summer/ Supplemental Elementary and Middle School	After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) in High School
120 days or more program attendance	189 (5.2%)	49,495 (17.5%)	2 (.1%)	0	103 (.3%)	1,795 (2.0%)
150 days or more program attendance	82 (2.3%)	25,802 (9.1%)	0	0	0	1,043 (1.2%)
Mean days of program participation	35.76	56.8	11.38	12.01	11.98	18.18
Median days of program participation	21	36	10	10	10	7

Note. Percentage values reported indicate the percentage of participants for that program who attended at or above the labeled thresholds.

Expanded Learning Programs Serve Youths Most in Need

All California ELPs are intended to serve students most in need.[18] As previously noted, ASES only funds programs in which a minimum of 50 percent of pupils are eligible for FRPM, with funding priority based on the total percentage of FRPM-eligible students. Similarly, 21st CCLC and ASSETs programs must serve students in schools eligible for federal Title I schoolwide programs or otherwise serve a high percentage of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, with priority given to schools designated as in need of improvement.[19]

An analysis of the characteristics of the schools and students participating in California ELPs in the 2020–21 school year highlights that California ELPs are reaching students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and are in high need of additional support to close the achievement and opportunity gaps and to foster positive youth development and well-being.

Exhibit 11 below shows the average school-level demographic characteristics for schools with California ELPs in the 2020–21 school year as compared to nonparticipating schools. The results of this analysis indicate that in the 2020–21 school year, the CDE awarded expanded learning grants to schools that served, on average, students who were predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged[20] (81.4 percent) and schools that served high percentages of students who were Hispanic or Latino (70.8 percent). An average of nearly 31 percent (30.9 percent) of the students in California ELP participating schools were English learners, 5 percent were experiencing

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[18] *EC* Section 8483(c)(1) states, "Priority for enrollment of pupils in an after school program shall be as follows: (A) First priority shall go to pupils who are identified by the program as homeless youth, as defined by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a), at the time that they apply for enrollment or at any time during the school year, to pupils who are identified by the program as being in foster care, and to pupils who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals."

[19] Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 1965), as amended, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. The school must focus Title I services on children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet state academic standards.

[20] Socioeconomically disadvantaged students are defined by the CDE as students (1) who are eligible for the FRPM program (also known as the National School Lunch Program) or have a direct certification for free or reduced-price meals or (2) who are migrant, homeless, or foster youth or (3) who have parents who are not high school graduates.

homelessness, 1.4 percent were migrant students, 0.9 percent were foster youths, and 13.8 percent were students with disabilities.

In 2020–21, on average, schools that offered ELPs served student populations with higher percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, African American students, Pacific Islander students, Hispanic or Latino students, English learners, and homeless students than schools not offering ELPs when comparing the average demographic populations served by both types of schools. The percentage point difference between schools offering ELPs and those who did not offer ELPs was especially large for socioeconomically disadvantaged (31.7 percentage point difference), Hispanic or Latino (38.9 percentage point difference), and English learner students (18.1 percentage point difference).

On average, schools that offered ELPs served student populations with lower percentages of Asian, Filipino, Native American or Alaska Native, and foster youth students than schools not offering ELPs, although these differences were small (ranging from 0.4 to 3.6 percentage points lower). Schools that offered ELPs also served student populations with lower percentages of students with disabilities (9.3 percentage point difference) and White students (22.6 percentage point difference).

Exhibit 11. Demographic Characteristics of Schools with ELPs in 2020–21 as Compared to the Demographic Proportions within Nonparticipating Schools

Characteristic	Expanded Learning Participant School Average	Expanded Learning Nonparticipant School Average
African American	6.4%	5.1%
Asian	5.4%	9.0%
Filipino	1.6%	2.1%
Hispanic or Latino	70.8%	41.9%
Native American or Alaska Native	0.7%	1.1%
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.4%
Two or more races	2.7%	5.5%
White	11.1%	33.7%
Female	48.5%	44.5%
English learners	30.9%	12.8%
Foster youths	0.9%	1.5%
Homeless students	5.0%	3.0%
Migrant students	1.4%	0.4%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	81.4%	49.7%
Students with disabilities	13.8%	23.1%
ELP 2020–21 participation rate	18.5%	N/A
Total number of schools	4,318	6,331

Note. In this and the following tables, student demographic characteristic category names were updated to match the CDE DataQuest data system. As a result, the following categories have been updated: “Black” is now reported as “African American,” “Hawaiian or Pacific Islander” is now reported as “Pacific Islander,” “Native American or American Indian” is now reported as “Native American or Alaska Native,” “English Learner” is now reported as “English learners,” “Migrant Education Program participant” is now reported as “Migrant students,” “Homeless” is now reported as “Homeless students,” and “Student with a disability” is now reported as “Students with disabilities.”

Exhibit 12 below includes the comparison of California ELP participants and their nonparticipating peers within participating schools. In the 2020–21 school year, a total of 2,551,311 students were enrolled in participating schools. Within those schools, 15.7 percent of students participated[21] in one or more of the California ELPs (that is, 401,767 students participated in California ELPs, whereas 2,149,544 did not participate in California ELPs).[22] Within participating schools, California ELPs served students who were demographically like their peers who did not attend California ELPs. There were no meaningful demographic differences between these two groups.[23]

Across the demographic characteristic categories, within-school differences between California ELP participants and nonparticipants ranged between 0 and 1.6 percentage points. The largest differences found between California ELP participants and their nonparticipating peers were the percentages of female students, Asian students, Hispanic or Latino students, White students, and English learners, although none were statistically significant.

Exhibit 12. Characteristics of ELP Participants and Nonparticipants within Participating Schools

Characteristic	Percentage of ELP Participants	Percentage of Nonparticipants
African American	6.7%	6.0%
Asian	6.4%	5.7%
Filipino	1.5%	1.7%
Hispanic or Latino	71.8%	72.6%

[21] All students enrolled in a school that has a grant are eligible to participate.

[22] Students with duplicate cases were removed. The data sources are discussed in more detail in appendix A.

[23] The effect sizes ranged from 0 to 0.04. With large sample sizes such as those including nearly all students in the State of California, a preferred indicator of a meaningful difference is an "effect size." Effect sizes show the overlap between two groups; when there is a lot of overlap, the effect size is small, but when there is little or no overlap (which indicates the groups are truly different), the effect size is large. For this report, Cohen's *d* was used as the effect size measure, and findings are interpreted based on effect sizes. The *What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbook, Version 5.0*, produced by the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse (2022), considers effect sizes larger than 0.25 to indicate a meaningful difference between two groups. For this report, findings are interpreted based on effect sizes.

Characteristic	Percentage of ELP Participants	Percentage of Nonparticipants
Native American or Alaska Native	0.5%	0.4%
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.5%
Two or more races	2.6%	2.4%
White	9.0%	10.0%
Female	49.7%	48.3%
English learners	30.6%	29.4%
Foster youths	1.1%	0.8%
Homeless students	1.8%	1.3%
Migrant students	13.1%	13.5%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	81.7%	81.5%
Students with disabilities	5.0%	5.0%
Total students	401,767	2,149,544

Comparing 2020–21 Quantitative Findings to Previous Reports

Quantitative findings within the 2023 Biennial Report, based on data from the 2020–21 school year, were comparable to the previous findings from 2015–16 and 2018–19 in several ways. Similar to those two reports, current findings show that schools that received CDE funding for ELPs served more socioeconomically disadvantaged students and homeless students, and similar populations of foster youths, when compared to schools that did not receive CDE funding.[24] The consistency in average demographic characteristics of ELP schools over the last three reports is displayed in Exhibit 13 below, which provides the demographic characteristics of schools with California ELPs in 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21. It offers a detailed breakdown of all available demographic characteristics, showcasing the program's impact on different student groups over the specified period of time.

Exhibit 13. Demographic Characteristics of Schools with ELPs in 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21

Characteristic	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2015–16	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2018–19	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2020–21
African American	7.3%	6.8%	6.4%
Asian	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%
Filipino	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%
Hispanic or Latino[25]	69.2%	69.6%	70.8%
Native American or Alaska Native	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%

[24] California ELPs include before school, after school, and summer/supplemental program components.

[25] In the 2017 and 2021 reports, the term "Latino" was used to describe this student subgroup. The term used has been updated to "Hispanic or Latino" in this report per guidelines from the CDE CALPADS data system located at https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/, but it refers to the same student subgroup.

Characteristic	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2015–16	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2018–19	Expanded Learning Participant School Average, 2020–21
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Two or more races	2.1%	2.5%	2.7%
White	12.6%	12.1%	11.1%
Female	48.7%	48.5%	48.5%
English learners	35.4%	28.5%	30.9%
Foster youths	N/A	0.7%	0.9%
Homeless students	5.0%	5.6%	5.0%
Migrant students	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	83.3%	82.2%	81.4%
Students with disabilities	11.6%	13.6%	13.8%
ELP participation rate	33.2%	31.1%	18.5%
Total number of schools	4,565	4,548	4,318

Notably, the average percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in California ELP participating schools remained consistent at 83.3 percent, 82.2 percent, and 81.4 percent in 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21, respectively. These values are consistently higher than the nonparticipating school comparison group in all three reports.[26] Similarly, average rates of Hispanic or Latino students in California ELP

[26] Values for the nonparticipating school comparison groups are reported in the current and previous two versions of this report. In the 2017 and 2021 Biennial Reports, they are displayed in Exhibit 6. In the current Biennial Report (2023), they are displayed in Exhibit 11.

participating schools remained consistent at 69.2 percent, 69.6 percent, and 70.8 percent in the reports, respectively, consistently exceeding those of the nonparticipating school comparison group. The same trends are observed for English learners in California ELP participating schools: Average rates remain consistent at 35.4 percent, 28.5 percent, and 30.9 percent in 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21, respectively, and are consistently higher than those of the nonparticipating school comparison group.

Across 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21, there is also consistency in the finding that within California ELP participating schools, California ELPs served students who were demographically like their peers who did not attend California ELPs, as reported in the current report in Exhibit 13.

As discussed in this report, the 2020–21 school year was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with most schools across the state facing school building closures or limits on students allowed to attend in person at learning spaces due to health and safety requirements. One finding from the 2020–21 school year that differs from previous years involves the number of participating students and their frequency of participation in California ELPs. The totals reported in Exhibits 14 and 15 below for the 2020–21 school year indicate a decrease in both the number of participating students and the frequency of program participation compared to previous years.

Exhibit 14. Program Attendance Reported in the 2019, 2021, and 2023 Biennial Reports for ASES and 21st CCLC After School in Elementary and Middle School and After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) High School Programs

ELP Type	2015–16 School Year	2018–19 School Year	2020–21 School Year
ASES and 21st CCLC after school: Number of students who attended at least one day	632,289	609,957	282,838
ASSETs: Number of students who attended at least one day	257,100	237,990	88,752

Exhibit 15. Median Days of Program Participation Reported in the 2019, 2021, and 2023 Biennial Reports for ASES and 21st CCLC After School in Elementary and Middle School and After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) High School Programs

ELP Type	2015–16 School Year	2018–19 School Year	2020–21 School Year
ASES and 21st CCLC after school: Median days of program participation	137	140	36
ASSETs: Median days of program participation	11	11	7

It is not possible to use previous years' data to investigate if any additional data in 2020–21 was missing or underreported, since the level of interruption due to the pandemic was so large and unprecedented. Nor is it possible to predict the extent to which lower participation may impact future program participation. Additionally, it is not possible to estimate program participation numbers and frequency of participation in the 2020–21 school year absent the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to uncertainty about the quality of the data used in this report, this 2023 Biennial Report includes qualitative data about the innovative strategies used by California ELPs to access and support youths, the support provided by coordinators and directors to program staff, and the perceived impact of California ELPs on students, families, and the broader school community.

In the fall of 2023, WestEd conducted a series of 19 interviews with ELP directors and site coordinators. WestEd also conducted one focus group with youths in 5th and 6th grade attending a single school. Both adults and youths worked for or participated in ELPs during the 2020–21 school year. The following section, generated from the interviews and the focus group, adds nuance and voice to the quantitative results presented above.

The Resilience of Expanded Learning Programs during the COVID-19 Crisis

As described earlier in this report, since the establishment of the BASLSNPP in 1998, California ELPs have been offering enriching activities and fostering positive relationships among students and have cultivated a sense of connection among students, schools, and local communities. Moreover, these programs have been instrumental in developing the academic and personal skills and values that youths need to succeed in school, career, and life to become productive, contributing citizens.

Despite the long-standing effectiveness of these programs, they too faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Navigating Uncharted Waters: Rapid Adjustments during the Pandemic

In the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-33-20 directing all residents immediately to heed current state public health directives to stay home except as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the 16 identified critical infrastructure sectors whose assets, systems, and networks were considered vital to Californian's health and well-being. For a period, both schools and ELPs were forced to shut down. When schools and ELPs were allowed to reopen in a virtual capacity, ELPs quickly and nimbly responded to the diverse needs of their program participants. During this time, ELPs were forced to make rapid adjustments to how they reached students, supported program access, and fostered engagement.

Despite these rapid adjustments, quantitative findings across 2015–16, 2018–19, and 2020–21 show that there was a noticeable decrease in participation across all ELPs during the 2020–21 school year compared to previous years. Before the pandemic, in the 2018–2019 school year, ELPs served 885,993 students in grades kindergarten through twelve, but in the 2020–21 school year, ELPs served only a little more than half of that amount: 447,149 students.[27] When asked about participation in the 2020–21 school year compared to previous years, both ELP program directors and site coordinators (ELP staff) confirmed that they were seeing approximately half of the students they would in a normal year.

Meeting Basic Needs and Beyond

In response to concerns about student access and needs, the EXLD provided written guidance to grantees on allowable ELP services and supports. One key allowance was the provision of basic technological needs (Newsom 2020). Such services and supports became critical following the abrupt transition from in-person to virtual instruction, which left many students and families who lacked computers or internet access disconnected from their schools and ELPs. Staff from ELPs collaborated with districts and schools to donate devices and help with distribution:

> We were able to pivot to the best of our ability in terms of scooping up all the devices on all campuses, including after school programs, and getting them out to students and families and then trying to figure out how to get hot spots for the families that didn't have internet at home.

[27] Total students served for 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 are duplicated student counts, including multiple counts of students participating across more than one ELP.

Many Californians also faced high levels of food insecurity during this time, impacting ELP participation. ELP staff elaborated on this, stating, “There are some kids or families that just completely dropped out because Zoom wasn’t going to feed them. And so, for them, [ELP] community wasn’t as important as trying to survive.” To address these critical needs, ELPs offered services like free snacks and meals funded by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act:

> We were supporting our schools with delivering lunch meals to the students at home, especially in the rural areas. We would hop on a bus and drop them off breakfast, lunch, and breakfast for the following day depending on the students, like the kids within the household.

ELPs also organized drive-through pickups to ensure families had access to essential items and provided access to curriculum materials and other resources that students needed. One ELP staff member noted that staff members “did a lot of drive-throughs where families could pick up all the materials and supplies they would need for the following week or two weeks of what they would experience and do in a program virtually.”

Contextual factors such as wildfires also impacted ELP participation. For instance, during crises such as the CZU Lightning Complex fires in August 2020 (CAL FIRE 2022), which burned in San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties in Northern California, many programs faced significant disruptions, leading to a drastic reduction in their capacity or even closures. In response, ELPs actively engaged with the community to reach out to displaced students and their families, often resorting to door-to-door outreach to ensure they received the necessary support.

While the total number of students attending ELPs during the pandemic decreased, interviewees reported an increase in first-time ELP participants. One ELP staff member noted that “about 25 percent were [participants] we’ve never seen before.” Another described a gradual increase in participants, attributing it to word-of-mouth promotion among students:

> We had four to five [participants], then we had eight, then ten. And then at one point we had about 20 to 25 students log in and that was a lot. It was a lot for us. I mean, not what we were used to servicing, but we heard “Oh, my friend gave me this thing,” … and then just little by little they started hearing and they started coming. And then when it would be time for us to close program, they … didn’t want to leave.

In addition to the organizing that was happening at the school and district levels, at the state level, Executive Order N-45-20, signed on April 4, 2020, and effective through June 3, 2020, introduced significant flexibilities related to program hours, student attendance, and program focus to address the challenges faced by ELPs. This executive order authorized programs to operate not only before and after school hours but also during the hours that school is ordinarily in session (as long as it was outside of school instructional minutes) ensuring comprehensive support throughout the school

day. Additionally, traditional grant applications for ELPs are based on previous years' program attendance, but this executive order waived the grant reductions process associated with low student attendance to ensure programs would maintain their funding levels. This allowed programs to alter their focus to work alongside schools to help meet the essential and immediate needs of students, families, and communities. The flexibilities provided by this executive order empowered ELPs to expand their operating hours and introduce new program supports to adapt to the evolving circumstances brought on by the pandemic.

Shifting Collaboration Dynamics

It has long been the intent of the Legislature that California ELPs complement but do not replicate learning activities in the regular school day and school year. While California ELPs are well positioned to serve as an aligned component of the school day, school ELP partnerships have not always operated in this way. Before the pandemic, the separation between schools and ELPs at times resulted in limited collaboration and coordination.

However, as ELPs were given the flexibility to expand their supports into and throughout the traditional school day, the separation between schools and ELPs began to break down. Teachers and ELP staff began to collaborate to respond quickly and effectively to a full spectrum of student needs before, during, and after the regular school day:

> Before … schools would be like, "All right, great, you guys are after school. They just have fun." And then it was like, "No, you guys are actually able to do academics, support academics, reinforce the lessons." So that really allowed us to have a different conversation with the teachers, not just it's about enrichment, but actually about learning.

Several ELP staff described how partnerships with districts were strengthened during this time. One site coordinator noted that "it really forced us to work together. It really strengthened that collaboration in terms of facilities, in terms of communicating with the parents and making sure the right students are in the program." Schools and districts had access to resources such as physical space, transportation, meals, and personal protective equipment. ELPs had staff with connections to families and communities with a more flexible program delivery model. By sharing resources, ELPs were able to respond to the needs of students and their families more quickly and effectively than schools alone.

The pandemic also made visible the vital role ELPs were playing in supporting students academically and promoting student well-being. Many ELP staff felt that they were seen as members of the school staff for the first time, which was an unexpected and sustained outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic:

> They were able to get an insight of what we do and the things that we go through. And just in partnering with my principal, they treat me as if I'm a part of the [school staff] team. The teachers are very understanding where

> it's always a struggle to get rooms. … It just geared us all to thinking that we're a partner. We're all here for the kids. That's the number one thing.

In addition to expanding program hours and implementing new program supports, Executive Order N-45-20 also permitted ASES grantees to serve school-age children of essential critical infrastructure workers regardless of their school of enrollment. Critical infrastructure workers are defined as individuals "needed to maintain continuity of operations of essential critical infrastructure sectors and additional sectors as the State Public Health Officer may designate as critical to protect the health and well-being of all Californians" (California Department of Public Health 2022). This temporary policy change enabled ELPs to support students from families with adults who were required to continue to work outside of the home even if they were not previously participating in the program. This added flexibility likely increased the number of first-time ELP participants while also benefiting the community as a whole.

The unique context of the pandemic required ELPs to develop creative programming to address students' ever-changing needs. Virtual programming required navigation of an online space while also closely considering participants' daily lives at home. ELPs diversified their programs, offering enrichment activities such as yoga, cooking classes, gardening, and virtual field trips. One site coordinator highlighted their staff's creativity in curriculum design, noting, "Some of our staff that were designing the curriculum, they got creative. They're like, 'We need to get kids on field trips.' … So, they made videos of different hikes and different places they could go."

Empowering Resilience: Supporting Student Engagement and Academic Success

While ELP participation declined in the 2020–21 school year, qualitative findings suggest that the participation frequency increased for some students. The isolation resulting from the pandemic and virtual schooling left many students feeling lonely and looking for connection.

One of the core goals of California ELPs is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that supports the developmental, social–emotional, and physical needs of all students (Quality Standard 1). This emphasis on safety and support enabled students to feel a sense of connection and normalcy, potentially increasing the engagement of ELP participants. Many students experienced screen fatigue, and others struggled with maintaining attention to virtual school instruction in an indoor setting with multiple distractions from parents working from home or from siblings who were also home. Because of their programming flexibility, ELPs had the ability to support these students by providing short bursts of programming and a diverse set of activities in addition to providing the necessary academic supports:

> We made sure that they had hands-on [activities], that they got to go outside and play and do games, and we just kind of re-created what we would normally do in after school, but [made] it individualized for health safety, [while] still being able to engage with their peers. And I think that

> helped the mental health of the kids because they got to see friends, they got to see peers that were their own age and/or spoke their language or were working on the same math problem and they were able to talk and have that engagement.

While academic support has long been a key focus of California ELPs, providing academic support prior to or just after periods of virtual school instruction was particularly crucial during the pandemic. ELP staff members were able to communicate directly with classroom teachers and provide aligned instructional support through tutoring, homework help, and other academic enrichment activities. The flexibility to operate during traditional school hours, made possible by Executive Order N-45-20, allowed ELP staff to directly support teachers' virtual instruction efforts by providing immediate and targeted supports to students:

> The teachers were so grateful that they could say, 'Hey, so-and-so needs help with this.' And so, then, the staff would go over and support the student, and the teachers really appreciated the work that the staff was doing.

Whether directly following teacher virtual instruction during the school day or during traditional expanded learning hours, ELP staff members were available to support students struggling to grasp concepts delivered in an online format. One student who participated in an ELP in the 2020–21 school year described their experience:

> I just remember that they helped us with our homework and that really helped me a lot because I was struggling with my grades because of virtual school, and it helped me a lot because I just needed help for my homework. I didn't really get the math and things like that.

In addition to helping students with their schoolwork, ELP staff members were also there to give students much-needed social–emotional support. With stay-at-home orders, a lot of students felt alone and disconnected, with very little human contact during the regular school hours. They had little opportunity to talk to or play with friends, and they were either home alone or the adults around them were often busy working during the day. As mentioned earlier, California ELPs aim to provide safe and nurturing environments that support the developmental, social–emotional, and physical needs of students (Quality Standard 1). One ELP staff member had this to say:

> I think we also increased our social–emotional learning activity component time, because there were a lot of students who were basically alone all day. And then, when they jumped into the after school program hours, they just wanted contact with another human being, especially if they were in their home on their own for nine or more hours while their families went to work.

Despite the widespread challenges of the pandemic, ELPs focused on building strong connections with students. Several interviewees noted the significance of positive

relationships and engagement during the school year. One site coordinator highlighted that “the expanded learning programs definitely impacted [student] mental health in the right direction in that students were then able to interact, build those relationships, and have a positive relationship with people and everything that is associated with the school.”

Adapting Amid Adversity: The Crucial Contributions of Expanded Learning Programs

By the later part of the 2020–21 school year, many schools began to open their doors, and teachers and students returned to their classrooms. While the eventual shift to in-person programming was a relief for some interviewees, it brought additional challenges due to public health requirements, such as social distancing and smaller staff ratios, as mandated by public health law. One site coordinator noted, “It was all a new learning experience every second, every day because you always learned something different, and you were always improving or adjusting our program in order to fulfill the needs of our students and our parents.”

Program directors and staff described the challenges following periods of high COVID-19 infection rates. One program director mentioned, “We [limited] how many people could be in a classroom, [and mandated] mask-wearing, hand-sanitizing, all of that. Then [in] January, when we came back from winter break, of course, everyone felt like the different outbreaks [made it feel] very hard.”

Even before the pandemic, ELPs struggled with staff turnover. However, the pandemic exacerbated staffing challenges, with COVID-19 infections prompting some program staff to opt out due to the heightened risk of infection. To address this, ELPs introduced new incentives during the 2020–21 school year aimed at retaining more staff and mitigating turnover. For example, one program director found ways to increase hours for part-time staff to offer higher pay and benefits. One site coordinator described their experience with staffing during the 2020–21 school year:

> We did lose quite a bit of our part-time employees because they were making either the decision not to return because they were just not feeling safe yet to return, or [because their] home-living situations have changed, and they’ve had to leave the area and so they’ve had to resign.

Throughout the myriads of challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the voices from the field illustrate how ELPs acted as a lifeline to students, families, schools, and communities. Whether operating in a virtual, hybrid, or in-person format, ELPs remained steadfast in providing high-quality programming and supporting the needs of the most vulnerable students.

The ELPs’ deep-rooted connection to communities and families established them as trusted community resources. They played a vital role providing basic needs to students and families throughout the pandemic. The programmatic and logistical flexibility they

exhibited bolstered schools and families when students were struggling to engage, learn, and connect with peers and trusted adults.

Moreover, their collaboration with teachers strengthened partnerships between schools and ELPs, paving the way for a more integrated and holistic approach to supporting students' overall well-being before, during, and after school hours. Beyond academic assistance, ELP staff also offered innovative social–emotional support, promoting the health and wellness of students.

Conclusion

While data quality concerns and limited data availability from the 2020–21 school year limited the analyses presented in this report, future CDE EXLD reports to the California State Legislature will be able to draw upon a broader array of outcome indicators to further document after school program effectiveness and examine improvement in student outcomes.

However, based on findings from this report, it is clear that through their comprehensive, flexible, and dedicated support during the COVID-19 pandemic, California ELPs served a vital role for students, families, and communities most in need. As intended, schools that received ELP funding served socioeconomically disadvantaged students, homeless students, foster youths, and students of color. Both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that California ELPs played a critical role in supporting students most in need by providing innovative, high-quality virtual and in-person programming that met the ever-changing needs of students and families throughout the 2020–21 school year.

Appendix A. Methodology

The following section describes the processes utilized to merge, clean, and analyze data from various sources.

File Construction

WestEd utilized data provided by the CDE from three file types for the analysis. First, the CDE EXLD collected program participation data by program, subprogram, and grant type from all its grantees. WestEd utilized 2020–21 data from the EXLD ASES and 21st CCLC datasets to capture information about participation in ASES programming by program component (after school, summer/supplemental, before school). Second, WestEd utilized 2020–21 data from the EXLD's ASSETs dataset to capture information about participation in ASSETs programming. Third, WestEd utilized 2020–21 data from the CALPADS demographics dataset to capture 2020–21 demographic variables including, but not limited to, race/ethnicity, gender, English learner, and socioeconomic status.

To prepare the data for analysis, WestEd carried out extensive data cleaning. To begin, WestEd reviewed each individual dataset to identify cases with missing, invalid, or unusable key data, as well as cases with duplicate Statewide Student Identifier values (see Exhibit A1 below). Duplicate student records were evident in all datasets, while only the EXLD programming files had instances of missing or invalid data. Duplicate records were a result of students enrolled in multiple school sites during a single school year. To resolve duplicates and determine which single student record to retain, the analysis team applied decision rules aligned with the nuances of each dataset. For the ASES and 21st CCLC data, the case with the highest number of days of ASES and 21st CCLC participation was retained. For the ASSETs data, the number of days from all instances of ASSETs participation was added because multiple cases were present only when students attended multiple versions of the programs. This resulted in the removal of 0 invalid cases (0 percent) and 37,426 duplicate cases (10.4 percent) in the ASES and 21st CCLC 2020–21 file and the removal of 0 invalid cases (0 percent) and 1,437 duplicate cases (1.2 percent) from the ASSETs 2020–21 file. WestEd randomly selected a unique case from each duplicate in the demographics data files for inclusion in the final dataset. This resulted in the removal of 470,830 duplicate cases (7 percent) and 113,395 invalid cases (1.7 percent) from the 2020–21 file.

Exhibit A2 below reports the match rate for retained cases during the cleaning process. According to the data, 99.2 percent of ASES and 21st CCLC participation cases were successfully matched to demographic characteristics files, and 95.4 percent of ASSETs participation cases were successfully matched to demographic characteristics files.

Exhibit A1. Removal of Duplicate and Invalid Cases in Original Data Files

Dataset	Cases in Original Dataset	Cases with Missing or Invalid Data Removed	Duplicate Cases Resolved	Cases Retained
ASES and 21st CCLC participation in 2020–21	360,492	0	37,426	323,066
ASSETs participation in 2020–21	90,190	0	1,437	88,753
2020–21 demographics	6,733,396	113,395	470,830	6,149,171

Exhibit A2. Merge of Participation and Demographic Data

Dataset	Cases in Original Dataset	Cases Merged to Demographics Data	Unusable Cases	Cases Retained
ASES and 21st CCLC participation in 2020–21	323,066	320,417	2,649	320,417
ASSETs participation in 2020–21	88,753	84,276	4,477	84,276

Appendix B. Geographic Analysis of the California Expanded Learning Programs Funded in 2020–21

Method

WestEd used three files to create all maps in this report using Tableau Desktop software. Cleaned participation files for ASES, 21st CCLC, and ASSETs programming, detailed in appendix A, were used to identify schools offering program types and number of participants within program types at each site. WestEd then match-merged this list of schools with the California Public Schools and Districts file, a dataset known as the "pubschls.xlsx" file, which is publicly available and maintained by the CDE. This file contains latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates for all schools in California.[28]

This matching process resulted in 4,287 matched schools that contained longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates and 31 unmatched cases that were present in the appended program file but not in the "pubschls.xlsx" file. Data from unmatched schools in this data merge are still present in participation totals in other report summaries; however, they were not possible to match with map locations, county summaries, or geographic region and locale summaries. Matched schools were then geocoded (that is, converted to points on a map) onto a base map of the 58 California counties using the longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates.

[28] Available from https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/si/ds/pubschls.asp.

Appendix C. Qualitative Analysis of the California Expanded Learning Programs Funded in 2020–21

Method

In the fall of 2023, WestEd conducted a series of interviews with adults and one focus group with youths who worked for or participated in ELPs during the 2020–21 school year. Nine program directors and 10 site coordinators from various regions across the state were interviewed, and one focus group was held with students in grades six through eight, all of whom participated in ELPs in the 2020–21 school year. The program directors and site coordinators who participated in interviews and the youths who participated in the focus group represent the following 9 of 11 regions designated by the California County Superintendents: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 (California County Superintendents n.d.).

Throughout the audio-recorded interviews and focus group, one WestEd staff member conducted the interview while a second WestEd staff member took notes on emerging themes that arose during the interview. These emerging themes informed the development of a codebook, which contained a refined set of themes that were used to identify qualitative findings across all interviews and the focus group. Following the completion of the interviews and focus group, audio recordings were converted into text documents by an online transcription service called Rev.com,[29] which utilizes artificial intelligence to transcribe the audio recording and a professional transcriber to check for accuracy. These documents were then uploaded into Dedoose, which is a qualitative coding software that allows researchers to collaboratively access and identify themes within a set of documents using a shared codebook. Using Dedoose, WestEd researchers used a process known as axial coding in which researchers identify sections of text within a transcript that reflect a predetermined set of themes. These sections of text were analyzed by theme to generate thematic summaries that were supported by information from multiple interviews and the focus group. Select quotes were added to the thematic summaries to elevate the voices of ELP staff and ELP participants whose stories informed the findings presented in this report.

[29] Rev.com can be accessed at https://www.rev.com/.

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