

Expanding Horizons:

The Case for Investing in Expanded Learning
for Middle and High School Students



Executive Summary

Because expanded learning (afterschool and summer) plays an essential role in every child’s learning and development, California has invested in a massive expansion of these programs with the aim of universal access for elementary school students by 2025. While this investment is historic in nature, it leaves out a huge segment of the student population that needs these supports more than ever: our adolescents.

Almost daily, we see reports of the toll the pandemic has taken on teens. On top of the wide-ranging mental health struggles, adolescent brains are developing more intensively than at any other time since early childhood. This combination of factors points to the need for more investment in additional supports both in and outside of school, such as mentoring and enrichment provided by school- and community-based afterschool and summer programs.

However, the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P), which is funded at \$4 billion annually, directs these funds to Transitional Kindergarten through 6th grade students. While a portion of other state and federal afterschool grant programs in California is set aside for middle and high school students, **when you add all of California’s afterschool investments together, less than 2% is reaching our high school students and less than 5% is reaching our middle school students.**

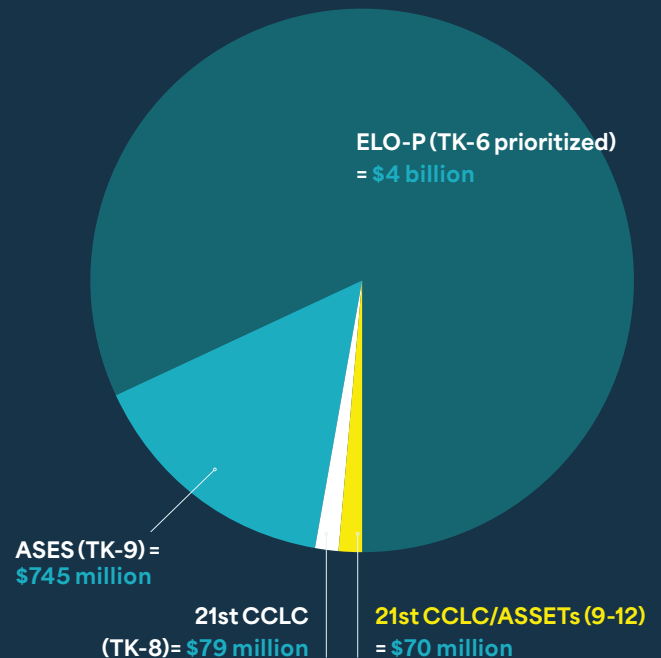
There is significant evidence that quality expanded learning programs for adolescents are effective; in boosting school-day attendance, academic performance and graduation rates, English language learning, college and career readiness, mental health and well-being, healthy behaviors and choices, student

safety, and leadership development and youth voice. For teens, quality programming looks like opportunities for youth leadership, to build skills that teens value, and support with college and career preparation such as application assistance, internship opportunities, and academic credit for participation.

There is also evidence of the strong demand for more funding for programs for adolescents, which existed well before the pandemic, with the typical demand for high school afterschool funds at more than twice that of funds available. Over 1,000 high schools serving high numbers of low-income students in California have no afterschool grant funds, and 76 high school districts, serving over 573,000 students a year, are not eligible to receive ELO-P funding.

CHART 1

High school students receive less than 2% of expanded learning funding annually



This primer on expanded learning programs for adolescents includes:

- Existing research and data;
- Examples from middle and high school programs across California;
- Ideas for how local education leaders can invest LCFF, ELO-P, or other flexible funding;
- Concrete policy actions that state leaders should take in order to improve outcomes for teens.

Recommendations for policy action include:

- Allow more of the ELO-P funding to be used for middle and high school programs;
- Increase funding rates for high school programs, in recognition of the different kinds of activities and costs associated with serving teens;
- Allow funds to flow directly to community-based organizations that have unique assets and skills in serving teens, as a key partner with schools;
- Collect better data and evaluate the impact of investments in expanded learning programs serving teens to inform program improvement and technical assistance;
- Create quality standards for programs serving teens, building on California’s existing Quality Standards for Expanded Learning that are more geared to programs serving younger students;
- Provide guidance, incentives, and technical assistance to support the blending and braiding of expanded learning programs with other related state funding.



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TOP OF PAGE – CALIFORNIA AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER CHALLENGE

Time is of the essence in addressing the needs of our adolescents. California leaders have an immediate and clear opportunity to respond, by supporting common-sense policy actions and boosting investment in programs and strategies that work. California’s teens, their families, and the educators who support them are counting on it.