

Expanding Horizons:

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



Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3	Background: How are Adolescents Being Served Currently?	14
Why Invest in Adolescents?	5	State Recommendations:	
Why Now?.....	7	Actions to Improve Adolescent Outcomes.....	19
Expanded Learning Opportunities for Adolescents Get Results.....	8		

About Us

The [Partnership for Children & Youth](#) (PCY) is an intermediary organization that has been working for over 20 years to expand access to high-quality expanded learning and wellness opportunities for children in under-resourced communities across the state of California. Grounded in research and experience, we train program providers, facilitate

relationships between schools and community-based organizations, and advocate for effective public policies and resources. We are dedicated to a future where all children reach their full potential through equitable access to learning opportunities and supportive, effective schools. To learn more, contact Jen Dietrich, Policy Director at jdietrich@partnerforchildren.org

Acknowledgments

Research and report development is a team effort, and we want to thank and recognize the contributions of many, including the PCY staff. Thank you to: Brian Lee for his writing and research leadership, the California Department of Education Expanded Learning Division (Joshua Brady and Angela Dotson) for sharing data and expertise, Jennifer Peck and Brittaney Carter for their review and feedback, Kseniya Makarova for her design, and our partnership with the members of the [California Afterschool Advocacy Alliance](#) (CA3) whom we have learned so much alongside.

Thank you to all of the expanded learning providers and students who took the time to share their stories and expertise with us: Brad Lupien and Stephanie Sajor at arc, Armando Diaz at EduCare Foundation,

Cori Ove and Cheryl Rubin at Bright Futures for Youth, Julee Brooks, Javier Gonzalez, and Belinda Younis at Woodcraft Rangers, John Fuentes and Mariana Lopez Quintanilla at Bay Area Community Resources, Da'Lana Walker at Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Donny Faaliliu at After-School All-Stars Los Angeles, Laura Beebe at LA's BEST Afterschool Programs, and Mike Snell at the California Teaching Fellows Foundation, and to the staff, administrators, and teachers who go above and beyond to support adolescents.

This report would not have been possible without financial support from the [Kaiser Permanente Northern California Community Benefit Program](#) and the [Stuart Foundation](#).

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.**

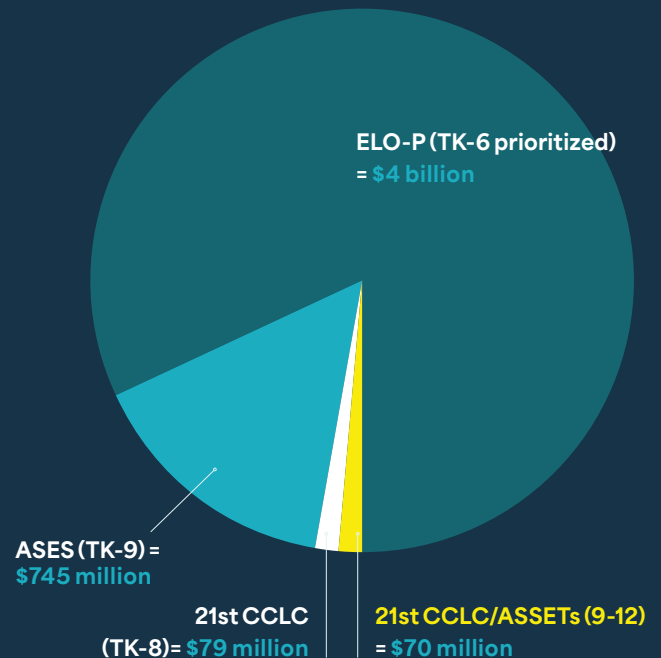
There is significant evidence that quality expanded learning programs for adolescents are effective; in boosting school-day attendance, academic performance and graduation rates, English language learning, college and career readiness, mental health and well-being, healthy behaviors and choices, student

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.



PHOTO CREDIT: ABOVE – EDUCARE,
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.

Why Invest in Adolescents?

It is now widely understood that early childhood (0-5 years) is a critical developmental stage, and public investment and policy have placed increasing emphasis on ensuring young children have all they need for the best chance of future health and success. What is less understood, is that there is another critical phase of development that must be nurtured with just as much focus: **the adolescent years.**

As they begin to transition to adulthood, adolescents face a critical time in their lives. Their brains are developing more intensely than at any point since infancy. They are developing not just physically, but also intellectually, socially, creatively, and emotionally.¹

Adolescence is a time of growth in many ways, and time in school alone does not provide sufficient opportunities and support that teens need such as connection and guidance from adult mentors, access to social capital, college and career exposure, and experiences that expand their horizons and skills. Therefore, teens, particularly those from under-resourced families, are often underprepared for important transitions and milestones that lead to successful school completion and productive college and career paths.

Afterschool and other expanded learning programs (including summer, before school, vacation, and intersession) offer crucial opportunities to advance adolescent development. They are proven to benefit older youth by increasing school-day attendance, improving academic performance, enhancing student well-being, improving behavior, and preparing them for college and career.

Older youth were actually the impetus for the substantial expansion of publicly funded afterschool programs enacted through Proposition 49 in 2002,

which was to a large extent focused on preventing delinquency.² Proponents cited studies reporting that students who participate in afterschool programs are less likely to commit violent crimes, be victims of violent crimes, skip school, repeat grades, or use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.³

Still, while benefiting older youth has been a key basis for afterschool and other expanded learning programs, few funds are directed their way.

The vast majority of public afterschool and other expanded learning funds in California go to serve elementary school students, particularly the \$4 billion [Expanded Learning Opportunities Program](#) (ELO-P),

“The Woodcraft Rangers afterschool program has proven to be a transformative force within our high school. It enriches our students’ lives, fosters personal growth, and cultivates a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom.”

CRISTIN THAKKAR, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, SOUTH EAST HIGH SCHOOL, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

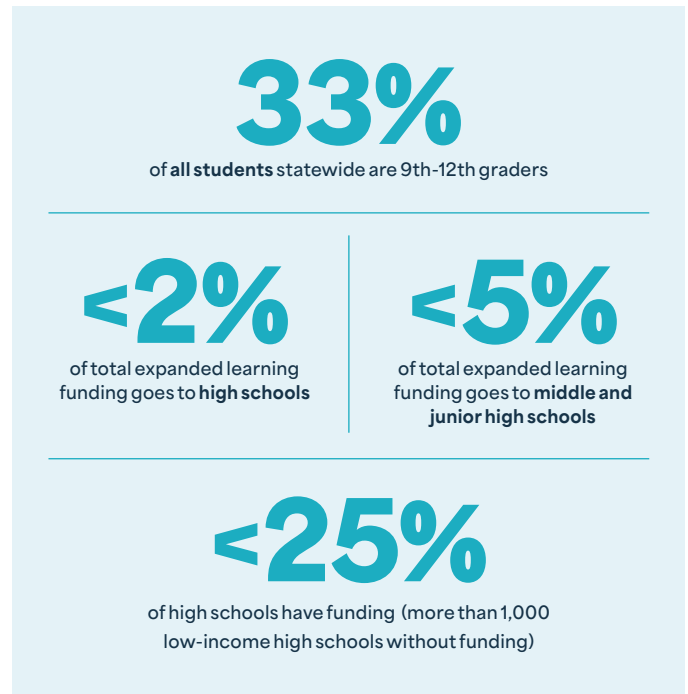
1. Arain, M., et al. 2013. Maturation of the Adolescent Brain. *Neuropsychiatr Dis Treat*. Volume 9: 449-461.

2. Argument in Support of Proposition 49. Retrieved from [https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_49,_Increase_Funding_for_Before_and_After_School_Programs_Initiative_\(2002\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_49,_Increase_Funding_for_Before_and_After_School_Programs_Initiative_(2002))

3. See, e.g. Fox, J.A. & Newman, S.A. (1997). After school or after school programs: Tuning in to the prime time for violent juvenile crime and implications for national policy. *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED412319.pdf>

which targets students in Transitional Kindergarten through 6th grade.⁴ Only if a school district has funds left over after it meets its obligations under ELO-P, such as providing programs to all interested TK-6 students, may ELO-P funding be used for middle or high school students. No ELO-P funds are available to high school districts—of which there are 76 Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) serving over 573,000 students a year—because only districts serving TK-6 students receive ELO-P.

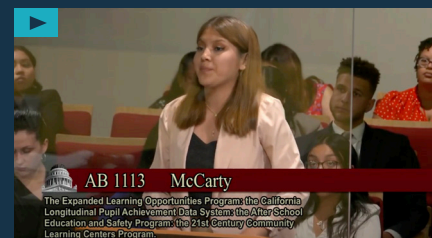
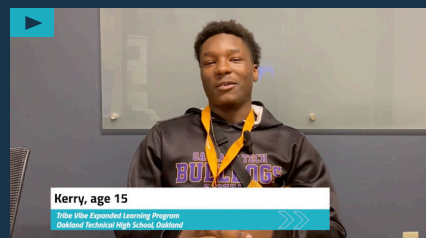
In light of the focus on younger students, less than 2%⁵ of expanded learning funding in California is designated annually for high school students through the 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) program (for program details see page 16), although 9th through 12th graders represent 33% of all students statewide (see chart 1).⁶



RESOURCE

Hear From Teens Directly

Take 1, 2, or 5 minutes to hear what teens say about their expanded learning programs in these videos



4. ELO-P was established in the 2021-22 budget and provides ongoing funding to school districts. [Education Code Section 46120](#).
5. As of 2023-24, there is \$4.89 billion available for expanded learning programs via ELO-P, ASES, 21st CCLC Elementary and Middle and ASSETs. Only \$70 million of this funding is supporting high school students via the ASSETs program.
6. California Department of Education. DataQuest. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Why Now?

Increasing investment in our teens could not be more urgent. The pandemic has had devastating effects on the mental health, attendance, and learning of middle and high school students.⁷



PHOTO CREDIT: BRIGHT FUTURES FOR YOUTH

- **Mental health** – Older youth have experienced high levels of stress, isolation, and trauma since the start of the pandemic, and communities are experiencing increased levels of violence and harmful behaviors, which can be offset by programs tailored for older students.⁸
- **Attendance** – Chronic absence has grown significantly among older youth, with both middle and high schoolers being chronically absent at close to twice the rate compared to prior to the pandemic.⁹
- **Learning** – Research also shows that older students experienced greater levels of grade loss than younger students.¹⁰
- **Income inequality and equity gap** – Exacerbated by the pandemic, income inequality drives unequal access to expanded learning programs.¹¹ For example, even prior to the pandemic, high-income families were able to spend more than five times as much on out-of-school-time activities (\$3,600 per year) than families in the lowest income bracket (\$700 per year).¹²

“Schools report that students are far behind in their academic and social skills due to the pandemic. Local school staff work to stay connected to youth but what about students after the school day when many have nowhere else to go?”

TIM REID, DIRECTOR OF PUPIL SERVICES, NEVADA JOINT UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

7. West, K.D., Ali, M.M., Schreier, A., & Plourde, E. (2021). Child and adolescent mental health during COVID-19: Considerations for schools and early childhood providers (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/0bcc372f4755cca29ebc80a47cfe300e/child-adolescent-mh-covid.pdf>; Moscoviz, L. and Evans, D.K. (2022). Learning loss and student dropouts during the COVID-19 pandemic: A review of the evidence two years after schools shut down. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/learning-loss-and-student-dropouts-during-covid-19-pandemic-review-evidence-two-years.pdf>
8. Stone, J., (2021). Addressing the trauma experienced by students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/news/2021/trauma-informed-covid-19-schooling#>; Reese, P. (2021) Homicides surge in California amid Covid shutdown of schools, youth programs. Retrieved from <https://khn.org/news/article/homicides-surge-in-california-amid-covid-shutdowns-of-schools-youth-programs/>
9. California Department of Education, Dataquest. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> Chronic absence occurs when a student has been absent 10% or more of all schooldays. Education Code Section 60901(c)(1).
10. Lafortune, J., et al. 2023. District spending of one-time funds for educational recovery. Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from <https://www.ppic.org/?show-pdf=true&docraptor=true&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ppic.org%2Fpublication%2Fdistrict-spending-of-one-time-funds-for-educational-recovery%2F>
11. Lazo, A. (2022). Did the pandemic create more inequity in California? CalMatters. Retrieved from <https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2022/02/california-income-inequality/>
12. Afterschool Alliance (2021). America after 3PM: Demand grows, opportunity shrinks. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/america-after-3pm-demand-grows-opportunity-shrinks.aspx>

Expanded Learning Opportunities for Adolescents Get Results

California-based research shows that expanded learning programs benefit older students in multiple ways, and are strongly aligned with current reconnection and learning acceleration goals and needs.



Expanded learning programs boost school day attendance of adolescents

- High school students who participated in at least 60 days of ASSETs programs attended up to 17 more school days compared to their non-participant peers, generating millions in ADA (Average Daily Attendance) funds.¹³
- A Stanford University study of the [AIM High](#) summer program for middle schoolers found significant benefits during the school year, including a 22% decrease in the likelihood of regular participants being chronically absent.¹⁴
- High-attending participants in the Southern California-based [arc](#) ASSETs program attended school three weeks more than non-attending students, and were nearly one third less likely to be chronically absent.¹⁵



Expanded learning programs improve academic performance, including for multilingual students

- A UCLA study of the ASSETs program showed that in comparison to non-participants, teens had higher standardized test scores and higher graduation rates.¹⁶
- High-attending participants in the arc ASSETs program were 38% more likely to meet or exceed standards on standardized math tests than non-attending students and 16% more likely on standardized English language tests.¹⁷
- Students who participated in California's [EduCare Foundation](#)'s afterschool program for four years graduated at a 23% higher rate than non-participants.¹⁸

13. Wendt, S. Austin, G., California Department of Education Expanded Learning Division. 2019. Characteristics of schools and students participating in after school programs. Report to the Legislature, Legislative Analyst's Office, and the Governor. Retrieved from <https://www.wested.org/resources/characteristics-of-schools-and-students-participating-in-after-school-programs/>
14. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities. 2020. Impacts of the AIM High summer learning program on student engagement & achievement. Retrieved from <https://aimhigh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Exec-Summary-Impact-Report-2019-Aim-High.pdf>
15. arc. Expanded learning program report card 2019-20. (2021).
16. Huang, D. and Wang, J. (2012). Independent Statewide Evaluation of High School After School Programs: May 1, 2008-December 31, 2011. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Center for the Study of Evaluation, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles
17. arc. 2021. Expanded learning program report card 2019-20
18. EduCare Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.educarefoundation.com/>

- Afterschool credit recovery helped boost a [Pasadena high school](#)'s graduation rate significantly. Among 155 on-time graduates one year, 84 relied on credits recovered in afterschool. Over five years, the school's on-time graduation rate increased 28%.¹⁹
- High-attending English learners in the arc ASSETs program were 29% more likely to score moderately developed or well developed than non-attending students on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California exam.²⁰
- High-attending English learners in EduCare Foundation's afterschool program were more than twice as likely to be reclassified as fluent English proficient as non-attending students.²¹
- arc offers credit recovery classes to approximately 50-100 students annually at each high school site. Courses include English, Math, Spanish, and PE. Credit recovery allows students to meet A-G requirements required for graduation and for California colleges.

 ON THE GROUND

English Learners and Newcomers

Expanded learning programs often include newcomers and other immigrants, who may also be learning to speak English. Programs are very intentional in addressing the needs of these youth. For example, [Bay Area Community Resources \(BACR\)](#) has a welcoming orientation with families, often in English and Spanish. BACR also compensates former newcomer students in high school to mentor their middle school counterparts and provides field trips to increase students' exposure to academic language. Programs generally hire multilingual staff and place them with those youth learning English. [After-School All-Stars LA](#) distributes its flyers in both Spanish and English. Programs also offer culturally relevant curriculum. arc operates specialized programming for English learners and refugees, which includes an estimated 150 undocumented students annually. In addition to language immersion, arc connects students with community resources including DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) assistance.



Expanded learning programs provide college and career readiness opportunities

- At [THINK Together](#)—California's largest nonprofit provider of expanded learning programs—88% of its high school students agreed that college is an option, 85% agreed that the program helped them with skills and knowledge necessary for college classes, and 82% agreed they have developed skills and knowledge they will need to pursue their chosen career path.²²
- Afterschool activities increased ASSETs students' awareness of the options available to them after graduating from high school.²³
- 80% of high school afterschool program participants in [Oakland Unified School District](#) agreed that their program helped them feel more confident about going to college.

19. Piha, S., Sinski, D. Connecting older youth to success through after school. Retrieved from https://www.expandinglearning.org/sites/default/files/em_articles/2_connectingolder.pdf

20. Arc. 2021. Expanded learning program report card 2019-20.

21. ERC. 2017. EduCare Foundation after school program report card for 2015-2016. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fcd2204e68b41342ba4cb-c7/t/60072df577d4ac219fbb16a7/1611083254133/EduCare%2BAfterschool%2BProgram%2BReport%2BCard.LAUSD%2B15-16%2B.pdf>

22. THINK Together. Annual report 2021. Retrieved from <https://thinktogether.org/annual-report-2021/>; THINK Together. Annual Report 2019. Retrieved from <https://thinktogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Think-Together-2019-Annual-Report-3-1.pdf>

23. Hipps, J & Diaz, M. California 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens, (ASSETs) Program, Independent evaluation, Final report. 2007. WestEd. Retrieved from https://www2.wested.org/www-static/online_pubs/eval-07-02.pdf

College and Career Readiness

Effective programs for adolescents, particularly high school youth, prepare students for college and career. Many programs, including **Bright Futures for Youth** in Nevada County, EduCare, and Los Angeles-based **Woodcraft Rangers**, offer assistance in the college application process and applying for scholarships and financial aid. Some programs offer SAT/ACT prep classes as well as field trips to colleges.

Some programs offer dual enrollment opportunities after school, which allow a high school student to enroll in a college class, not only giving a student a head start on college but also saving students and their families money by getting college credits without paying a fee. EduCare facilitates dual enrollment after school at 23 school sites, serving as the lead contact for college teachers, signing up students, and directing teachers and students where to go.

Many programs include career readiness through job training and internships where students have the opportunity to learn tangible skills, which serve them both in high school and into the future. BACR students learn bike repair, and both BACR and **Fresno County** run a barber shop. Woodcraft Rangers offers the opportunity to earn Food Handlers Certificates, helping prepare teens to work in the food industry. BACR partners with The Crucible in Oakland to provide internships. The Crucible teaches industrial arts, including jewelry making, blacksmithing, welding, and woodworking, and offers a small stipend to participating students. Middle schoolers at the Los Angeles

Pipeline to Careers in Education

Many programs help move students and staff into a pipeline to education careers by, for example, training students to get paid work in afterschool and summer programs. At Woodcraft Rangers, 40% of the staff are alumni of the program. At EduCare, approximately 30% of the staff are alumni. Additionally, the majority of California's expanded learning staff are pursuing or interested in careers in teaching, afterschool leadership, education administration, or school counseling.



PHOTO CREDIT: EDUCARE

Conservation Corps earn money by working over the summer doing beautification, gardening, and clean-up. After-School All-Stars Los Angeles offers a stipended ten-week career readiness job training course that includes financial literacy skills and connects students with business owners and operators to talk about pathways to entrepreneurship.

While programs often struggle to provide paid internships, some have been able to find the resources. For example, Oakland Unified School District and their partners recently provided \$420,000 for over 275 interns.²⁴ Stipends and wages help encourage students to participate and make them less likely to opt for low-wage jobs.²⁵

While statewide data is not available, at **California Teaching Fellows Foundation** (CTFF), more than 70% of expanded learning staff are interested in a career in education, and approximately 25% of their staff go on to work in education. At **LA's BEST Afterschool Program**, more than 50% of their staff are interested in careers in education, and approximately 25% of their staff participated in their afterschool program.

²⁴ Partnership for Children & Youth & California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. 2021. Summer game plan: Creating engaging summer learning opportunities for high-school youth. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBnDNUvgoEc>

²⁵ Partnership for Children & Youth & Linked Learning Alliance. 2021. Tips on how schools can pay students. Retrieved from <https://www.partnerforchildren.org/resources/2021/6/8/a-summer-like-no-other-accelerating-learning-for-high-school-students>



Expanded learning programs enhance students' well-being

- The cultivation of protective factors—such as caring relationships, high expectations, school connectedness, and meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution—promote healthy development and help prevent negative outcomes.²⁶ Through social and emotional learning, skill building, and developing strong student-adult relationships, expanded learning programs can help build protective factors for all youth, including those who may have an unidentified mental health need. One study of California's expanded learning programs found 7th, 9th, and 11th grade participants regularly reported higher scores on protective factors than non-participants from the same school. These positive effects were greater among high school students than middle school students.²⁷
- Given the clear connection between physical health and mental health,²⁸ it is noteworthy that the UCLA study found that ASSETs participants performed better than non-participants in virtually all of the Physical Fitness indices.²⁹
- The UCLA study found that students in ASSETs programs that were rated high in quality features of youth development had higher perceived academic competence, social-emotional competence, future aspirations, and life skills.³⁰

ON THE GROUND

Mental Health

Expanded learning programs can help address mental health issues in a variety of ways. For example, they can act as a platform for traditional mental health services, as with Bright Futures for Youth, where a Master of Social Work is on staff to assess issues of mental health and trauma and can make referrals to the county behavioral health department as needed.³¹ Programs also may provide alternative opportunities to address mental health issues, such as through therapeutic art and performing arts activities. BACR partners with Today's Future Sound to offer students beat-making lessons from instructors trained in social-emotional learning, mental health, and trauma. After-School All-Stars LA partners with Every Monday Matters to use hip hop to help address stress and anger.

"I feel like this program is making me a better person physically and mentally. This program has taught me how I can treat myself better and how I can treat others good too. I have a good connection with the adults and I feel like I belong here and that I'm welcome here." 7TH GRADER, PACOIMA MIDDLE SCHOOL, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

26. Austin, G. Wendt, S. & Klinicka, L. WestEd. 2021. Promoting protective factors in California's afterschool programs. WestEd and California Afterschool Network. Retrieved from https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/promoting_protective_factors_in_californias_afterschool_programs_june_20212.pdf?1622837569
27. Austin, G. Wendt, S. & Klinicka, L. WestEd. 2021. Promoting protective factors in California's afterschool programs. WestEd and California Afterschool Network. Retrieved from https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/promoting_protective_factors_in_californias_afterschool_programs_june_20212.pdf?1622837569
28. Ohrnberger, Julius, Fichera, Eleonora, Sutton, Matt, 2017. The relationship between physical and mental health: A mediation analysis. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29132081/>
29. Huang, D. and Wang, J. (2012). Independent statewide evaluation of high school after school programs: May 1, 2008-December 31, 2011. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Center for the Study of Evaluation, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles
30. Huang, D. and Wang, J. (2012). Independent statewide evaluation of high school after school programs: May 1, 2008-December 31, 2011. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Center for the Study of Evaluation, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles
31. After school can be an effective platform for providing mental health services, linked with other skill development, without missing instructional time. National Center on After-school and Summer Enrichment. June 2021, vol. 12. Voices from the field: Supporting and promoting mental health in out-of-school time. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/new-occ/resource/files/ncase_supporting_and_promoting_mental_health_in_out-of-school_time_508c_0.pdf



Expanded learning programs improve healthy choices and behaviors

- Youth who consistently attend afterschool programs are less likely than their non-attending peers to engage in socially risky choices, such as using illegal substances—including marijuana and alcohol.³²
- Parents of children in afterschool programs say these programs can help reduce suicide risk, drug use, and teen pregnancy.³³
- The Stanford University study of the AIM High summer program for middle schoolers found significant benefits during the school year, decreasing the likelihood of regular participants being suspended by 37%.³⁴
- Compared to non-participants, youth with histories of involvement in the juvenile justice system in a [San Francisco](#) afterschool program were significantly less likely to recidivate, and participants without such involvement were significantly less likely to commit a first offense.³⁵

“I started the Friendship Club when I was about 10 years old. When I was young, my mom was a drug addict and that [posed] quite a few ... difficulties in my life. So, when I got into the Friendship Club, it really opened up a whole new world to me. I was able to have a safe place to go that felt comforting and welcoming. ...I was also involved in mentorships, such as a fine art, dance and one of my most favorite and treasured things that I was involved in was having an angel (mentor). She was the one who really inspired me. **She gave me so much to look up to ... She showed me what it was like to run a business, unknowingly, and how to be a strong, independent woman.”**

WRYNNA KOHLER, EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAM ALUMNUS AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNER IN GRASS VALLEY, CA

→ ON THE GROUND

Student Safety

Expanded learning programs offer an emotionally and physically safe place during a time when youth are most likely to become victims of crime. Program providers offer positive activities and atmosphere that help students to steer clear of gangs and violence. Some schools have used expanded learning programs to provide restorative circles and space for healing after a safety incident on campus or in the neighborhood to support students. For example, after gun shots rang out across the street from Oakland Technical High School, one student reflected about his afterschool program, “that [my afterschool program] really prevented me from possibly getting hurt.”³⁶

“I like Woodcraft because for me it is a safe space. Coming to Woodcraft afterschool always helps me because I can either come here to do homework or just hang out with friends.”

VIVIAN B., 12TH GRADER, HUNTINGTON PARK HIGH SCHOOL, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

32. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. 2019. From risk to opportunity: Afterschool programs keep kids safe when juvenile crime peaks. (Washington, DC: Council for a Strong America)
33. Garcia, G.M., Price, L., and Tabatabai, N. 2014. Anchorage youth risk behavioral survey results: 2003-2013 Trends and correlation analysis of selected risk behaviors, bullying, mental health conditions, and protective factors. Anchorage, AK: University of Alaska Anchorage Department of Health Sciences. Retrieved from https://safealaskans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Anchorage-YRBS-Report-2003-2013_final.pdf
34. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities. 2020. Impacts of the AIM High summer learning program on student engagement & achievement. Retrieved from <https://aimhigh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Exec-Summary-Impact-Report-2019-Aim-High.pdf>
35. Afterschool Alliance. 2007. Afterschool alert: Issue brief no. 27.
36. Partnership for Children & Youth. 2023. Why teens need expanded learning programs. Retrieved from <https://www.partnerforchildren.org/resources/2023/5/3/video-why-teens-need-expanded-learning-programs-97jcj>

➔ ON THE GROUND

Leadership Development and Youth Voice

At arc, many youth apply the leadership skills they learn through the program by serving on the Leadership Council, which convenes weekly to inform the planning, marketing, purchasing, recruiting, and operations of the program. Leadership Council members are elected for a semester term and have included English Learner students, students with IEPs, and other voices from historically underrepresented groups. High school Youth Advisory Boards at Woodcraft Rangers determine how much funding will be directed to each club in the program. At Bright Futures for Youth, youth provided input on the design of a new youth center, resulting in the inclusion of a cafe, stage, and video game area.



PHOTO CREDIT: ABOVE – WOODCRAFT RANGERS, TOP OF PAGE – BRIGHT FUTURES FOR YOUTH

Background:

How Are Adolescents Being Served Currently?

High school youth are served primarily through the state-administered, federally funded 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) program.

“The purpose of the 21st CCLC ASSETs Program is to provide local flexibility in the establishment or expansion of community learning centers that provide students in grades nine through twelve with academic enrichment opportunities and activities designed to complement students’ regular academic program and that support college and career readiness, assist with literacy and related educational development services for families of these students, and provide a safe environment for students participating in their programs.”³⁷



PHOTO CREDIT: PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

As of the 2022-23 school year, ASSETs provided approximately \$70 million to 306 high school programs. Middle school students are served by the state-run After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and state-administered, federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program. As of the 2022-23 school year, ASES and 21st CCLC provided approximately \$222 million to 1,125 middle and junior high school programs.

While the annual ELO-P targets TK-6 students, some districts have used this funding for teens after meeting their obligations to provide programs to interested TK-6 students. However, there has been no statewide tracking or reporting on where or how these funds are being directed to middle or high school students.

While middle school students are expected to participate in afterschool programs at least 3 days per week under both ASES and 21st CCLC statutes, ASSETs provides more flexibility for high school students, who often have competing commitments, such as jobs or sports, and are likely to attend less frequently than middle schoolers. Often individual high school students will focus on a particular activity, which may meet for a short term of 6 to 8 weeks. While some will participate in a variety of activities, others may not attend as regularly. Still, there is generally a steady stream of participants, which keeps daily participation rates high. For example, at arc, a typical high school has 550 to 575 students participating in its afterschool program. Because most of these students don’t come all the time, the average daily attendance on a given day is 100 to 130. Under the ASSETs statute, programs are held accountable for meeting their attendance goals.

³⁷ California Department of Education. Description of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/desc21stcclc.asp>

Who do current programs serve?

Demographically, statewide breakdowns are not available by program or grade level, although data from the 2018-19 school year show that ASES, 21st Century, and ASSETS together effectively target the most historically underserved students (see chart 3). For example, 83% of afterschool participants are low-income, compared to 60% statewide, 25% are English Learners, compared to 19% statewide, 90% are students of color, compared

to 76% statewide, and 25% of students experiencing homelessness are served.³⁸ Expanded learning programs offer equitable opportunities that may not otherwise be available to these populations because of income, geography, and other factors.



25%

of students experiencing homelessness are served in expanded learning

CHART 2

Inequitable Access: Few Adolescents Have an Option³⁹

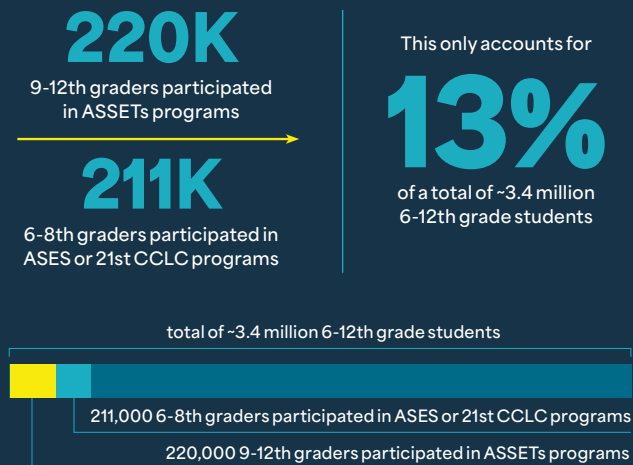
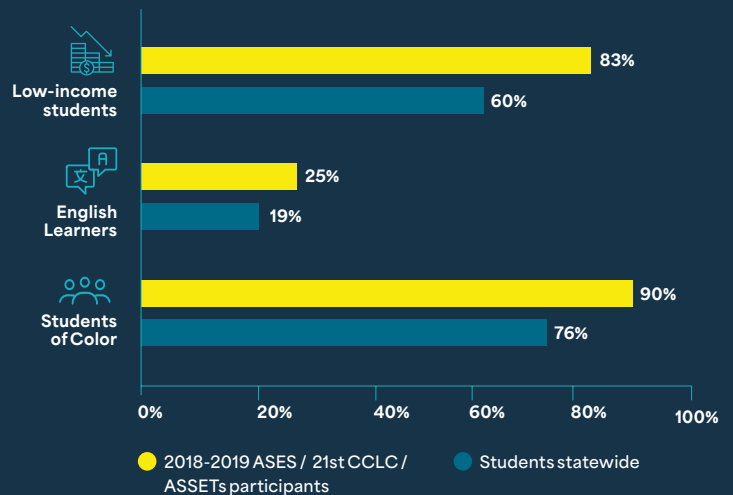


CHART 3

California's Historically Underserved Students Rely on Publicly Funded Programs



What is the demand for expanded learning programs for adolescents?

At the high school level, the most recent available data for ASSETS show that demand far exceeded the supply of available funding in a recent round of grants. Districts sought more than twice the available funding, with \$48.7 million requested versus \$18.4 million granted (see chart 4). And many more could have applied, given the over 1,000 low-income high schools without grants.

At the middle and junior high school level, demand exceeded the supply of available funding to a greater extent. In a recent round of 21st Century grants,

demand exceeded supply by over 7 times, with \$29.9 million requested for middle and junior high schools, but only \$4.1 million granted (see chart 4). Many more could have applied, with over 1,400 low-income middle and junior high schools without grants.

1,000

low-income high schools lack grants

1,400

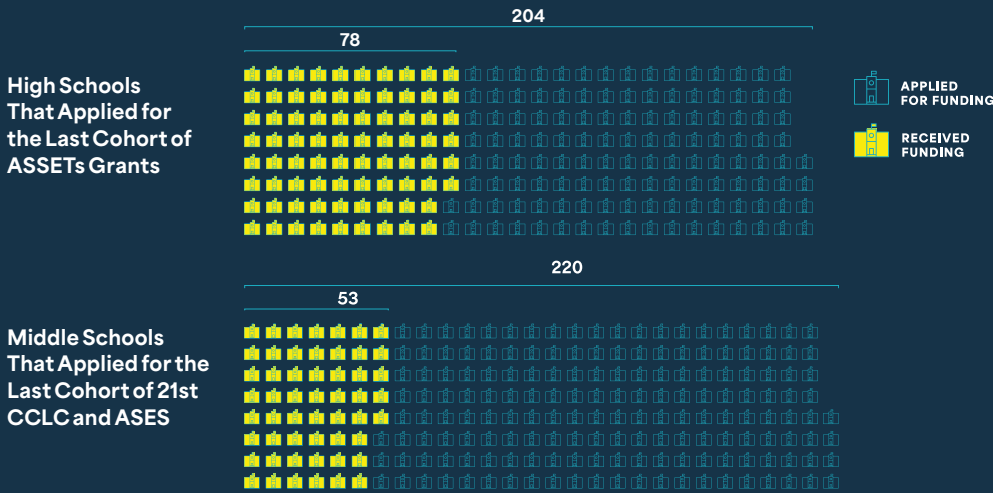
low-income middle and junior high schools lack grants

³⁸ California Department of Education, Dataquest. Annual enrollment data, 2018-19.

³⁹ California Department of Education, Dataquest. Annual enrollment data, 2018-19.

CHART 4

Demand for Adolescent Programs Far Exceeds Funds Available



High Schools That Applied for the Last Cohort of ASSETs Grants

Middle Schools That Applied for the Last Cohort of 21st CCLC and ASES

Since 2002, funding rates for ASSETs have seen an increase of just

1.8%
to
\$10.18
daily per student

Meanwhile, minimum wage has increased

130%
And cost of living
72%

What are the per-student daily funding rates?

Funding for ASES, 21st CCLC, and ASSETs is based on a set daily funding level per student, currently \$10.18 daily per student, regardless of grade level. That’s a helpful increase for middle, as well as elementary, schools, for whom the rate had been \$5 in 2002 and \$7.50 since 2006 before being raised incrementally starting in 2017. Meanwhile, the ASSETs program rate has remained largely stagnant at \$10 since 2002 (the rate was originally set to be double the elementary and middle school rate). ASSETs’ only increase since then, in

2021, was merely 1.8% from \$10 to \$10.18. This stark lag in rate increases is particularly challenging because it is recognized that older youth programs are more expensive to operate.⁴⁰

Community-based organizations (CBOs) often struggle the most from low rates, because when school districts contract with CBOs they can still reserve 15% of state funds for themselves to help administer the programs.

PHOTO CREDIT: WOODCRAFT RANGERS



40. Grossman, J.B., et al. 2009. The cost of quality out-of-school-time programs. Public/Private Ventures, The Finance Project & The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-Cost-of-Quality-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.pdf>

What does quality look like in programs for teens—and how much does it cost?

In addition to elements that apply to programs serving all ages, such as strong relationships between students and staff and students and peers, high-quality programs for adolescents:⁴¹

- **Provide opportunities** for youth leadership and youth input/involvement;
- **Offer skills** students want to learn and specialists/experts who can teach them those skills; and
- **Prepare them for college and career**, with support during the college application process, academic credit, internships, and stipends for participation⁴² (particularly for high school students).

It is well-established that programs for older youth cost more than those for younger children.⁴³ There are different measures of what level of funding it takes to run a high-quality program for older youth, but regardless of which is applied, it is clear that the current \$10.18 rate is insufficient. The Wallace Foundation in 2009 released a report and accompanying cost calculator for individual regions within states, which is regarded as the gold standard in quality afterschool cost studies. They updated the cost calculator in 2021 to address the increased cost of living. Applying this research and cost calculator, the cost of providing high-quality middle and high school programs in Los Angeles/Long Beach as an example, is \$38 daily per student, while middle and high school programs in the Central Valley (Stockton) would cost \$31.⁴⁴ According to the Wallace Foundation, the reasons for the higher cost for teen programs include higher compensation, more specialists, and higher education levels for staff.⁴⁵

Without sufficient per-student funding (and corresponding increased grant amounts), many programs face high staff turnover, less access to field trips, and fewer specialists. For high schools in particular, the insufficient per-student rate can result in less robust, if any, summer programs. (ASSETs grants of up to \$250,000 can be used to cover summer as well as school-year programs, but they are not required to include summer). ASES and 21st CCLC programs also are challenged in offering summer programs because of a limited amount of funding to provide separate “supplemental” grants for summer or intersession.

“arc has done a wonderful job of providing a wide range of opportunities for our students. They care as deeply about our kids as we do and are always positive role models, leading by example. I also appreciate how collaboratively we work together.” ALISON BROWN, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, ANIMO PAT BROWN CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL, GREEN DOT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

41. See, e.g., Vandell, D. L. (2013). Afterschool program quality and student outcomes: Reflections on positive key findings on learning and development from recent research. In T. Peterson (Ed.), *Expanding Minds and Opportunities*. Retrieved from https://www.expandinglearning.org/sites/default/files/em_articles/3_afterschoolprogramquality.pdf

42. See, e.g., Deschenes, S.N., et al. 2010. Engaging older youth: Program and city-level strategies to support sustained participation in out-of-school time. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/engaging-older-youth-city-level-strategies-support-sustained-participation-out-of-school-time.aspx>; Piha, S. & Sinski, D. Connecting older youth to success through afterschool. Retrieved from https://www.expandinglearning.org/sites/default/files/em_articles/2_connectingolder.pdf

43. Grossman, J.B., et al. 2009. The cost of quality out-of-school-time programs. Public/Private Ventures, The Finance Project & The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-Cost-of-Quality-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.pdf>

44. Los Angeles and Stockton rates are based on the following factors: mixture of academic and non-academic activities, run by a communitybased organization, in a school, youth-staff ratio higher than 15:1, 5 days per week, 36 weeks per year, 15 hours per week, 100 slots. These factors can be changed and changes would likely result in different rates. The 2021 cost calculator is only available for certain geographic regions; no national or statewide rate is available. The Wallace Foundation Calculator was retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/cost-of-quality/pages/default.aspx>

45. Grossman, J.B., et al. 2009. The cost of quality out-of-school-time programs. Public/Private Ventures, The Finance Project & The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-Cost-of-Quality-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.pdf>

Where does middle school fit in?

Programs for adolescents include both middle schools and high schools. Many middle schools offer summer bridge programs to mitigate learning loss and to help students prepare for high school—academically, emotionally, and socially.⁴⁶ For example, **San Diego Unified School District** requires all schools to implement a summer bridging program for 9th graders to provide anchoring experiences to help students feel engaged, connected to the school campus and culture, and aware of the academic and social-emotional supports available.⁴⁷ Middle school programs typically focus more on cultivating relationships with peers, but they also have similarities to high school programs to help ease the transition to higher grade levels.⁴⁸

For example, middle school programs often welcome and encourage youth input in program development, given that middle school students are beginning to develop specific interests they want to more deeply explore. As with high school programs, middle school programs rely on specialists or experts to instruct them on these interests. One program provider estimates that elementary school programs have about 5% of their staff as specialists, middle school programs have 30%, and high school programs have 80%. And middle school is an important time to start exploring college and career opportunities.

“I love my coach! I was shy when I started the program in sixth grade but now, I’m a captain on my dance team. Next year, I will be going to high school and plan on trying out for cheer. I feel ready.” 8TH GRADER,
STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL (LA CONSERVATION CORPS)



PHOTO CREDIT: WOODCRAFT RANGERS



PHOTO CREDIT: LA CONSERVATION CORPS

46. Abbott, S.E., et al. 2013. Ninth grade counts: Using Summer Bridge programs to strengthen the high school transition. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/ninthgradecounts/ninthgradecountsummerbridgeguide.pdf>

47. San Diego Unified School District. Extended learning opportunities, Summer Bridge program. Retrieved from https://www.sandiegounified.org/departments/extended_learning_opportunities_elo/summer_bridge_program

48. Deschenes, S.N., et al. 2010. Engaging older youth: Program and city-level strategies to support sustained participation in out-of-school time. Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/engaging-older-youth-city-level-strategies-support-sustained-participation-out-of-school-time.aspx>

State Recommendations: Actions to Improve Adolescent Outcomes

The Governor's Office and California State Legislature should:

- **Increase the per-student daily rate** for programs for older youth to better meet the real cost of care and support, at a minimum to address cost-of-living increases.
- **Permit increased use of and/or flexibility of ELO-P funding** for middle and high school programs in underserved communities.
- **Designate a new funding source** (or increase ELO-P to have a high school district set aside) to support expanded learning opportunities at high schools.
- **Allow a portion of expanded learning funding to go directly to community-based partners** to speed up implementation, improve quality, and be more cost effective.



PHOTO CREDIT: ARC

→ ON THE GROUND

Expanding Horizons

Expanded learning programs can open the door to new experiences that otherwise may not be available to students, often for financial or geographic reasons. For many students, these programs provide formative experiences, such as their first time going to a beach, traveling on a plane, visiting a college campus, wearing a tie, being on a stage, going to the State Capitol, or seeing snow.

The California Department of Education should:

- **Collect and share additional student-level data statewide**, in particular demographic data (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, languages spoken at home) broken down for each of middle/junior high and high school participants, instead of combined demographic data for participants of all grade levels.
- **Conduct evaluations of the impact** of expanded learning programs on different grade levels, including for different racial/ethnic groups within those grade levels.
- **Convene key stakeholders**, including students, program providers, and school leaders to explore and define what quality standards should be for middle and high school programs, and modify current regulations, such as attendance penalties and offsite programming, to best meet the needs of adolescents.
- **Provide guidance** and technical assistance to support the blending and braiding of expanded learning programs and funding, and integration of programming in the following areas:
 - **Behavioral health.** Potential funding streams include the [Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program](#) and [School-Linked Partnership and Capacity Grants](#).
 - **Dual enrollment.** Potential funding streams include the [College and Career Access Pathways Grant](#) and the [Middle College and Early College Grant](#).
 - **Career and Technical Education, Linked Learning, and college and career readiness.** Potential funding streams include [California Golden State Pathways Program](#).
 - **Community Schools Partnership Program.** Expanded learning opportunities are 1 of 4 pillars for the [foundation of community school strategies](#).
 - **Civic Education and the State Seal of Civic Engagement.** Potential funding streams include [College Corps](#), [Youth Jobs Corps](#), and the [California Serves Grant Program](#).

“When I was lost and struggling, [Bright Futures for Youth’s NEO program] was immensely influential and impactful to me... I was given so many opportunities and I learned skills that have given me direction for where I want my life to go and who I want to be. With the expansion, I’m looking forward to the growing reach this organization will have and the kids who will benefit from it.”

GLORY, EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAM ALUMNUS (BRIGHT FUTURES FOR YOUTH)



To learn more, contact Jen Dietrich, Policy Director at PCY or go to partnerforchildren.org