



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the

Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and 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.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit **www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds**.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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Taking Expanded Learning to Scale: California's Road to Success

California has an exciting story to tell. Since 2007, roughly 4,500 schools in our state have been able to offer afterschool (and in some cases summer learning) programs to thousands of students in high-poverty communities thanks to California voters' support of Proposition 49¹ and to the federal investment in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. We are striving for every one of these programs to be filled with engaging, hands-on, relevant, and exciting learning opportunities that support mastery, expand horizons, and draw on the talents of both school and community educators.

Presently, our afterschool field in California is in a great deal of transition, as we seek to take our work to the next level. Since we began investing state and federal resources in afterschool programs in the late 1990s, a great deal has changed in our state; and the needs of children, families, and schools have intensified in a variety of ways. In addition, we have learned a considerable amount about what it takes to provide high quality afterschool experiences to students that lead to better outcomes for children, families, and schools.

Because of these factors and more, we have become intensely focused on making sure that our investments in afterschool programs—nearly \$700 million per year in California when state and federal funding are combined—are having the greatest possible impacts on student learning and success. We are changing the way we do business by transforming our approach from one that for too long operated on a parallel

1. In 2002, California voters approved Proposition 49, which constitutionally mandated increased state grant funds that leverage community resources for before and afterschool programs in public elementary and middle schools to provide tutoring, homework assistance, and educational enrichment. See *California Education Code (EC) 8482*.

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track to the regular school day to one that involves schools and partners working side by side to expand learning beyond the school day and school year.

It is well known that dollars do not always equal results. California leaders have been keenly aware that we need to become a state recognized for the quality of our out-of-school-time investments and not just for being the state spending the most money on these important programs.

To address this, in 2006 we—as policy maker and advocate working together—developed critical implementing legislation before over \$400 million in new funding went out across the state.² This legislation focused grants on the lowest-income communities, increased grant sizes, and improved the accountability system to look at a range of academic and other student success measures beyond just test scores. An expansion of this scale presented many challenges, but these new policies put us on a very promising path.

Over the years, we have joined many others in our state in intensive efforts to identify how to best support programs to achieve the maximum level of impact on student learning and success. We have chosen to focus on a few critical strategies

that we believe will leverage the best results and outcomes from California's sizable investment in expanded learning, including making state policy more targeted, flexible, and responsive to local needs; prioritizing summer learning; encouraging school-day educators and community partners to work as a team in every aspect of program operation; and institutionalizing a definition of high quality expanded learning opportunities to ensure programs focus on what works.

Specifically, here are some of the things we have been able to accomplish together as a statewide team focusing on these goals:

Examining how the state invests its dollars in improving program quality and impact.

To this end we have

- *created a new division at the California Department of Education solely focused on out-of-school-time investments and brought in smart new leadership from the field to lead this division;*
- *implemented a strategic planning process that includes both department staff and field representatives and is developing improvements to our statewide and regional systems of program support; and*
- *begun to re-examine our laws governing state and federal afterschool funding to identify where we can simplify and streamline processes, provide more flexibility to local programs, and ensure accountability structures that are appropriately matched to program goals.*

2. Prior to the passage of Proposition 49, California allocated \$120 million annually to the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program. Proposition 49 expanded this existing program to \$550 million annually, and renamed the program the "After School Education and Safety Program."

Tackling the huge gap in summer learning opportunities for students in California.

Together we are

- *raising awareness about the devastating effects of summer learning loss with policy makers, educators, and the public;*
- *making existing funding for summer learning programs more flexible and effective at the local level through legislation; and*
- *adopting a new approach to high quality summer learning programs that moves us away from the old remedial summer school model, and moves us toward programs that integrate learning with enrichment, nutrition and outdoor experiences, and the fun – and effective – summer learning experiences that all children deserve.*

Institutionalizing the “expanded learning” frame as the way we do business.

To this end, we are

- *creating a definition of high quality expanded learning that can inform policies that impact out-of-school-time programs, as well as school improvement funding and other resources that contribute to an expanded learning day and year;*
- *considering the range of approaches to expanding learning time a community might implement, including afterschool and summer, community schools, and linked learning at the secondary level;*
- *identifying key factors to success of any expanded learning approach, such as partnerships between schools and community organizations, and implementing practices that effectively engage students as well as their families;*
- *developing and creating effective messaging to key stakeholders of what we already know through experience and research—that when done well, afterschool, summer, and other forms of expanded learning programs can absolutely support student learning; and*
- *engaging principals and superintendents as our partners and champions in communicating the value of expanded learning opportunities.*

As we embark on this exciting transformation, we are going in with our eyes wide open. We know that the expanded learning terminology, and the policy implications that go with it, has been the subject of a challenging debate at the federal level and around the country. We know that some in the afterschool world feel justifiably nervous about funds being diverted to only adding minutes or hours to the school day, without really doing anything differently. And we also know that those fears could be realized if strong policies and practices are not in place reflecting both what we know about how kids learn most effectively and the components that must be in place to effectively utilize additional learning time.

We believe that local communities need to decide which approach(es) makes the most sense for their student population. We also believe that embracing the expanded learning frame will allow us to build much-needed bridges between community-based program providers and the schools they serve and give us an opportunity to talk about how all partners—schools, community organizations, and families—can contribute to student learning and success.

Many programs in California have already proven just that. With a relatively small amount of money, these programs provide a different type of academic content that is standards-aligned but project based, offer homework help, serve nutritious snacks, teach children (and their parents) about healthy eating, offer physical activity that has regrettably all but disappeared from the school day, and increase student engagement in school.

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For example, in a 20-year UCLA longitudinal study, researchers found that elementary school students who participated for 3 or more years in LA's BEST afterschool program were about 20% less likely to drop out of school than similar students who did not attend LA's BEST (Huang et al., 2005; LA's BEST, 2006). A 2011 UCLA study confirmed the lasting impact of high quality afterschool programs showing that students who participated in LA's BEST in their elementary school years demonstrated gains in math, science, and history GPAs as well as standardized test scores in 8th grade (UCLA National Center for Research on Evaluations, Standards, and Student Testing, 2011).

Participants in 86 Oakland Unified School District afterschool programs—virtually all of which are state- or federally funded—increased their school-day attendance by 35,343 days in 2010–11, earning the district close to \$1 million in additional revenue (Public Profit, 2011).

Blair High School in Pasadena, a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantee, increased its on-time graduation rate by 28% over 4 years, which school leaders in large part attribute to academic supports such as embedding tutoring into sports and enrichment activities and credit recovery programs provided by the BlairLEARNS program (Blair International Baccalaureate High School, 2007).

The operative factor in these successes is “high quality.” We in California know very well from our experiences in scaling up that helping programs provide meaningful and impactful learning experiences for children that support school success is no simple task. We have learned that many expanded learning programs are not as effective at improving student outcomes when they work in isolation from schools. We have learned that it can be challenging to get busy, pressured educators to find the time and will to

collaborate in a meaningful way with community partners. We have learned that when schools and partners develop a shared vision for student success, pool their human and financial resources, and fully take advantage of the resources our state provides for expanding learning time, kids do better.

Here in California, in addition to getting our own house in order around operating a strong system of training and professional development for afterschool staff, we know that we also have to support schools and districts in their capacity to take advantage of expanded learning partnerships and promote the idea that facilitating student learning is a joint endeavor between all parties. This takes more than talk—this takes creative collaboration.

For example, here at the California Department of Education and in the field, we are discussing concrete ways that California's 4,500 expanded learning programs can support schools in the task of implementing the Common Core Standards. We are piloting efforts to bring more hands-on science education to students through afterschool and summer learning programs. We are dedicating half of our 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding to high schools and using that resource to boost college and career readiness.

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Conclusion

We are very proud of what we have collectively accomplished in our state. We have made serious investments in expanded learning programs, and we are serious about making these investments as effective as possible. We recognize we are constantly learning about what works best, and we have much more to do in order to ensure that all students receive a strong, well-rounded education. We believe the only way to move closer to that goal is through partnerships—between policy makers and stakeholders; between school districts and community partners; within and across all kinds of public agencies; and between students, parents, and their schools. It is only through genuine partnerships that we can truly expand high quality learning opportunities for all students.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tom Torlakson was elected in 2010 to a 4-year term as California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He has served as a classroom teacher and coach and as a member of the Antioch Council, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and the California State Senate and State Assembly. In 1998, Torlakson authored legislation leading to the development of the largest system of afterschool programs in the nation. In 2006, he authored the bill that led to the 300% expansion in these programs so that they now reach 4,000 schools around the state. Born in San Francisco, Torlakson earned the Vietnam Service Medal while serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine. He earned a BA in history, a life secondary teaching credential, and an MA in education from the University of California, Berkeley.

Jennifer Peck was a founding staff member of the Partnership for Children and Youth in 2001 and has served as its executive director since 2003. In late 2010, Jennifer was appointed senior policy advisor and transition team director for Tom Torlakson, the newly-elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Prior to joining the Partnership, Jennifer spent 8 years as an appointee of President Bill Clinton at the U.S. Department of Education, where she supported implementation of numerous initiatives including student loan reform, School-to-Work, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

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