



Executive Summary




Expanding Learning for California’s Children

Top-Level Learnings from a Seven-Year Investment in After-school and Summer Learning

Prepared for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation | Prepared by Informing Change

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of its multi-year investment in improving after-school and summer learning programs (also known as expanded learning programs) for California’s K–12 students, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation (the Foundation) invested in three linked strategies:

 Quality Practice	 Systems Building	 Stakeholder Engagement & Policy Development
<p>The Foundation invested in 10 target communities across California to serve as models for how—with adequate funding, a common set of summer learning quality standards, technical assistance (TA), and community partnerships—summer learning programs could become integral components of students’ year-round learning experience.</p>	<p>The Foundation sought to cultivate a statewide network of TA providers for summer learning, building upon the TA network for after-school and utilizing clearly articulated standards to help program providers understand and implement a cycle of quality improvement.</p>	<p>The Foundation endeavored to create a broader and deeper base of support for public policy changes, such as increased and more flexible funding streams and inclusion of expanded learning as priorities in local school district plans.</p>

As envisioned in the Foundation’s Theory of Change, these three areas built off one another. High-quality model summer learning programs, driven by quality standards and supported by a system of TA, were designed to stimulate demand for more expanded learning programs and compel stakeholders and champions to advocate for

This Executive Summary draws on findings from the report “Expanding Learning for California’s Children: Final Evaluation Report of the After-school & Summer Enrichment Subprogram’s Investment Strategy,” prepared for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation by Informing Change.



them. The Foundation’s hypothesis was that greater advocacy, then, would lead to policies to expand quality programs and TA to more communities in California.

Over the course of this seven-year investment, Informing Change worked with the Foundation to understand how this theory of change played out in reality, and we found that the investment yielded a number of key successes. The problem of summer learning loss is now at the forefront of many state and local education conversations, as is the solution of summer learning programs. Stakeholder groups—from program providers to district and state education leaders—now have shared language in the form of quality standards for summer learning programs, as well as TA systems to support programs. While these successes are not widespread throughout the state, they are encouraging indicators that California’s expanded learning system is growing and improving.

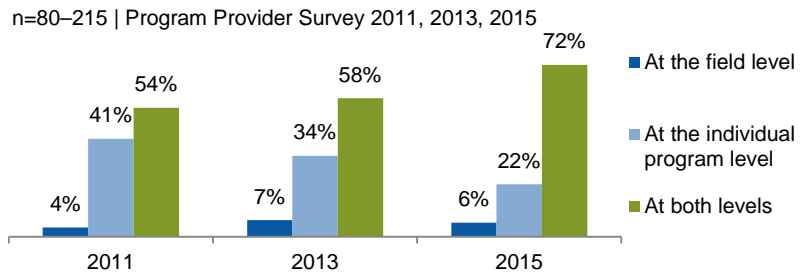
KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Defining High Quality	A major accomplishment of the Foundation’s investments was helping California’s expanded learning field arrive at what is now a widely-accepted definition of a high-quality summer learning program.
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Over time, a range of stakeholder groups found shared interest in a set of common standards for high-quality programs. Program providers increasingly believe in the value of both field- and individual program-level quality standards (see graph). Foundation-funded investments to define and measure summer quality played an instrumental role in the development of the California Department of Education’s (CDE) [Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California](#), released in 2014. With greater clarity about both summer and broader expanded learning standards, program providers reported that they can better identify gaps in quality and seek out TA.

Likewise, shared quality standards for both summer learning and after-school programs now serve as a common language between TA providers and programs, and guide TA providers on the types of TA they offer and prioritize. As a result, expanded learning programs across the state are increasingly using quality standards to guide their program planning and development.

Program providers increasingly believe that quality standards should be developed and implemented at both the field and individual program levels.



Strengthened TA Ecosystem	The Foundation’s investments in summer learning strengthened the overall ecosystem of expanded learning TA, which has been vital to prompting program quality improvements.
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Compared to seven years ago, there are new and stronger regional networks of TA and program providers, greater diversity of TA offerings and resource materials, more collaboration among TA providers, and better alignment between the types of available TA and program provider needs for both summer learning and after-school programs. These changes stem in part from the Foundation’s strategic investments in TA for summer learning programs that dovetailed with the needs of the after-school field, thereby creating a knowledge base of tools and expertise among TA providers that is a lasting contribution to the overall expanded learning field.

Creating Champions

In communicating the problems and solutions connected to summer learning loss, the Summer Matters Campaign changed some local and state leaders' minds about making a solution—expanded learning—a priority.

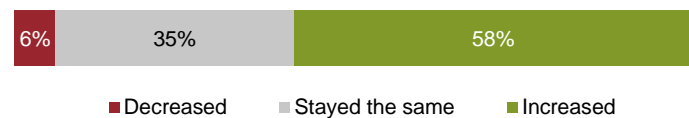
The [Summer Matters Campaign](#), led collaboratively by a group of Foundation grantees, sought to increase the salience of summer learning among state and district K–12 education leaders, policymakers, and a broad range of funders. Through Summer Matters Campaign “roadshows” and target community site visits, education leaders, community leaders, and government officials saw high-quality summer programs in action. Within the target communities, these high-quality summer learning programs repeatedly caught the attention of parents, principals, district officials, and the media.

Program providers have seen a slow, but steady, increase in district leaders' appreciation of expanded learning programs' contributions to student success, thereby increasing alignment between the school day and expanded learning. Further, through Summer Matters Campaign communications, convenings, and advocacy, groups such as public libraries, state parks, and community colleges became aware of how their institutional goals and interests connect with and benefit from quality summer learning programs. Summer learning programs increased their partnerships, working together around common goals with diverse partners such as a county health agency or a mayor's office.

Program providers believe K–12 leaders have growing awareness of expanded learning programs as a strategy to reduce summer learning loss.

n=186–195 | Program Provider Survey 2015

How have California K–12 education leaders' perceptions of expanded learning programs as an important strategy for reducing summer learning loss changed over the past few years?



Strategic Support to the Public System

The public-private partnerships underpinning the Foundation's approach allowed the public education agencies to derive multiple benefits from private philanthropy's and nonprofit organizations' ability to innovate, experiment, and catalyze growth.

The Foundation's investment sought to improve an existing system, rather than build one from the ground up. For example, the nonprofit grantees working in the Summer Matters TA team were more agile in launching new materials and choosing geographic areas to focus on, compared to the public system; they could put ideas into practice more quickly and with fewer restrictions. This agility coupled with support offered by TA team members who were based in County Offices of Education allowed the TA team to create new resources, develop and test quality assessment tools, and facilitate learning opportunities for TA providers within and outside of the CDE-sponsored TA system. These partnerships ultimately increased the capacity of the publicly-funded support system, as well as promised greater sustainability upon the Foundation's exit.

Mixed Results on Funding

The increased salience of summer learning did not create new funding streams for expanded learning, but it did motivate local and state leaders to advocate for more flexibility in fund distribution and reallocate some local funds to expanded learning.

The funding picture for most expanded learning programs in California is generally stagnant. Expanding learning field leaders have tried to leverage the higher visibility of high-quality summer learning programs and student benefits to open doors for new or increased funding; this has yet to happen. Even higher-quality programs with

numerous champions to advocate for them reported facing stubborn barriers to increasing funding and enrollment. As microcosms for what the Foundation hoped to catalyze statewide, the target communities' experience highlights the importance of new, dedicated, public funding streams for expanded learning. While creating new funding streams was not one of the Foundation's objectives, increased funding appears to be key in sustaining program quality and growing enrollment numbers; how to do this system-wide remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, some expanded learning program providers have benefitted from CDE's shift to using the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). While it did not create a new funding stream, this development during the Foundation's summer learning investment opened up new possibilities for school district funding of summer learning and after-school programs. Despite tough competition among local needs for these funds, some districts are allocating new funding to expanded learning programs.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Foundation's investment was successful in stimulating currents of change within California's system of publicly-funded expanded learning programs. Yet, this success was not evenly distributed across the state. Significant challenges remain in the field around reaching the entire state and addressing funding volatility. As the Foundation has exited this strategy, we offer the following concluding thoughts that could help inform future actions by expanded learning field leaders.

Continue to Build Quality

- To promote and continually refresh best practices will require **centralized channels** at the state level to collect and vet resources, as well as **local feedback** to ensure that best practices reflect the needs and perspectives of multiple regions and program types.
- With limited and sometimes unstable funding, maintaining program quality while also expanding program enrollment can be at odds with one another. Field leaders must **continue the conversation** about this tension so that program providers can understand how and why they make decisions when faced with this choice.

Leverage the Public Structure

- For the field to move forward at the state level, CDE and the lead organizations in the Summer Matters Campaign need to consciously put time and resources into face-to-face events with each other in order to keep their **public-private partnerships strong and trusting**.

Develop Field Capacity

- To maintain momentum, the field must reduce dependence on one or two "star players" within an organization or entity and **seek out and train emerging leaders** and advocates for expanded learning across key organizations at the state and local levels.
- To create a **communication and dissemination chain** for announcements and best practices in the field, field leaders should map and streamline the ways expanded learning program providers and their systems of support share information.
- To **prevent communication silos about summer learning**, field leaders need to scan the broader statewide landscape and target areas where the Summer Matters vision has not yet taken hold. This may require **diversifying the types of communications** to target hard-to-reach program providers and their communities.