



Linking Common Core and Expanded Learning

After school programs can reinforce learning from the school day, and serve as partners in Common Core Standards implementation.

If you walk into a fourth grade after-school classroom, it appears on the surface that students are playing math games that reinforce multiplication tables. Drill down a bit and you'll find these games are intentional, as the after-school providers and classroom teachers have discussed how to support multiplication because benchmark testing showed weaknesses in concept mastery.

Collaborative planning time is at the heart of these activities, and the time is appreciated by both the teachers and the after-school staff who support students who need extra help.

This example out of the Glenn County Office of Education is part of the SPARK program (Supporting Participation in Academics and Recreation for Kids), but is represented in thousands of schools every afternoon with the intentional academic alignment between staff of the school sites and after-school programs, often called expanded learning programs or opportunities.

After-school and summer programs are

huge assets to the school day. Kids need time to play, explore and have fun, and after-school and summer staff are well suited to provide those kinds of experiences. When the expanded learning partners work closely with school staff, they can also set up the fun, out-of-school activities to reinforce learning from the school day. It's a clear win for teachers, after school/summer staff, and – of course – kids.

Expanded learning programs have the unique potential at school sites where structured, facilitated conversations are taking place about student learning. They increase student time on task, highlight key concepts identified for student mastery, and more importantly, engage students with additional caring adults who provide support and help connect students to school.

In light of the new demands of the Common Core State Standards, no time could be

*By Lisa Gonzales, Jessica Gunderson
and Mara Wold*

better for expanded learning programs to emerge as an effective best practice to support student learning.

The strength of expanded learning

Increased learning time can be a critical factor in improving student outcomes. High quality expanded learning programs refer to a wide range of engaging, relevant learning opportunities that include before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs, all of which enhance the development of youth outside of regular school hours. A report from The National Center on Time and Learning indicated that significant benefits arise from more learning time, including opportunities for deeper engagement in content and more investment in student enrichment activities (Farbman, 2012).

A robust body of research shows that these programs are effective at improving a range of student academic, social, emotional and physical outcomes (George *et al*, 2007; Reisner *et al*, 2004; Kauh, 2011). Research on California-based expanded learning programs suggests long-term positive effects on school attendance, improved English fluency, academic success, social and emotional outcomes, as well as reduced dropout rates and juvenile delinquency (Huang *et al* 2005; Huang & Goldschmidt, 2007).

Accordingly, California has made a significant investment in expanded learning programs – more than \$650 million annually in federal and state funding, more than the remaining 49 states combined (Lee, 2010). There are currently more than 4,200 publicly funded expanded learning programs across the state that serve about 400,000 students.

These programs serve students in communities most in need of additional supports. Ninety-seven percent of state and federal funding for expanded learning programs goes to students from low-income families, specifically targeting schools with at least 40 percent or more of the student body participating in the federal free/reduced priced meal program.

Benefits of expanded learning programs

In late 2011, per the recommendation of State Superintendent Tom Torlakson's Tran-

sition Team, the California Department of Education established a new After School Division (ASD). In October 2012, the ASD released its "Statement of Strategic Direction," which highlights expanded learning programs that should be "results-driven, flexible to student and community needs, include community partners, and comple-



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ment but not replicate traditional classroom instruction" (CDE After School Division, 2012).

The After School Division recognizes that the highest quality expanded learning programs are those that are active, collaborative, meaningful, support mastery and expand horizons (Piha, 2012).

According to research by the Harvard Family Research Project, expanded learning programs are uniquely positioned to partner with schools to improve student outcomes, leverage resources, and support school improvement strategies (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). Developing strong partnerships between the school day and after-school partners is a key indicator of high quality programs (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008).

Students who regularly and fully participate in a state-funded After School Education and Safety or federal-funded 21st Century Community Learning Center

after-school, intercession and/or summer programs gain the equivalent of up to an extra 90 days of school. These programs not only provide tutoring and homework support in key academic areas, but a wide range of hands-on activities that include project-based enrichment activities that may not be available during the school day.

Skills for a healthier future

Middle school students in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in Watsonville have built and raced go-carts, built solar ovens, grown and harvested their own fruits and vegetables for use in cooking classes, designed and implemented service-learning projects, and established peer-to-peer mentoring projects with neighboring elementary schools.

Superintendent Dorma Baker said, "We are especially proud of our Extended Learning Fitness 4 Life component of the after-school program. The program is dedicated to developing skills in youth for a healthier future and has been very successful. The program was awarded as a silver medalist by the Governor's Council."

The Fresno County Office of Education and California Teaching Fellows Foundation partner to provide a huge variety of activities with intentional learning goals for hundreds of children each year. Their program at the Central Unified School District is focused on a novel that the middle school participants read and then explore more fully through hands-on projects and experiences.

This past summer's novel, "The Red Pyramid," led youth through a deep study of Egyptian culture, scientific inquiry into the pyramids and mummification, and English language arts through theater.

Central Superintendent Mike Berg said, "Summer and after-school programs are an integral component of Central's effort to provide our neediest students experiences they otherwise might not get, thus predisposing them to being at a disadvantage to their more affluent peers. Our students enjoy the programs so much that they frequently forget they are in a learning setting."

When designed with student learning outcomes in mind, expanded learning

programs reinforce and bring to life the concepts introduced and taught during the school day. Expanded learning programs are uniquely positioned to develop habits of mind, which build the overarching critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative skills essential to students' success in school, career and life.

Furthermore, when students are engaged in relationships with other caring adults and mentors on their school campuses, the con-

These collaborative examples demonstrate the types of learning and habits of mind that are the essence of the CCSS. When expanded learning and school day programs collaborate well, the benefits for student learning experiences and success can be exponential.

Unique potential of expanded learning

After the California State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State

Standard recommends districts to “integrate the CCSS into programs and activities beyond the K-12 school setting” and suggests “professional development to district administrators, school principals, and after-school program directors on how to collaborate to incorporate into after-school/extended day programs activities that enrich and extend the CCSS-related learning initiated during the regular day.”

This recommendation is not surprising, given the positive outcomes for students that can result from strong collaboration between expanded learning programs and their school partners, as well as the rich after-school infrastructure present in California.

Most districts have begun work toward transitioning to the new CCSS, with primary emphasis on teacher training and preparation. And this work will continue to be both time-consuming and focused to reach the 2014-15 goal of full implementation of the new standards. The education system will be hard-pressed to meet the Common Core Standards in isolation. The expanding learning field can provide support as a key partner in CCSS implementation, as it has additional space, time, flexibility and specialized staff to engage students and families.

Some promising examples

While this work is still in its infancy in California, there are a handful of promising examples of CCSS links with expanded learning programs. This connection begins with a robust system of field support. California is broken down into 11 support regions, as identified by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association. Each region has a lead County Office of Education (Regional Lead) who works with CDE staff members and other external entities to provide needs-driven technical assistance to expanded learning programs throughout the state.

This important infrastructure supports compliance and quality implementation, and ensures accountability measures are in place. Unique also to California is a statewide system of support for technical assistance providers, called ASAPConnect, that builds the capacity of Regional Lead county offices, Department of Education staff, and



nection between social, academic and workforce skills is made even more real.

“It goes deeper than quantifiable content,” said Bob Cabeza, executive director of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach. “Our approach has to be relational bonding to pro-social norms. Young people are hungry for relationships, and the presence of long-term role models keeps kids coming to school. Kids listen to people, not rules.”

The Sacramento City Unified School District bridges students' entry into both middle and high school programs with its “Summer of Service” program. Through this program, more than 800 young people are inspired to research, debate, select and plan collaborative service learning projects. Many of the projects focus on their new school communities, giving them an opportunity to interact with older peers from their new schools and to feel ownership of their new facility.

Standards in 2010, the CDE made significant investments to develop the infrastructure, guidance and communications around the CCSS implementation. California's CCSS systems implementation plan, in particular, provides a timeline for implementation as well as an overview of seven key guiding strategies for districts.

While most of the strategies refer to K-12 levers to advance implementation, guiding strategy four calls for collaboration with external partners, including expanded learning providers. Based on a scan of other states by the Partnership for Children and Youth, a non-profit research and advocacy organization, California is the only state to have expanded learning partners called out explicitly in its Common Core implementation plan.

According to the “Common Core State Standards System Implementation Plan for California” (October 2012), the strat-

the more than 250 external technical assistance providers to better train, coach, mentor and broker resources at the local level.

In Fall 2011, CCSESA Region 5 (Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties), the After School Regional Lead and local County Office Coordinators began scaffolding CCSS trainings with expanded learning program staff throughout the region. After-school program grant managers and program directors were the first to receive training to build a common language base around the education reform, as well as a deeper understanding of the standards.

The Site Coordinator and Frontline Staff trainings culminated in intense, three-hour sessions on concrete educational strategies that could be used in the after-school setting to support in-class math and language arts instruction. While these trainings were a critical first step, the real work is the current and ongoing coaching support needed to ensure learning is transferred and sustained into daily practice.

Involved from the beginning

In Santa Ana Unified School District, staff from the expanded learning time provider, THINK Together, sit on the district's Common Core Task Force. By being involved in planning and coordination from the beginning, THINK Together will be better prepared to complement the district's efforts, and the two partnering entities will be well situated to leverage each other's training and planning resources.

Deputy Superintendent Cathie Olsky said, "The district sees THINK Together, as well as other extended school time providers, as a major asset in our efforts to implement Common Core effectively by capitalizing on and mobilizing the hours and days beyond the regular school day and year. We are looking forward to building on our partnerships, including THINK Together, to support student learning toward the Common Core standards.

In the San Francisco Unified School District, the Department of Children and Youth is organizing a learning circle of middle school expanded learning providers to focus on new math practices, best practices in integrating STEM learning into applied

Getting started with an expanded learning program

What can you do in your district or county to begin collaboration with expanded learning partners? Here are some steps to consider:



■ Contact your local Regional Lead for help identifying those organizations that provide support for students before and after school, during intercessions, or in the summer months. This includes both site-based and off-site After School Education & Safety Programs and 21st Century Community Learning Programs run by school districts, non-profit community-based organizations, for-profit companies, institutions of higher learning, or faith-based groups. Also, reach out to fee-based child care programs and others in the surrounding school community.

■ Invite expanded learning partners to specific staff meetings, PTA meetings, English Language Advisory Committee meetings and other district trainings where CCSS overviews are provided.

■ Share with expanded learning programs information and resources on CCSS that your district has either created or promoted to share with the school community. One great resource is the "Parents' Guide to Student Success," which provides background information on the CCSS and how education is changing in the United States (PTA, 2011). Because expanded learning programs often have stronger connections to students' families than school personnel, a natural partnership exists with these groups to assist with communication about the new standards.

■ Have expanded learning staff members attend grade-level planning sessions with teachers. Ask teachers to share skills, activities and successful strategies that can be used to reinforce the concepts being taught in class. Teachers will appreciate the opportunity to have these collaborators. When expanded learning providers understand what teachers are teaching, it makes it easier for their programs to complement the school-day instruction and support student achievement.

and project-based learning, and how out-of-school-time providers can support the district's transition to the new math standards.

There are several strategies your district or county office can take to get started with an expanded learning program. See the box above for some ideas.

Having intentional conversations – now

So here is your challenge. The time is now to begin having intentional conversations about how to strategically involve your expanded learning programs in a practical manner that supports student learning. If these program providers are going to begin to support the work, it is imperative that they are at the table and treated like valuable partners with skills that can support

students in meaningful ways. The movement around the idea of expanded learning opportunities and their potential to support students recognizes that quality learning experiences can occur anytime, anywhere. This has heightened the potential for successful implementation of the Common Core Standards, and will ultimately fulfill our promise that all students will be ready for college, career and life. ■

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Lisa Gonzales is ACSA's vice president for legislative action. Her work at the Santa Clara County Office of Education has supported the roll-out of the Common Core State Standards with after school providers. Jessica Gunderson is the policy associate with the Partnership for Children and Youth. Mara Wold is the Regional Lead, Region 5 After School Partnerships, Monterey County Office of Education.