



Expanded Learning 360°/365
Skills for Success in School, Work and Life



Student Success Comes Full Circle

**Leveraging Expanded Learning
Opportunities**

Concept Paper, May 2015

Research Overview

The full list of research and materials reviewed is too long to list here. Some of the foundational reports and references that underlie this paper include:

- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294-309.
- Farrington, C., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T., Johnson, D., & Beechum, N., (2012). *Teaching adolescents how to become learners. The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance: A critical literature review*. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Farrington, C., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T., Johnson, D., & Beechum, N., (2014). *A framework for developing young adult success in the 21st Century. White paper: Defining Young Adult Success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Garcia, E. (2014). *The need to address noncognitive skills in the education policy agenda*. Economic Policy Institute.
- California Office to Reform Education (CORE). (2014). *CORE SEL Pilot Update*. Website: <http://coredistricts.org/>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). *Social and Emotional Core Competencies*. Retrieved from the CASEL website: <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies/>

For more information on the literature review and/or the research work group content and process, please see the Expanded Learning 360/365 project [website](#).

A Note on Terminology

“Social-emotional learning” and **“character development”** (along with other terms like “non-cognitive skills”) are often used interchangeably. These skills are broadly defined as “patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior” that develop throughout one’s life.¹ For this paper, selecting one broad term was less important than defining specifically what these skills are and how they are developed through quality expanded learning programs. As described in this paper, success means more than the logistics of life; it also means having the moral compass to participate in a community as a positive citizen. It is important to note that these skills and practices are not new. Within the field of expanded learning, the term **youth development** has been used for decades, with a strong research foundation, to describe the supports and opportunities that effectively nurture social-emotional and character skills.²

The term **Expanded Learning** refers to before- and after-school, summer, and intersession learning programs that focus on developing the academic, social, emotional and physical needs and interests of students through hands-on, engaging learning experiences. Expanded Learning programs should be student-centered, results-driven, include community partners, and complement but not replicate learning activities in the regular school day/year.³ We know children and youth spend more time out of school than in, and learning is not restricted to the classroom.

1 Garcia, E. (2014). *The need to address noncognitive skills in the education policy agenda*. Economic Policy Institute. p.3.

2 Community Network for Youth Development. Youth Development Guide. <http://www.ydnetwork.org/YDN%20Publications>

3 California After School Division. California Expanded Learning Strategic Plan 2014-26. <http://caexpandedlearning.weebly.com/expanded-learning.html>

All children and youth need social-emotional and character skills in order to thrive in school, work, and life.

A broad body of research substantiates that academic ability works in tandem with social-emotional and character skills to support young people's success in the 21st Century.⁴ Young people need to be able to assess their own skills and behaviors, work with others, and persist when faced with challenges.

We want our youth, as they reach adulthood, to be well-prepared for productive careers and as socially conscious, engaged citizens. To get there, they need to succeed in school and that means mastering the complex and demanding new learning goals embodied in the Common Core standards.

By their design and structure, high-quality expanded learning programs provide valuable opportunities for children and youth to develop social-emotional and character skills. Families with sufficient resources spend freely to provide these opportunities through private lessons, summer camps, and special programs. California's unparalleled expanded learning infrastructure makes similar experiences accessible to young people whose parents wouldn't otherwise be able to afford them. **We believe expanded learning and school day programs can and must work together to ensure that our investments result in real and equitable gains in young people's success. They can do this by consistently and coherently prioritizing students' social-emotional learning and character development.**

Unfortunately, too many school district leaders overlook the extra time, space, partnerships, and expertise that expanded learning programs can provide for social-emotional learning and character development, particularly for underserved youth. This is an opportunity lost, perpetuating gaps in both academic and life outcomes for these young people.

The purpose of this paper is to help school day and expanded learning leaders capture that opportunity by providing a shared understanding of what and how expanded learning programs contribute to social-emotional learning and character. We believe this information will inspire better coordination of and commitment to school-day and expanded learning practices that ensure young people thrive in school and as citizens in the 21st Century.

⁴ See Research and Acknowledgements text box on page one.

Expanded Learning Programs strongly support three foundational areas of Social-Emotional Learning and Character Building.

Children develop social-emotional skills and character over time and through a variety of experiences. Expanded learning programs offer structured yet flexible learning environments where specific skills can flourish. A diverse body of research has shown that the skills listed below contribute to and are interdependent with improved academic and well-being outcomes. (See Research text box on page one.)

I AM—intrapersonal skills



- *Self-awareness*—young people are able to recognize and understand their own personal identity and feelings. “I know how I am feeling.” “I know who I am.”
- *Self-management*—young people regulate and monitor their own behaviors, feelings, and impulses in order to make responsible decisions, maintain focus, and achieve goals. “I choose how I react to things.” “I can control my own behavior.” “I can stay focused.”

I BELONG—interpersonal connections



- *Social awareness*—young people have a capacity for empathy, and are able to consider and appreciate the diverse feelings, perspectives, and personal contexts of others. “I care about other people’s feelings.” “I get along with kids who are different than me.”
- *Interpersonal skills*—young people use effective communication and collaboration skills to establish and maintain positive and productive relationships. “I can learn from others.” “I can communicate my ideas clearly.” “I work well with others.”

I CAN—beliefs and mindset



- *Self-efficacy*—young people believe in their own capabilities and their ability to learn, achieve goals, and succeed. “I can overcome challenges.” “I believe that I can do well in school.” “I’m going to college.”
- *Growth mindset*—young people believe that they can, through their own efforts, grow in their intelligence and abilities. “The harder I try the better I will get.” “I can learn from my mistakes.”

In addition to academic success, these skills prepare young people for the practical aspects of life, including being self-sufficient, having positive relationships, and adapting to changes and challenges. They also support the moral aspects of life like citizenship, integrity, responsibility, and overall what we know as “being a good person.”

California’s publicly-funded system provides quality expanded learning programs for the kids most in need.

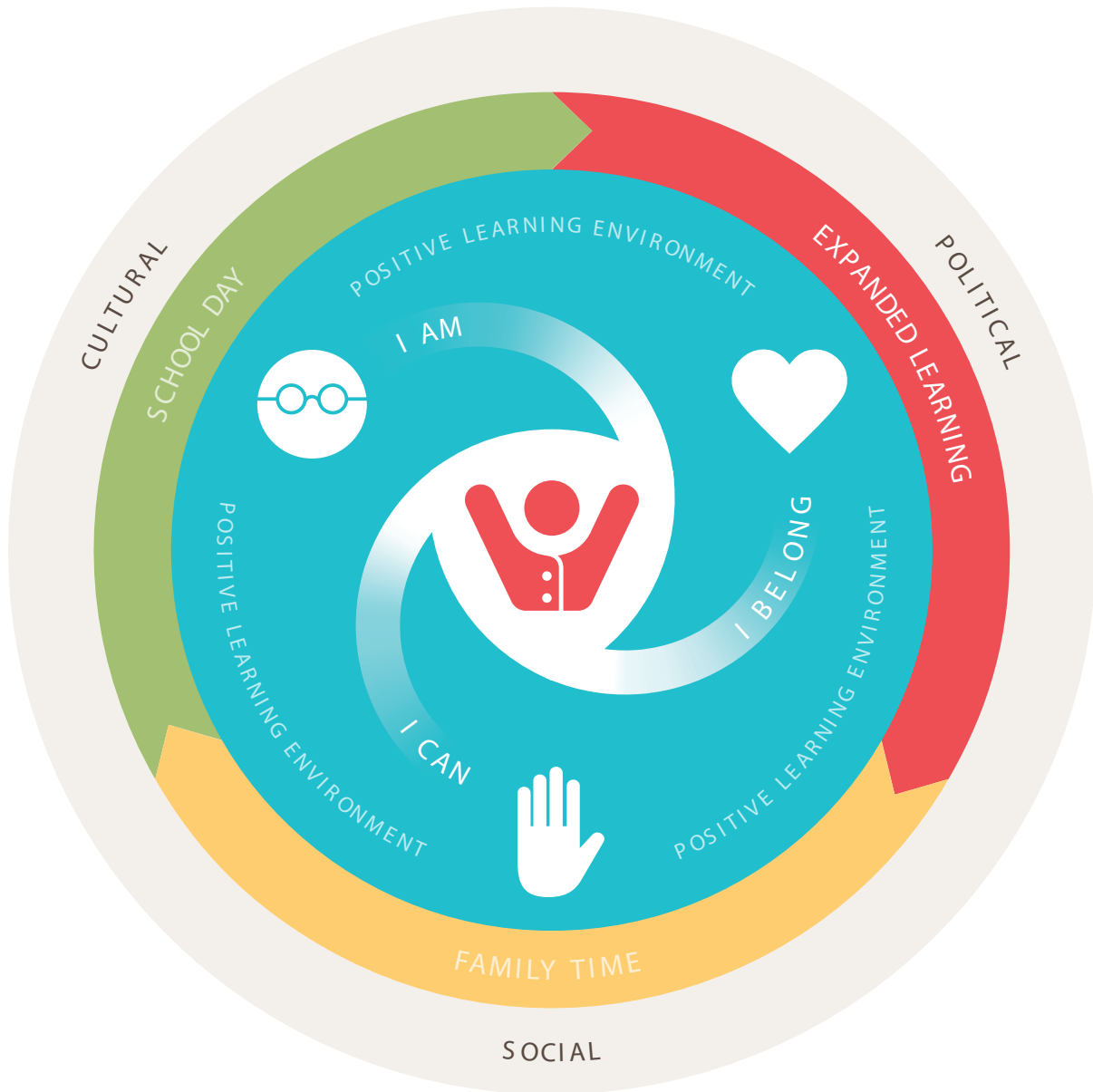
Summer learning programs and camps, organized youth sports, children’s theatre programs, and similar activities provide positive learning experiences—when families are able to pay for them. Recent research shows that higher income youth are twice as likely to access enrichment and after-school activities such as sports, arts, and music.⁵ Additionally, unequal summer learning opportunities are responsible for about two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth.⁶ This difference in access to expanded learning opportunities directly contributes to the achievement and opportunity gap.

Since implementing Proposition 49 over a decade ago, California has created a strong network of after-school and summer programs that serve the state’s most underserved children and youth. These expanded learning programs focus on providing children and youth with a safe

5 Putnam, R.D., C.B Fredrick, and K Snellman. 2021. *Growing Class Gaps in Social Connectedness among American Youth*. The Saguario Seminar: Civic Engagement in America. Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

6 Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olson, *Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap*, American Sociological Review 72(2):167-180, 2007

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and positive learning environment where social-emotional and character skills are intentionally instilled through activities, relationships, and experiences. They strive to be places where learning is active, meaningful and collaborative, promotes mastery, and expands students' horizons.⁷ These programs serve all young people, but the public support is essential for children whose families cannot otherwise afford to pay for them.

Expanded learning programs create the positive learning environment where social-emotional skills and character development can thrive.

As part of its investment in expanded learning, the state has also built an infrastructure to support continuous improvement in program quality and effectiveness. California's quality standards for expanded learning programs define best practices that align well with the learning strategies and conditions found to be most effective in developing character and social-emotional skills.⁸

Safe and supportive environment

Quality expanded learning programs create a safe, orderly environment that is fun, honors individual differences, and celebrates success. Staff members are intentional about building positive relationships with youth, and creating a culture of respect and caring between peers. At the same time, they hold participants to high expectations for behavior and achievement. Research points to these strategies as key aspects of increased social-emotional learning and character development among young people. Safe and supportive environments also contribute to the instructional capacity of schools and classrooms by promoting young people's connections to school and their academic engagement.

In this safe environment, participants develop a strong sense of belonging and feel comfortable trying out new ideas and skills. These relationships and experiences allow them to understand and negotiate different opinions and perspectives, experiment with unfamiliar activities and skills, and establish their identities as students and individuals.

Active and engaged learning

Project-based, experiential learning is a mainstay of expanded learning programs, requiring students to explore, think, and create collaboratively and actively. Through these activities, participants learn how to connect with others and be productive participants around work that is meaningful to them.

The activities that staff members plan and implement—whether in sports, the arts, social justice, or science—are relevant and meaningful to young people. They also increase participants' 21st Century skills, sense of personal and social responsibility, and understanding of life and career options. These activities provide learning experiences that engage multiple senses, raise awareness, and promote thought-provoking discussions. The staff supports collaboration across the larger community, diverse cultures, and even globally.

Skill building

In quality expanded learning programs, staff are intentional about the scope and sequence of learning opportunities. Participants have the flexibility to move at their own pace and to dive more deeply into skills and content that particularly interest them. Participants are also encouraged to understand and develop their abilities through practice, reflection, and constructive feedback. And they regularly celebrate and appreciate learning through presentations, performances, and exhibitions that allow children with different skill sets to experience and demonstrate mastery. Importantly, staff help youth see connections between the activities and skills they experience inside the program and their lives outside the program.

7 Learning in Afterschool & Summer Principles. <http://www.learninginafterschool.org/documents/PositionStatement.pdf>

8 Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/as/documents/qualstandexplern.pdf>

How social-emotional and character skills support Common Core success

In today's classroom, students are being asked to activate a whole set of interpersonal and social skills that were not emphasized under No Child Left Behind. Implemented well, the Common Core will engage and build young people's abilities in communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (the 4 Cs). **The social-emotional and character skills we've identified are a necessary prerequisite for students' Common Core success.** Empowering young people to believe "I am, I belong, and I can" will be essential as they are called upon to work together, share their learning, persevere in challenging tasks, and negotiate new content and classroom strategies.

Youth voice and leadership

Expanded learning program participants are given opportunities to express their opinions about the activities they do and they see their preferences and interests reflected in program offerings. They also hold leadership positions in classrooms, at program sites, and within organizations that have authentic decision-making authority. These meaningful roles build their self-awareness and sense of responsibility for their actions.

Diversity, access, and equity

Expanded learning programs regularly celebrate diversity within their program and in the broader community. By creating a safe and structured environment, staff allow participants to explore and learn about themselves and others through group experiences and honest conversations. To build participants' social awareness, capacity for empathy, and sense of civic responsibility, effective programs give participants the chance to serve in their communities in meaningful ways. Staff—who often come from similar backgrounds and experiences as the youth—are intentional role models, helping participants understand a broader set of possibilities for their own schooling, careers, and lives.

Together, all of these practices—defined by California's expanded learning quality standards—create opportunities and environments where young people are continuously building their social-emotional and character skills, including their sense of self, connections to others, and confidence as learners.

School day and expanded learning leaders need to seize the opportunity to help all students thrive.

A remarkable window of opportunity in education is open today. School-day educators are remaking classroom instruction to adapt to the Common Core and put more emphasis on college and career readiness, both of which require a solid foundation of social-emotional and character skills. At the same time, California's publicly-funded expanded learning programs are working intentionally to improve quality and effectively support social-emotional learning and character development.

School day and expanded learning leaders must make the most of this opportunity by working as authentic partners who recognize and leverage each other's strengths and assets, and who:

- Affirm a shared vision of student success in the 21st Century.
- Use a common vocabulary regarding social-emotional and character skills.
- Build on existing programs and services unique to the local community.
- Share and implement consistent learning strategies.
- Recognize and honor learning and competencies in and out of the classroom.
- Talk about, and act upon, ideas for collaboration that support children and youth.

We cannot afford to miss this opportunity. It is not enough for the adults and systems to just pay lip service to 21st Century learning; we must walk our talk. We must leverage this chance for new partnerships and increased effectiveness using the same kinds of innovation, creativity, and collaboration that we aspire to instill in our students. By working together, we can maximize leadership, vision, and time to meet our goals for the young people whose lives and futures we are shaping.

Acknowledgements

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