



STRATEGIC DIRECTION



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Our Aspiration, Purpose, Vision, and Mission

Our Aspiration

The California AfterSchool Network (CAN) grounds its work in the aspiration of a global, human-centered society.

Our Purpose

We exist to make a difference in the health and well-being of children, youth, their families, and their communities by strengthening access to high-quality Out-of-School Time (OST)¹, including Expanded Learning² programs.

Our Vision

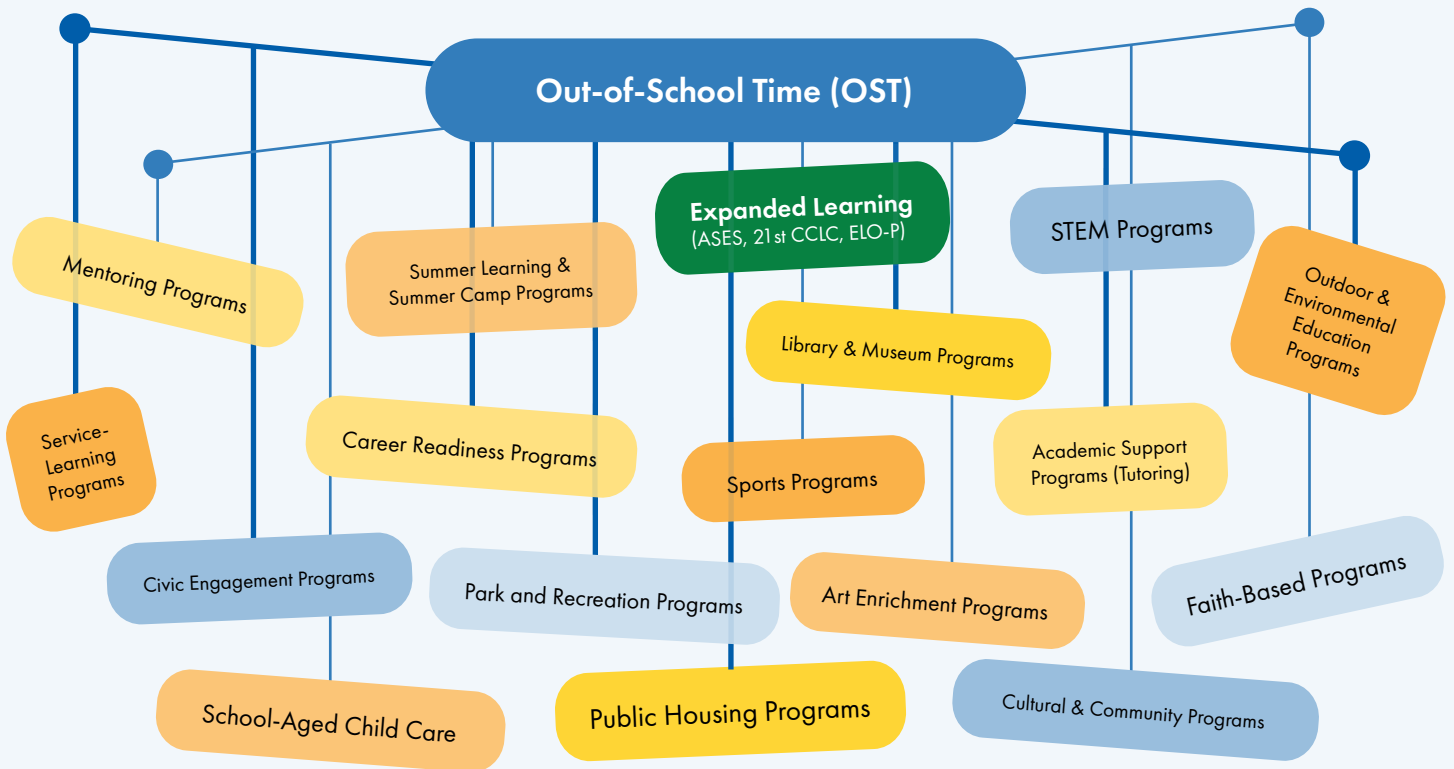
We envision compassionate communities that collaborate with OST programs to support whole children, families, and communities so that every young person, and every family is well-known, well-cared for, and prepared to thrive.

Our Mission

We provide the resources and support needed by the OST field and its partners across sectors³ to build high-quality OST programs that improve the lives of all⁴ of California's children, youth, families, and communities.



CAN believes the Out-of-School-Time (OST) field, including Expanded Learning, plays an essential role in advancing the health and well-being of every child.



Our Commitment to Equity and Justice

CAN is not neutral on issues of equity, social and racial justice. We acknowledge neutrality as complicity in perpetuating injustice.

The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California highlight that quality programs create an environment in which children and youth experience values that embrace diversity and equity that are inclusive of diverse identities representing race, color, religion, sex, age, income level, national origin, physical ability, sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. We seek to perpetuate these conditions for children, families, OST professionals, and communities.

CAN acknowledges a history of white supremacy, racial injustice, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, capitalism, environmental injustice, and oppression that has resulted in inequitable outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. This requires us to acknowledge our history and to act intentionally as geographically, culturally, and professionally diverse allies to bring about a more just and equitable future.

CAN acknowledges that our current systems are designed to produce the outcomes they are producing. These systems can be redesigned. CAN applies equity design principles to how CAN works, and integrates equity-driven principles into what CAN does. CAN actively works to create a **new way of being**, one that is human-centered, socially just, and anti-racist. We recognize that this approach supports the success of all people, and devalues none.

We understand that the culture is steeped in norms and patterns of white dominance, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, etc. that are often difficult to recognize (like a fish recognizing water). It is incumbent upon us to be open and inclusive of a diversity of perspectives, engage in personal reflection, and examine how our biases show up in our leadership.

While CAN advocates and lobbies for policies supportive of Out-of-School Time (OST) access and quality, we also acknowledge that OST programs exist within a broader context that impact the lives of the children, youth, families, and communities we serve. Therefore, we advocate and lobby for just and equitable human-serving systems including and beyond OST.



CAN's Equity Symbol

This symbol represents the importance of equity considerations in promoting quality and continuous quality improvement.

¹According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Out-of-School Time (OST) is a supervised program that young people regularly attend when school is not in session. This can include before-and after-school programs on a school campus or facilities such as academic programs (e.g., reading or math focused programs), specialty programs (e.g., sports teams, STEM, arts enrichment), and multipurpose programs that provide an array of activities (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs)." Reference - <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/ost.html>.

California has the largest collection of OST programs in the nation consisting of federal, state, local, city, community, and fee-based programs. Each system has its own unique networks, standards, and practices.

²Expanded Learning programs are a subset of OST programs in California that receive funding administered by the California Department of Education's Expanded Learning Division and are defined in the California Education Code as "before and after school, summer, and intersession learning experiences that develop the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of children and youth. Expanded Learning opportunities should be hands-on, engaging, student-centered, results-driven, involve community partners, and complement learning activities in the regular school day/year."

³Sectors include but are not limited to government and community based health/ public health, mental health, social services, education (K-12 and higher education), expanded learning, child care, recreation, enrichment, nutrition, workforce development, municipality, child/family advocacy agencies, and other human service agencies.

⁴CAN seeks to improve the lives of all children and youth with an explicit emphasis on historically marginalized and under-resourced communities. This emphasis is grounded in the philosophy that when we design for the many, our systems may continue to perpetuate marginalization. When we design at the margins, we design for all.

The Challenges We Address

Economic, racial, and other forms of inequity have resulted in educational, health, and well-being disparities, which are intensified by inequitable access to high-quality OST learning and enrichment opportunities. As California continues to recover from the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also faced with climate-related disasters, food and housing insecurity, and growing mental health challenges across all age groups, which are magnified in communities that have been historically marginalized.

California has the largest collection of OST programs in the nation consisting of federal, state, local, city, community, and fee-based programs. Each system has its own unique networks, standards, and practices. The OST field is supported by a substantial workforce that is diverse and representative of the communities they serve, but is often underpaid, and lacking full-time employment, career pathways, and collective representation resulting in recruitment and retention challenges, and variable levels of quality.

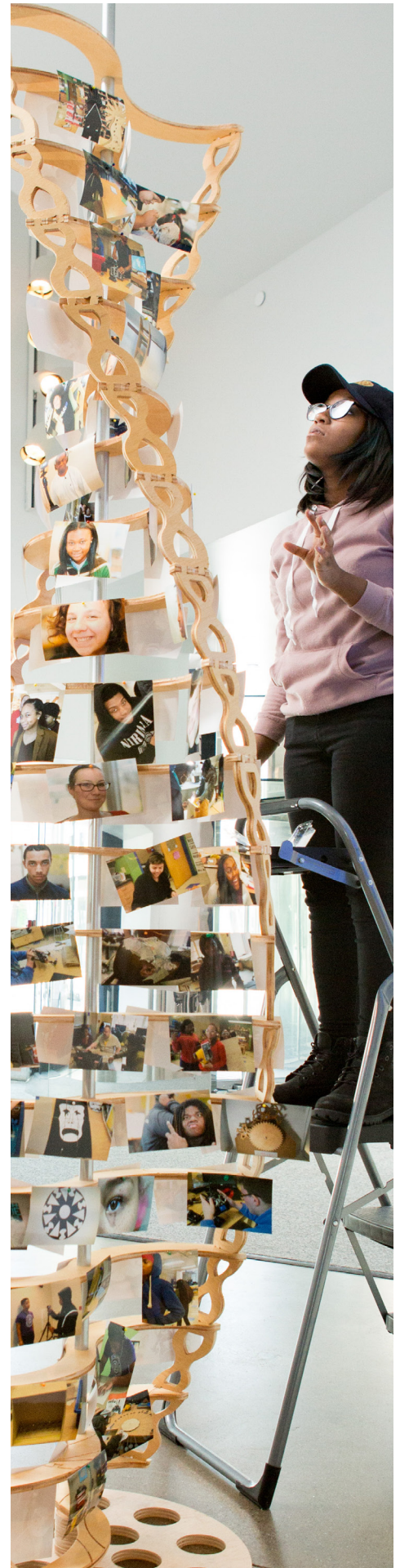
OST programs are well-positioned to partner across community agencies to help mitigate economic, educational, and health inequities in California's communities. This potential has not been fully realized (largely) because existing policies and practices have created barriers to collaboration with OST programs that could improve the lives of children and families.

Our Approach

We recognize that lasting and sustainable change is only possible when we hold a powerful, compelling, shared vision of what could be – and think strategically, work collaboratively, and act intentionally to bring it into reality.

This is why CAN approaches its work as a Network defining success as progress toward a shared mission. CAN does not strive to be the brightest star, but instead convenes and supports collaborative constellations.

Grounded in the understanding that relationships and trust are the foundation for effective partnership, we foster opportunities for collaboration that promote more equitable outcomes for California's children, youth, families, and communities.



Our Call to Action

Now Is the Time to Act

California's Governor, Legislature, and state agencies have created a bold statewide vision to work across sectors to promote child, family, and community wellness. This vision is supported by unparalleled investments in Expanded Learning, early learning, Community Schools, school-based and school-linked mental health and well-being, nutrition, arts and music, and workforce development.

These investments include California's commitment to universal Expanded Learning for all Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through sixth-grade children and youth. This robust system supports children, youth, family, and community wellness while also providing meaningful employment opportunities. These programs are essential partners for local and regional whole child health, mental health, wellness, and workforce development organizing efforts. Expanded Learning can be the catalyst for change and a hub for partnership and integration in every California community.

Investments in OST, including Expanded Learning, represent the ultimate multiple-win strategy. They create a return on community investment, allow caregivers and guardians to maintain employment, and support a significant workforce that enhances local economies while developing skills that translate to careers in multiple sectors. While impactful, these benefits are secondary to the positive long-term outcomes for the children and youth who participate in OST programs.

CAN's work is to ensure California seizes this moment to create collaborative ecosystems of support for whole children, youth, families, and communities.

There has never been a better time to:

- Ensure California's Expanded Learning investments are protected and sustained so that every child, youth, and family that needs access to a program, has access.
- Build the capacity of California's growing Expanded Learning programs to create conditions for children and youth to thrive.
- Establish school, community, and Expanded Learning partnerships to promote wellness and increase access to health, mental health, and substance use prevention, intervention, and treatment services for children, youth, and their families.
- Develop new career pathways and workforce development partnerships to support a thriving Expanded Learning workforce and pathways into education and health & human services careers.

Organizational Strategies



CAN is “of the field and for the field.”

CAN *assembles and mobilizes* geographically, professionally, and culturally diverse interest holders⁵ to collectively address significant workforce needs and advance innovation in the OST field.



CAN is a catalyst for quality.

CAN *promotes* a shared vision of quality, advances a culture of continuous improvement, and builds capacity to ensure the OST workforce is equipped to implement high-quality programs.



CAN is a vehicle for advocacy.

CAN *advances* a 3-pillar policy framework⁶ that focuses on redesigning systems to address inequity, expand access to high-quality OST programs, support and nurture our workforce, and align resources for children, youth, families, and communities.



CAN is a conduit for communications.

CAN *elevates* field voice and provides the information, tools, resources, and practices that address stated field needs and enhance practice.



⁵An interest holder is defined as a person with an interest or concern in something. An interest holder as it pertains to this Strategic Direction might include children, youth, families, OST professionals, community members, policymakers, and individuals including, but not limited to representatives from any of the sectors mentioned in footnote number four.

⁶CAN's Policy Framework: <https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/advancing-ost-policy>



CAN is “Of the Field and For the Field”

CAN assembles and mobilizes geographically, professionally, and culturally diverse interest holders to collectively address significant workforce needs and advance innovation in the OST field.

WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN convenes and supports collaborative efforts to address evolving field needs, spread innovations, and strengthen state and local partnerships with OST programs.

CAN advances a **Statement of Strategic Direction Toward Equity-Driven Whole Child Health and Wellness** to foster collaboration between the OST field and human service sectors resulting in an ecosystem of support for thriving children, youth, families, and communities.

CAN participates in, and supports, the California Department of Education’s System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL) to ensure state, county, and local agencies have the resources and support needed to implement high-quality Expanded Learning opportunities as California’s Expanded Learning system grows.



CAN is A Catalyst for Quality

CAN promotes a shared vision of quality, advances a culture of continuous improvement, and builds capacity to ensure the OST workforce is equipped to implement high-quality programs.

WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN provides Technical Assistance to the OST field, education, health and human services, and community interest holders to continuously improve program quality, and strengthen community partnerships resulting in positive developmental outcomes for children and youth.

CAN utilizes and promotes equity-driven practices to ensure OST programs serve California’s historically underserved children, youth, and families with environments that are inclusive of diverse identities representing race, color, religion, sex, age, income level, national origin, physical ability, sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression.

CAN develops and promotes career pathways and opportunities into, within, and through the OST field, advocates for well-compensated OST employment, and supports Site Coordinators to ensure a thriving OST, youth development, and TK-12 educator workforce.



CAN is a Vehicle for Advocacy

CAN advances a 3-pillar policy framework that focuses on redesigning systems to address inequity, expand access to high-quality OST programs, support and nurture our workforce, and align resources for children, youth, families, and communities.

WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN increases awareness, provides resources and data, and advocates for policy changes that address the root causes of inequity and create a more just and equitable landscape for all children, youth, families, and communities.

CAN strives to build capacity and ensure access to advocacy opportunities for all members of our communities, especially those with the least access to the decision-making process, to advance policies that ensure we all thrive.

CAN seeks opportunities for joint advocacy efforts across sectors to promote policies that strengthen and build cohesion amongst multiple resources for children, youth, families, and communities.



CAN is a Conduit for Communications

CAN elevates field voice and provides the information, tools, resources, and practices that address stated field needs and enhance practice.

WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN elicits information and facilitates generative dialogue with leaders and practitioners in the field to learn how CAN and its partners can be responsive to the needs of the OST field and promote innovation.

CAN curates and disseminates timely news and information about current events, tools, resources⁷, promising practices, and available professional development, through a variety of communication channels and forums to spread innovation, and increase program impact.

CAN celebrates the achievements of OST programs and workforce to increase awareness of program impact and the importance of this critical workforce.

⁷CAN disseminates information, tools, resources, and professional development opportunities to address current and emerging field needs especially including but not limited to: workforce and participant safety and promising practices to address reopening in the context of COVID-19; Positive Youth Development / Social Emotional Learning (SEL) / Science of Learning and Development (SoLD); program quality and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), trauma informed approaches; equity-driven practices, social justice, and anti-racism; health and wellness; nutrition and physical activity; Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM); support for English learners; support for older youth; support for rural programs; information, tools, and resources to advance policies supportive of out-of-school programs; timely and urgent issues for the field; and promote the accomplishments.

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