Emerging Practices For Attendance Recovery

California's Attendance Recovery policy, launched in July 2025, has sparked widespread interest among districts across the state. Their interest makes sense. Attendance Recovery gives districts the opportunity to recoup lost attendance revenue, a significant need given the funding and attendance challenges that many districts are facing.

But the Attendance Recover (AR) policy should do much more than bring in money. Implemented well, AR could:

- Get students re-connected to their school community and re-engaged in the learning process.
- Inspire teachers - in partnership with expanded learning staff - to design interactive, educational activities that spark students' curiosity and strengthen skills.
- Allow formerly disengaged students to experience a deeper sense of community with caring adults and peers that motivates them to come to school every day.

These benefits won't be realized without intentional planning and commitment on the part of districts and their expanded learning partners.

Fortunately, there are pioneering districts working to figure out effective ways to implement AR. This memo documents the emerging practices in these districts in order to maximize the benefits of AR and expanded learning. In sharing these practices, we hope to support districts across the state as they navigate if and how to integrate AR into their context. The examples in this memo come from interviews with Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) staff in five school districts and ELO technical assistance providers at two county offices of education.

This memo is the second in a series of memos about the implementation of the AR policy.

Memo #1	Memo #2	Memo #3
Recommendations for Partnering with Expanded Learning	*Emerging Practices For Attendance Recovery*	*Return on Investment from Attendance Recovery Programs*
Summer 2025	**Winter 2025**	**Spring 2026**

Please note that the Partnership for Children and Youth does not represent the California Department of Education. These findings are not an interpretation of Ed Code but a reporting out of practices in the field.

Emerging Practices

Below, we describe strategies and structures for AR that are currently being implemented or planned by the LEAs we interviewed. It is still too early to declare these practices successful. They are shared here as part of the robust conversation among educators about how to make AR work effectively for students, families, and schools.

START UP: What should we do first?

- **Districts are piloting AR, only after engaging multiple players in the planning process and testing out attendance tracking technology.**

  - All of the districts we interviewed started by piloting AR classes and the tricky attendance reporting requirements at a small number of schools.

  - Interviewees took the time to plan with multiple individuals and groups in the district, central among them the teachers' union in order to agree on teacher pay for AR classes. Attendance staff, the business office, curriculum and instruction, technology and principals all need to understand and provide input to emerging plans.

> **Don't surprise anyone.**
> OMSD Coordinator

- **Many of the districts started by identifying and capturing attendance from existing programming that already align with AR policy**, such as summer, intersession, afterschool intervention classes and high school credit recovery/acceleration classes.

  - In **Ontario Montclair School District (OMSD)**, the Expanded Learning Coordinator identified existing afterschool intervention classes that are taught by credentialed teachers and meet the requirements of AR. They are adding some structure - pre/post tests to capture learning gains and smaller class size requirements (around eight students per class). The current attendance tracking system allows the district to re-code past classes as AR in order to report attendance retroactively.

  - **Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD)** already has 99 clubs taught by certificated teachers that meet the requirements of AR. Like OMSD, they are capturing attendance from the previous and current quarters.

- In **Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD)**, the existing high school credit recovery/acceleration classes meet the AR requirements with the added bonus that students in these classes are getting credit toward their specific courses.

CHALLENGE:

In some cases, district ELO staff have been assigned to implement the AR policy with little explanation of the districts' goals, partnership with leadership, or additional resource of time and staffing. ELO directors are actively addressing this challenge by reaching out to other departments to co-design the AR strategy.

STRUCTURE AND DESIGN: How do we fit AR into everything else we're doing?

- **All of the districts we spoke with are integrating AR into the district's single comprehensive expanded learning program.**

  - In EGUSD, teachers pull students - who have not opted out of AR - from ELO, for one hour sessions, primarily during homework time. Students participate for a set number of weeks; then the teacher pulls a new group of students. Families automatically register for AR when they complete the ELO-P registration form. They are given the opportunity to "opt-out" if they don't want their child pulled out to work with a certificated teacher. So far, no one has opted out.

  - In OMSD, AR is one item on a menu of ELO offerings that students can choose. Afterschool partners, such as Think Together, provide the backbone programming of ELO while district staff (including, but not limited to credentialed teachers) offer other sports, activities, and clubs. Some of the clubs and activities qualify as AR. Students who choose AR activities can leave ELO for one hour and then go back to ELO or go home with a proper sign-out.

  - CVESD operates a single comprehensive expanded learning program, called LEAD. ASES funding supports the LEAD "Hub" which operates until 6 pm and is available five days/week. "Clubs" are a supplemental piece within LEAD, offering one hour activities, with those that are taught by credentialed teachers counting as AR classes.

    Students choose their Clubs by quarter. Students who need daily afterschool programming are in the Hub and may also participate in Clubs. Other students participate only in Clubs and get picked up after their activities. All students are registered for the Hub so that students who need longer care on some days of the week can be absorbed into the Hub on those days.

- CVESD has a future plan to create a specific AR component during its Friday minimum day based on the Junior Achievement Biztown model. This model integrates math, ELA, science and other academic content into a make-believe business world where kids learn by doing. The first part of the afternoon will be supervised by ELO staff while teachers are in their minimum day meetings and by teachers in the second part of the afternoon for AR. CVESD is planning to pilot this approach at two or three sites.

> ### *CHALLENGE:*
> One district experienced the challenge that ELO-P operates as a "drop-in" program where parents pick up their children whenever they want, including in the middle of AR classes. To address this challenge, they instituted "pick up windows" between scheduled activities.

- **Districts are requiring minimum student attendance per class** that is lower than the 20:1 student Ed Code ratio, and they are using flexible groupings in classes to personalize learning.

  - In EGUSD, teachers must have at least 12 students enrolled in order to be approved to teach their class.

  - OMSD sets the number at 8 to 10 students per class, with teachers creating smaller groups of students within the class focused on similar topics

  - CVESD established a 15 student minimum in its teacher agreements, but in reality has allowed 9 to 10 students.

  - In the **Santa Ana Unified School District**, teachers with multiple grades in a classroom will be doing a variety of small group (by grade level), full group (focused on reading/literacy), and individual, independent activities.

- **Many of the districts are scheduling AR on one or two days of the week**, rather than every day.
  - SAUSD is planning to offer school sites the option of hosting AR twice a week after school or on Saturdays.

  - OMSD avoids having AR activities compete with the "fun" stuff by scheduling enrichment on some days and academic AR content on other days.

> **Intentional scheduling means that students won't have to choose between basketball practice and math instruction.**
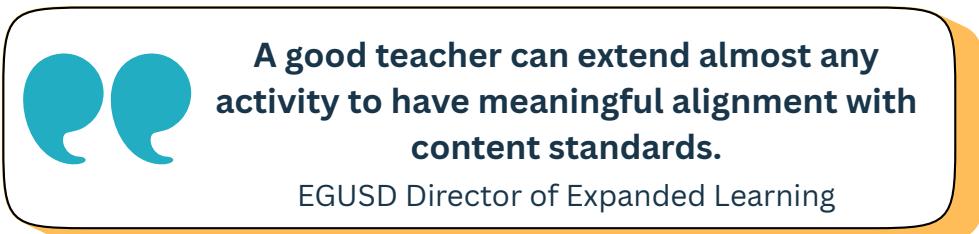>
> OMSD Expanded Learning Coordinator

- **The one district that included AR in its 2025 summer program made slight adjustments in its existing AM/PM structure to meet AR requirements.** Other districts are planning a similar approach for intersession and Summer 2026 implementation.

  - At EGUSD, certificated teachers teach the AM component, and ELO staff facilitate afternoon enrichment activities. When the AR policy came into effect on July 1, 2025, teachers were given the option to align their curriculum to the AR policy by identifying the standards associated with their content (see below for more on this system). As much as possible, students were assigned to teachers for their grade level, although in some cases, experienced teachers were asked to expand their content to adjacent grade levels. Student attendance in these classes was counted for AR.

    In Summer 2026, teachers will be required to align with AR so that all the attendance can be captured. Within this requirement to align with standards, teachers are expected to keep the content interactive, fun and engaging.

  - The districts planning for Summer 2026 AR programming are following a similar approach with morning instruction by certificated teachers and afternoon activities with ELO staff. In order to keep programming engaging, these districts are continuing to have themes across the summer or by week.

CONTENT: How do we meet the requirements for AR while making it engaging?

- **Most districts are allowing teacher autonomy to choose content and align it to the standards.**

  - For Summer 2025, EGUSD created a process in which teachers identify the standards that their AR class content aligned with. The district chose 4 to 5 standards in each of the following content areas for each grade level - VAPA, ELA, Math, NGSS, ELD and PE. Teachers completed a form for each AR class that describes their content and which standards it aligns with (selected from a drop-down menu including the grade-level standards chosen by the district or using the option to type in other standards if not the ones chosen by the district) along with the number of students, grade level and date.

  > **A good teacher can extend almost any activity to have meaningful alignment with content standards.**
  > EGUSD Director of Expanded Learning

  - During the school year in EGUSD, high school and middle school teachers are invited to submit proposals to teach one-hour classes before or after school. The site administrator (usually an assistant principal) assigned to oversee the AR component approves or requests revisions to the proposed classes.

- In OMSD, the district has added some parameters to the classes that teachers were already offering after school. To count for AR, teachers need to administer pre-/post-tests and explicitly identify how the activities are addressing gaps in learning. At the same time, OMSD is not requiring that classes only cover core academic content. They have left guidance open for teachers to apply for classes related to Physical Education and other standards, without explicitly promoting these broader content areas until they have worked out all their systems.

- CVESD also invites teachers to submit proposals for the after school Clubs they want to offer. Teachers are asked not to re-teach their lessons from the school day because the classes are not grouped by their specific classroom teacher. As in EGUSD, teachers fill out a form with their weekly curriculum and the standard it aligns to. Site leads from the YMCA and the principal review and approve proposals together, considering the mix of Clubs being offered with the principal specifically focused on assessing the degree of alignment with content standards.

- **Districts are creating, or encouraging teachers to create, engaging academic enrichment activities that are standards-aligned,** rather than strictly academic instruction.

  - In SAUSD, teachers will be encouraged to do project-based learning and interactive activities through content areas, like STEAM, that lend themselves to an integrated academic and enrichment approach.

  - Similarly, CVESD encourages teachers to expand academic content through engaging activities, for example, using legos to teach engineering concepts.

  - In EGUSD, if teachers are pulling students out of the ELO enrichment time, rather than homework help, teachers must demonstrate that activities will integrate academics and enrichment, including, for example, visual arts, STEAM, Readers Theater, or project-based math.

EGUSD studied the impact of its summer intervention classes compared to its enrichment-based summer camp. They found that students in the summer camp had equal or better academic gains than students in the intervention classes. Based on this data, they are sticking with an enrichment model.

- **Districts are using creative names for the AR component to reflect the engaging content** that corresponds to their existing expanded learning program, rather than calling it "Attendance Recovery."
    - The SAUSD will revamp the name and program of its popular Saturday School, "WIN," for its after-school AR component, which will be offered in conjunction with ELO-P.
    - As noted above, CVESD includes AR classes as part of their "Club" offerings.
    - For internal conversations, one district is adopting the language "Learning Recovery," rather than "Attendance Recovery," to refocus the effort on student learning rather than on recouping attendance dollars.
- **Districts are offering teachers resources from which to choose their content**.
    - EGUSD offers its summer teachers interactive, engaging kits for teaching math, language arts, visual arts and STEAM that are already standards-aligned.

STAFFING: How do we staff for AR and management?

- **Districts agreed on specific compensation rates for AR classes with the teachers union.**
    - CVESD negotiated a rate with the union, increasing the existing ELO-P teacher rate from $50/hour to $75/hour because of the additional requirements for teaching AR classes and recordkeeping. Teachers are compensated for time with students, but not for prep time.
- **EGUSD is intentional about ensuring adequate site level administrative capacity to manage the AR program.**
    - Site level staff - usually an administrator, like an Assistant or Vice Principal - is assigned to oversee the AR component, including scheduling and documentation. EGUSD found that these tasks couldn't be effectively managed from the central office across all their sites.
- **EGUSD also made shifts in programming based on the number of teachers available to teach AR.**
    - At sites where there were too few teachers signing up to teach, they asked the available teachers to teach additional classes for different grades. They were also strategic about which students were offered AR opportunities, rather than making the classes open to all students.
    - At sites where they had a high number of teachers interested in teaching AR, EGUSD staggered the AR offerings across the schedule so that the number of AR classes on any one day did not undercut participation in ELO classes.

TARGET STUDENTS: Who goes to Attendance Recovery?

- **Districts have varied criteria for identifying students for AR.**

  - Some are inviting students already enrolled in the expanded learning program to participate in AR.

  - Others are using the opportunity to bring new students - who have attendance challenges - into AR and getting them engaged in ELO-P.

  - Some are specifically targeting students who have either attendance or academic gaps in order to access learning supports.

  - For Summer 2026, EGUSD will be strategic about recruiting students for AR classes based on data about their previous year's attendance. This will be especially important if there aren't enough credentialed teachers for everyone to be in an AR class.

- **Some districts noted that being able to "bank hours" gives them greater flexibility to include all students in AR**, rather than only targeting students with high absenteeism. Many students are likely to have recoverable absences at some point across an entire school year.

- **EGUSD is intentionally capping student AR participation at the 10-day limit established in Ed Code**. They have teachers move on to another group of students once their group has reached the cap.

ATTENDANCE TRACKING: How do we record and report attendance?

- **Districts are using a variety of attendance tracking software to meet the requirements across AR, ELO-P, the school day and CalPADS**. (Please note: This list is not an endorsement of any of these platforms; it is simply a record of software being used by a few districts.)

  - Attendly, used by SAUSD, offers digital check-in from ELO-P and AR. SAUSD will be investing in an AR add-on to their system to track all learning recovery hours recouped per student and the potential revenue that will be brought into the district.

  - EGUSD has built ELO-P and AR into its Student Information System, Synergy by Edupoint, in a way that provides student-level data reports on school-day absences and tracks AR days earned across school sites.

  - OMSD has made Q (short for Aequitas Solutions) mandatory for every ELO-P activity, including AR. Q uploads directly to CalPADS.

  - CVESD is using Jumbula.

CHALLENGES:

- People are struggling to identify attendance tracking software that captures attendance from the school day, ELO and AR, while also linking to CalPADs. In piloting AR, some administrators had key individuals - ELO staff, principals, teachers - test out the attendance tracking software and system before starting any programming.

- Two districts noted the challenge of tracking data across multiple sites for summer attendance because students are coming from different home schools, with student attendance data housed in different places.

Advice to Other Districts

The most consistent advice that these pioneering districts had for their peers was to plan before implementing. This advice included multiple elements:

- Look at <u>CDE guidance</u> and the <u>Audit Guide</u> so you understand the requirements before you start designing. There are a lot of nuanced pieces - for example, how and by whom "standards-aligned' and "substantially equivalent" instruction are defined - that you need to know before wading into this conversation with others.

- Connect with other departments to identify resources and co-leads. Don't try to do this alone through the ELO department.

- Build off existing structures and classes that already meet the AR requirements.

- Start small and have pilot groups try out the systems and strategies you are implementing in a school that doesn't have a lot of attendance issues.

- Communicate the goals of the program across interest-holder groups to gather support. Teachers, for example, respond positively both to the program learning goals and the possibility of earning back attendance dollars for the district. Families are more likely to embrace AR as a learning opportunity for their children, rather than as a consequence for poor attendance.

- Once you understand the AR requirements, you can use the ELO rules to put more structure to AR and create consistency across students' experiences, explaining to people that, "This is the way expanded learning operates."

Conclusion

The districts profiled in this memo are in the process of implementing the AR policy. They will continue to develop their strategies and systems based on their experiences. Will all this work be worth the effort in terms of recouping lost attendance dollars and learning for students? We'll find out after the first reporting period when the amount of money brought back into districts will be visible. Keep an eye out for PCY's third AR memo this spring in which we'll document results from several districts across the state.

In the meantime, districts believe that by doing it right - which means focusing on students - they can reap benefits from the way that school-day and expanded learning staff are working together, from the alignment of resources and most importantly, from consistently positive practices for students.

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ABOUT PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

Partnership for Children & Youth (PCY) is an intermediary organization that has been working for over 20 years to expand access to high-quality expanded learning and wellness opportunities for children in under-resourced communities across the state of California. Grounded in research and experience, we train program providers, facilitate relationships between schools and community based organizations, and advocate for effective public policies and resources. We are dedicated to a future where all children reach their full potential through equitable access to learning opportunities and supportive, effective schools.

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