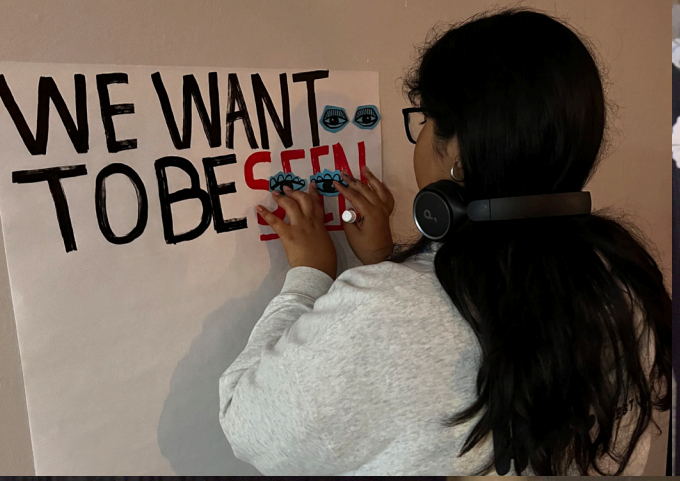








Becoming an Ecosystem

California's Expanded Learning Strategic Plan for Connecting People, Partnerships, and Community Systems

> "infrastructure is love at scale."
>
> **DR. NADINE BURKE HARRIS,**
> FORMER CALIFORNIA SURGEON GENERAL

What is the Ecosystem Plan?

Becoming an Ecosystem builds on **A Vision for Expanded Learning in California and Strategic Plans 1.0 and 2.0**, advancing the next phase of California's statewide commitment to Expanded Learning.

Co-hosted by the California AfterSchool Network and the California Department of Education Expanded Learning Division, **the plan is a collective impact strategy and collective care response.** It establishes Expanded Learning as an essential partner across California's education, health, and human services, and workforce development systems, and as a source of community, well-being, and opportunity for young people and families.

This work begins at a moment of convergence. Statewide efforts are arriving at common findings regarding role clarity, shared accountability, and coordination across state, county, and district levels. Clear structures remain essential, and they are strongest when they are rooted in trusted relationships. The leadership this moment calls for asks us to give greater attention, resources, and reverence to the relational work of connection, so that structure and relationship can strengthen one another.

Through a deliberate, relationship-centered strategic design process, partners across the Expanded Learning ecosystem listened together, turned shared meaning into priorities, and built capacity to coordinate with integrity. Expanded Learning is uniquely positioned to carry this forward. Connected to state systems and rooted in local communities, it offers a practice field where statewide priorities become place-based action, with youth, families, and the workforce at the center. In this way, the plan is stewarded as a living system, sustained through reciprocity and collective responsibility.



What are the Ecosystem Plan Strategic Priorities?

The five priorities that follow are an invitation to orient, reflect, and act in ways that are responsive to your context, community, and the conditions you are working within.

*This plan draws from the principles of Emergent Strategy, a framework developed by **adrienne maree brown**, who describes it as "a strategy for building complex patterns and systems change through relatively small interactions" and as "an adaptive, relational way of being.[1]"*

Ecosystem Plan Strategic Priorities

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	UNIVERSAL GOALS	STRATEGIC INTENTIONS
Youth, Family, and Community: Voice + Power	All young people, families, and communities belong in spaces where they share power to create opportunities and environments that reflect their identities and lived experiences.	By year 3, Expanded Learning systems will shift from input-based engagement to shared decision-making by establishing structures where youth, families, and community members co-design, influence, and hold accountability for programs, policies, and funding priorities at local and statewide levels.
Thriving Workforce and Conditions for Care	All young people are supported by a thriving and well-resourced workforce that is valued, compensated, and recognized as essential, where care practitioners of the broader youth-serving ecosystem have the conditions, skills, and support to show up fully for those they serve.	By year 3, Expanded Learning systems will cultivate a thriving, well-resourced Expanded Learning workforce by establishing career pathways, investing in continuous professional learning, and advocating for compensation and working conditions that honor educators' critical role in young people's lives.
Healing-Centered, Culturally Rooted Programs	All young people experience high-quality, healing-centered, and culturally rooted programs and experiences that are meaningful, inclusive, and responsive to who they are and where they come from.	By year 3, Expanded Learning programs will center healing and culturally-affirming practices by developing shared quality frameworks co-created with communities, investing in trauma-informed practices at the site level, and ensuring program content celebrates the identities and strengths of the young people served.
Collaborative Partnerships & Community Systems	All young people, families, and communities have coordinated, compassionate, and culturally responsive support wherever they are—in programs, schools, and communities—grounded in authentic partnership.	By year 3, Expanded Learning systems will bridge gaps between schools, community-based organizations, and families by formalizing cross-sector partnerships, co-locating aligned services at program sites, and establishing shared data and referral protocols.
Policy, Funding, and Systems Alignment	All young people, families, communities, and the workforce that serves them are sustained by a fully resourced, equity-driven youth-serving ecosystem where California's policy environment removes barriers, aligns cross-system partnerships, and cultivates conditions for collaboration accountable to those most impacted.	By year 3, the Expanded Learning ecosystem will advance policy and funding alignment by developing transparent investment frameworks, establishing cross-agency coordination, and building public accountability structures that demonstrate how resources reach those with the highest need.

The Teams who Came Together to Build the Ecosystem Plan



The different groups who came together to work on the Ecosystem Plan were multi-sector and multi-layered:

CORE TEAM: Staff from the California AfterSchool Network and the California Department of Education Expanded Learning Division who provided strategic direction for the process and refined the final plan into a clear, accessible, and actionable document.

DESIGN TEAM: Representatives from the broader youth serving ecosystem who developed and implemented statewide listening, engagement, convening, and dissemination strategies that expanded access to the design process and informed the development of Becoming an Ecosystem.

ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY TEAM: Representatives from across roles and many parts of the Expanded Learning field who listened, built cross-field relationships through the convenings, and offered strategic guidance on the plan's content and priorities.

*The Ecosystem Plan is also supported by a **Convening Team made up of CAN staff**, who carry day-to-day implementation, and a **Consulting Team** of contracted partners, including Innovation Network as our data and evaluation partner.*

Endnotes

1 brown, adrienne maree. Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. AK Press, 2017. The definition of emergent strategy appears on p.2. The discussion of strategic intentions as directional guides appears on pgs. 236-237.

2 Photos throughout this brochure are from the in-person October 2025 Ecosystem Advisory Team Convening in Sacramento, CA and the March 2026 Afterschool and Summer Challenge in Sacramento, CA.

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