



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

2022-2025

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# Our Purpose, Vision, and Mission

## Our Purpose

The California AfterSchool Network (CAN) exists 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 sectors<sup>2</sup> to build high quality OST programs that improve the lives of California's most vulnerable children, youth, families, and communities.



# Our Call to Action

## Now is the time to act.

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated a statewide and national recognition of the need for expanded cross-sector partnerships that include schools, OST programs, families, and communities to meaningfully improve equity, inclusion, and health outcomes.

This has resulted in unprecedented one-time and ongoing investments in schools, Expanded Learning<sup>3</sup>, child care, community schools, mental health, substance use prevention/intervention, and other human service sectors.

As part of this, California's Legislators have committed to universal Expanded Learning for all Kindergarten through sixth grade students in the state, which could increase the Expanded Learning workforce to at least 60,000 youth development practitioners over the next 2-3 years.

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

<sup>1</sup> According 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>.

<sup>2</sup> Sectors 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.

<sup>3</sup> Expanded Learning refers to before and after school, summer, and intersession learning experiences that develop the academic, sociotonal, and physical needs and interests of students. 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.

# 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. OST programs are well-positioned to support the healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children and youth.

They are also 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.

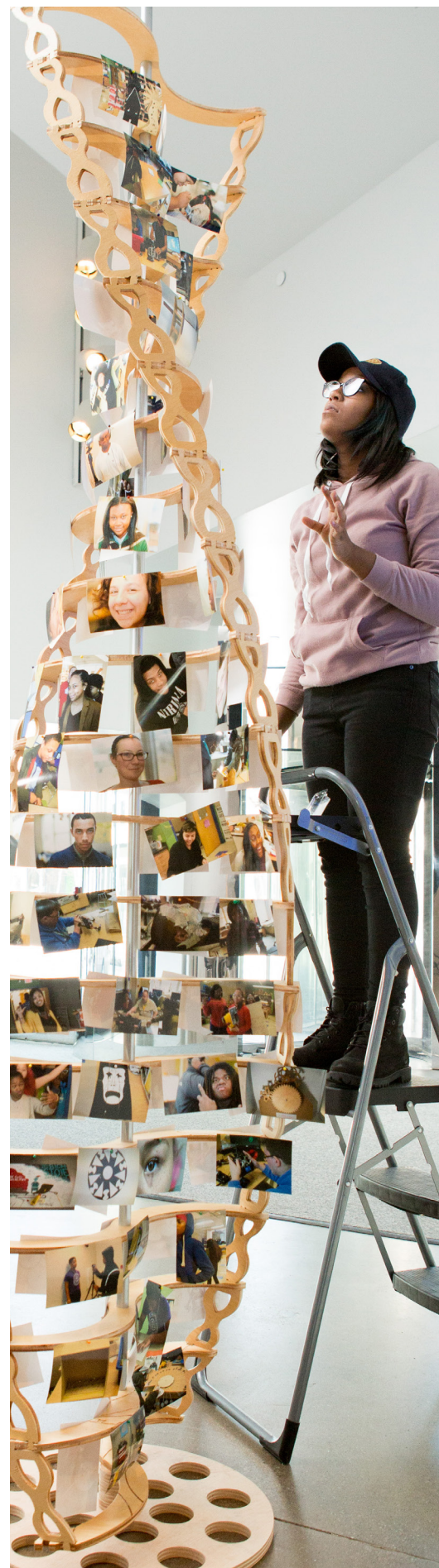
California has the largest collection of OST programs in the nation consisting of federal, state, local, city, community, and fee-based programs. Each system has its own unique networks, standards, and practices. The OST field is supported by a substantial workforce that is diverse and representative 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.

## 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.





# Organizational Strategies



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

CAN *assembles and mobilizes* geographically, professionally, and culturally diverse stakeholders<sup>4</sup> to collectively address significant workforce needs and advance innovation in the OST field.



## **CAN is a catalyst for quality.**

CAN *builds capacity* by promoting a shared vision of program quality and advancing a culture of continuous improvement in the OST field.



## **CAN is a vehicle for advocacy.**

CAN *equips* the field, stakeholders, and decision-makers with the resources, data, and information that illuminates the importance of OST programs.



## **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.



<sup>4</sup>A stakeholder is defined as a person with an interest or concern in something. A stakeholder 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 two.



## CAN is “Of the Field and For the Field”

**CAN** assembles and mobilizes geographically, professionally, and culturally diverse stakeholders 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, especially as California adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate-related disasters, and social injustice.

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** builds capacity by promoting a shared vision of program quality and advancing a culture of continuous improvement in the OST field.

### WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN provides Technical Assistance to the OST field, education, human service, and community stakeholders to continuously improve program quality, and strengthen community partnerships that result in positive developmental outcomes for children and youth.

CAN utilizes and promotes equity-driven practices to ensure OST programs serve California’s most marginalized children, youth, and families with environments that embrace diversity and equity regardless of 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 in and out of the OST field including into the teaching profession, advocates for well-compensated employment in the OST field, and provides targeted support for the critical role of Site Coordinators to ensure a thriving OST, youth development, and K-12 educator workforce.



## CAN is a Vehicle for Advocacy

**CAN** equips the field, stakeholders, and decision-makers with the resources, data, and information that illuminates the importance of OST programs.

### WHAT CAN DOES:

CAN increases awareness, and advocates for support of, partnerships with, and sustainability for OST programs so that every child and family that needs access to a high-quality OST program, has access.

CAN builds the capacity of the OST field to utilize data and research to communicate the impact of OST programs so that community-members and decision-makers prioritize access to high-quality OST opportunities.

CAN seeks opportunities for joint advocacy efforts across sectors to promote policies that benefit California's most vulnerable children, youth, and families and the workforce that supports them.



## CAN is a Conduit for Communications

**CAN** elevates field voice and providing 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, resources<sup>6</sup>, 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 the OST workforce to increase awareness of the impact of OST programs and the importance of this critical workforce.

<sup>6</sup> CAN 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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