
THE SECOND WAVE:

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AND TO
THE FIELD ON THE 2025-26
EXPANSION OF THE EXPANDED
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

FEBRUARY 2026



Introduction

In FY 2021-22, California established the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) with a \$1.75 billion investment which was increased to \$4 billion the following year. Today, the investment in ELO-P is \$5.4 billion, revealing the high need for the program in school districts across California.

ELO-P's overarching goal is to provide universal access to expanded learning opportunities (before-school, afterschool, and summer programs) for all TK-6th grade students with a focus on students who are in the foster care system, English Learners and /or low-income (referred to as the Unduplicated Pupil Percentage (UPP) student population). If well implemented, ELO-P has the potential to offer multiple benefits to students and families including increased school day attendance, care for working families, more learning and enrichment time, and a stronger connection to the school community. What ELO-P is not intended to be is an extension of the school day.

ELO-P provides an allotment of funds to every Local Education Agency (LEA) using a codified per pupil funding formula. At the time of the program's creation, LEAs that had a UPP student population of 75% or greater received a per pupil amount of \$2,750 (Rate 1). Those LEAs with UPP student populations below 75% received a per pupil amount determined by the funds remaining after all the Rate 1 district allotments were paid out (Rate 2).

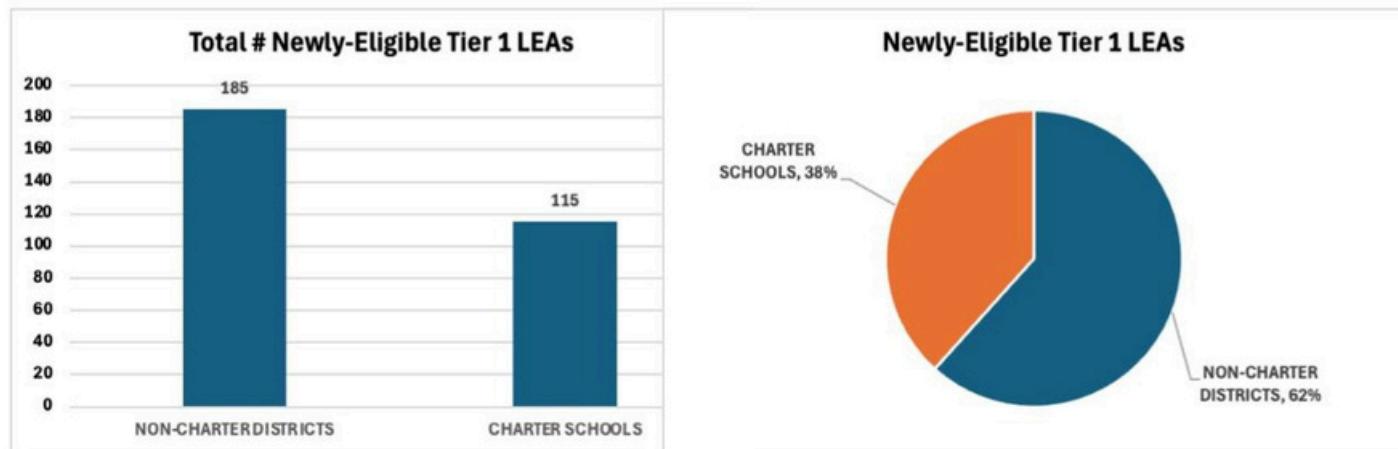
Since implementation of ELO-P, several challenges around the funding structure have surfaced including:

- *Inequities*: The difference in funding allocated to a LEA with 75.2% and a LEA with 74.8% UPP is large, but, essentially, both districts have the same needs. For example, in the chart on page 4, the LEA with the lower UPP will receive \$1,175 per student less than the LEA with the higher UPP to address essentially the same student needs.
- *Insufficiency and unpredictability*: Rate 2 LEAs face difficulty in budgeting due to both the timing of when they receive their funding and the fact that it can change each year. The calculation of Rate 2 allotments is determined only after all Rate 1 LEA allotments have been established. Further, the determination of which rate a LEA falls under is based on UPP from the previous school year.

- *Larger burden on districts with lower UPP and small(er) districts:* Smaller LEAs and those with “mid-range” UPP percentages (i.e., 40-60%) often have less infrastructure for expanded learning and already received lower After School Education and Safety (ASES)/21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants, limiting their capacity to manage and deliver programming.

Because of these challenges and the need for quality expanded learning being so great, the Legislature amended the original law, and the Governor signed AB121 in September 2025. The change lowered the threshold for Rate 1 funding from 75% to 55% or greater of UPP in LEAs and increased the investment in ELO-P to \$5.4 billion. As a result, approximately 300 LEAs (including both charters and non-charter LEAs) have shifted from Rate 2 funding to Rate 1 funding.

This is a major expansion of expanded learning across the state and a substantial increase in access to programs, resulting in hundreds of thousands of new students and families being served. Three hundred of the nearly 1,000 LEAs in California will have significantly increased funding for their expanded learning programs allowing for more equitable and higher quality programming across the state.



Source: School Fiscal Services

Changes in ELO-P Policies & Rates in 2025-26

	Tier 1 LEAs	Tier 2 LEAs
UPP	Greater than or equal to 55% <i>decrease from 75% in 2024-25</i>	Less than 55%
Rate	\$2,750 <i>same as 2024-25</i>	\$1,575 (<i>original proposal: \$1,280.81</i>) <i>decrease from \$2,000 in 2024-25</i>
Offer	Offer access to ALL students in TK-6	Offer access to at least ALL UNDuplicated students in TK-6
Provide access	Provide access to ANY student as requested	Provide access to ANY UNDuplicated student as requested

Many LEAs with Tier 1 funding have already gone through the experience of ramping up toward universal access. In an effort to avoid reinventing the wheel, the purpose of this memo is to provide those LEAs shifting from Rate 2 to Rate 1 funding with recommendations from the field to support their program expansion. Field experts represent LEAs that expanded or launched programs for the first time four years ago and those who have recently transitioned to Rate 1 as well as County Offices of Education that supported the expansion.

Similar to the initial rollout of ELO-P, LEAs have been provided with a “grace” audit year for compliance with Rate 1 requirements, offering LEAs time to step back and thoughtfully plan the program’s expansion. PCY hopes that LEAs find these recommendations helpful as they embark on their ELO-P expansion journey and continue building the quality of their programs.

*** 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.*

Methodology

To develop the recommendations in this memo, PCY gathered a workgroup of expanded learning leaders from LEAs and community-based organizations, along with representatives of the State System of Support for Expanded Learning (SSEL) Regional Leads. All workgroup participants have a vested interest and expertise in this issue as they are either in, or provide support to, a LEA that is moving from Rate 2 to Rate 1. The group was tasked with sharing their key learnings and practices from the initial ELO-P rollout and identifying and refining the top issues. At the same time, PCY conducted three individual interviews, two with SSEL Regional Leads and one with charter school expanded learning leadership. The feedback from the workgroup and information from individual interviews were then integrated into the memo.

Recommendations

The recommendations in this memo reflect the best thinking of some leaders in the field who have experience with ELO-P's implementation. It should be noted that the recommendations could be implemented in a variety of sequences as they are not "steps" to guide program expansion.

PCY also recognizes that the recommendations will not apply to every LEA setting. There are several contributing factors to LEAs' capacity to implement ELO-P such as district size, frontier status, and the existence (or lack) of an ASES- or 21st CCLC-funded expanded learning program. Tailoring recommendations to these particular environmental factors is beyond the scope of this memo.

1) Shift mindsets

California's historic and ongoing commitment to expanded learning is deepening young people's learning experiences; their attachment to caring, supportive adults; and their sense of belonging in the school community. These youth development and whole child principles undergird all expanded learning programs, and districts need to center these principles as they consider expansion opportunities. Multiple LEAs mentioned this mindset shift as an important initial step especially with their colleagues who are newer to the expanded learning field/programming. To realize the full potential of ELO-P, LEAs and their partners should:

- Seek buy-in and support from district leadership (e.g., superintendent, cabinet, board of education) by demonstrating how expansion aligns with the district's vision, goals, and priorities.
- Secure the support of instructional and administrative leaders (if not already secured).
- **Move from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset by recognizing that, unlike in the past, there are sufficient resources to offer students an expanded learning opportunity that may have previously been out of reach.**
- Work with principals to have them send the message to their staff that the school facilities belong to everyone in order to facilitate securing adequate space for expansion.
- Remind interest-holders that students must be kept at the center at all times.

2) Engage in transparent two-way communication with families and partners

Open communication with families and existing partners supports high-quality programming, grounded in the needs and assets of the community. LEAs and their partners should:

- **Initiate clear, transparent communication with families and existing partners about the expansion and the approach being used to open slots in the program.**
- Go further and engage with and listen to families and community members to understand the needs and assets of the community that will drive the design of programs and where and how to expand.
- Leverage existing needs and assets data from other initiatives (Community Schools, MTSS, SEL, etc.) to inform expansion plans.

3) Build on current structures

Many LEAs have existing expanded learning structures, for example, ASES or 21st CCLC-funded programs, fee-based programs, child care and/or teacher-led clubs. LEAs and their partners can leverage these assets, and avoid duplication and competition, if they:

- Use current program design and infrastructure as a foundation for expansion and avoid creating a separate program that could lead to confusion for parents as well as produce competition for ASES-funded programs, which, if attendance targets are not met, will face grant reductions.
 - Ensure the foundational program is strong and high-quality.
 - Integrate ELO-P registration with school registration.
 - Ask families to complete only one ELO-P registration form that provides liability coverage for all external (non-district) partners.
 - Use existing standing meetings (e.g., School Site Council or Parent Teacher Organization) and data collected through other initiatives (e.g., Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Community Schools) to gather information about student needs and assets.
 - For intersession programs in particular, survey students about their interests and preferred activities that would draw them to participate.
 - Access the SSEL Regional Leads for support with changing/updated guidance, problems of practices, and tools/resources.
 - Consider phasing in the expansion by, for example, starting with schools with high UPP percentages and large waiting lists.
 - Double check for flexibility in Ed Code when some district-level policies or processes create barriers and seek modifications to remove those obstacles if possible.



“Pay attention to the 4 S’s - staffing, space, safety, and special education.”

(San Diego USD)

4) Lean into current and new partnerships

Long-term commitment and investment in partnerships - both internally with other LEA departments and externally with expanded learning partners - result in consistently high-quality programming that positively impacts school culture and student outcomes. To strengthen these partnerships, LEAs should:

Internal partnerships

- Establish new, different, and/or deeper connections with other district departments – such as Community Schools, early education, special education, data, and attendance – that will be impacted by the program expansion.
- Move forward with sensitivity and caution when tension exists between increased ELO-P funding and budget deficits that might be facing the district.
- Consider designating an individual with a “bird’s eye view” to manage the integration of the ELO-P expansion with other initiatives and structures within the district (e.g. Community Schools, MTSS, Local Control Accountability Plan) ensuring that expanded learning is represented at these tables.
- **Build goodwill by using ELO-P funds for capital that benefits both the school-day and expanded learning (e.g., purchasing shade structures for outdoor areas used by students), while keeping track of cost-sharing requirements.**
- Discuss the need to create contingency plans with leadership should ELO-P funding be reduced.

External partnerships

- **Bring your primary/lead community-based partner to the table as an equal partner to co-design expansion and approach the partnership with the mindset that community-based partners provide services with the district, not for the district.**
- Map the opportunities that currently exist in the community that could address students’ needs.
- Consider bringing in specialized and targeted enrichment providers (e.g., dance, arts, sciences, coding) to enhance the general ELO program.
- Consider a menu of specialized providers that can provide short-term “camps” or other activities (e.g., sports leagues) throughout the year.
- Use an RFQ or RFP process to screen potential specialized enrichment providers and other technical vendors (i.e., vendors that offer curriculum, software platforms, staff training) to determine if they are a good fit and whether their mission is aligned with the district’s mission.
- Be cautious about unrealistic pricing and deliverables to ensure that a potential partner has a long-term vision around partnership rather than the desire to make a short-term profit.

5) Create or build on one single, comprehensive program

By creating one single, comprehensive program that includes all the expanded learning activities on campus, a LEA and its partners can pursue coherent goals and common standards of quality, create aligned structures and strategies, and reduce confusion for students, families and staff. This approach dovetails with the work to strengthen current partnerships and infrastructure while developing new ones to address the needs of students. While the backend of the program may distinguish between funding sources supporting the activities, the front-facing presentation should be as one before-school, after-school, and intersession program offered by the district.

- **Seek integration across programs and structures by:**
 - **Avoiding naming programs with the funding source;**
 - **Blending and braiding expanded learning funding sources; and**
 - **Meeting requirements of each funding source on the backend without advertising the differences to students and families.**
- Prevent ELO-P from being perceived as competition for pre-existing programs (childcare, ASES/21st CCLC).
- Incorporate district-operated Attendance Recovery components into the single, comprehensive expanded learning program.
- Understand that fees can still be charged on a sliding scale (taking into account family income and ability to pay) to meet true costs and increase quality, but it is important not to segregate students by creating a separate fee-based program.



6) Implement strategic approaches to staffing challenges

With expansion in students comes an expansion in staffing, and the challenges facing the field around recruiting and retaining a workforce cannot be understated. That said, LEAs and their partners can alleviate persistent staffing challenges if they:

- Plan ahead to meet Instructional Aid (IA) certification requirements.
 - Be aware of testing dates and timing of the hiring process.
 - **Explore options to meet the IA certification requirements such as temporary certification, seeking partners that can do the certification more quickly, and implementing district-approved IA requirements specifically for ELO staff.**
- Establish MOUs with teachers and classified staff unions that define pay rates, requirements and expectations.
- Form agreements with local colleges and universities, creating a partnership for recruiting students as staff.

7) Manage expectations of families, community, and other interest-holders

All the interest-holders in the system need to be realistic about the time and attention required - within an already stretched system - to implement this expansion with quality. LEAs and their partners should:

- Use the grace audit year to plan full expansion, including understanding the needs of students, and to phase in growth.
- Clarify the reality of waitlists, specifically that eliminating them is difficult with facilities and staffing shortages.
- **Communicate with clear messaging around what the increased funding means, the timeline for expansion, and what the expansion means for them.**

8) Design with the end-goal in mind: positive impact on student outcomes

To maintain public support for ELO-P funding, the field will need to demonstrate and communicate positive outcomes from the state's investment. LEAs and their partners should plan to:

- Identify data that will show the impact of the program and its expansion.
- **Recruit students who are identified as UPP and not currently participating in the program by determining why they are not coming to the program and implementing strategies to address the obstacles that surface.**
- Create and leverage opportunities to communicate positive impact data locally, regionally, and statewide.

9) Set up structures, strategies, and agreements to meet the needs of Special Education (SPED) students

Students in special education have assets to share and complex needs that must be addressed through the expanded learning system. LEAs and their partners will need to:

- Understand the legal requirements for serving SPED students.
- Set up agreements with the district SPED department about how these requirements will be met, including staffing.
- **Consider piloting an inclusive expanded learning program at one or two sites as an opportunity to learn and understand the challenges that need to be addressed.**

Next Steps

This memo only begins to capture the variety of experiences that LEAs have and will have in this significant ELO-P expansion. There are multiple areas around ELO-P expansion that require more in-depth research and conversations with LEAs including:

- Integrating special education students in ELO-P;
- Understanding the unique needs and challenges of rural LEAs;
- Identifying the issues that arise for LEAs moving from full-fee programs to subsidized/free programs;
- Reflecting and learning from this policy change after one year of implementation; and
- Identifying and considering policy changes that are needed to better meet the goals of the program.

PCY will work with field leaders and policymakers to pursue the issues above that need more research and documentation. By reaping the learning from the initial implementation of ELO-P, the hope is that LEAs will find this rollout smoother than three years ago. The real test will come when attendance numbers are released and waitlists are examined to determine if, in fact, this ELO-P expansion has achieved what it intended to do: provide as many students as possible, particularly those identified as UPP, with expanded learning opportunities that connect them to their school community and engage them in the learning process.

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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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