



Trauma-Resilient Informed Practices  
in Expanded Learning Programs:  
*A Snapshot of Trends in the Field*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was commissioned  
by the Los Angeles County  
Office of Education

The landmark 1995-1997 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study<sup>1</sup> conducted by Kaiser Permanente and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is one of the largest research studies to examine the long-term health and social impacts of childhood stressors over the lifespan of individuals. One of the study's critical findings is the link between childhood adverse experiences and the risk for significant short-term and long-term social and health problems. The ACE study has informed the practice of various sectors and has been the impetus for deeper levels of trauma-resilient informed work. Today, expanded learning programs are looking for additional ways to develop a trauma-informed lens in order to better serve and support students in their programs.

LA's BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program is a large-scale expanded learning program that serves over 25,000 students in the Los Angeles Unified School District. LA's BEST is currently taking steps to integrate a trauma-resilient informed approach in a comprehensive manner. Like LA's BEST, programs across the country are beginning to implement trauma-resilient informed approaches. As programs become more intentional in their efforts, they grapple with questions about how to successfully implement this work.

This report will provide a snapshot of some current approaches, gaps and needs, examples from the field, and recommendations for programs and the field to effectively integrate trauma-resilient informed practices into expanded learning programs.

By becoming trauma-resilient informed and by leveraging the assets of the expanded learning field, programs can help to mitigate the often devastating effects of trauma on young people's lives. Programs can also create spaces for healing and provide the support for young people to grow and ultimately thrive following their adversity.



<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>

## KEY LESSONS AND FINDINGS

Trauma awareness in the field of expanded learning is prevalent. However, the current depth and scope of implementation of trauma-resilient informed practices covers a wide spectrum from offering one-time trainings to comprehensive systems-level adoptions of a trauma lens. In most programs, the depth of implementation of trauma-resilient informed practices is limited. The ways programs approach and enter into this work varies and is largely dependent on staff's capacity and the resources available.



### TRAINING

Most programs currently target resources to train direct-service staff in becoming trauma-aware and help staff gain practical strategies.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Some expanded learning program are cultivating stronger partnerships with the school day and/or mental health service organizations.

### ADAPTATION OF TRAUMA-RESILIENT INFORMED MODELS

The wide array of trauma-resilient informed models is mostly targeted toward the instructional school day. Some programs are adapting these evidence-based models to meet the needs of their programs.

### COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Fewer programs are currently implementing a comprehensive approach. For those programs, this work may include: conducting an assessment of needs, fostering key partnerships, providing ongoing professional development for staff, and incorporating a trauma lens into policies and protocols.

### FUNDING

Expanded learning programs in some states are leveraging funding from grants released by the Department of Health and Human Services to combat the opioid epidemic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our review of trauma-resilient informed approaches as well as an acknowledgement of the differing contexts and needs of programs across the country, we offer the following four recommendations to support expanded learning programs in their efforts to become trauma-resilient informed.

### 1. BUILD CAPACITY ON ALL LEVELS

Expand the depth and scope of training supports so training can be provided to staff on all levels, including leadership. This would help to ensure better integration within program activities, policies, and program culture. Furthermore, provide ongoing professional development to ensure a more seamless integration with current practices and curricula.

### 2. FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to ensuring a strong partnership with school day staff, partnerships with institutions and entities such as mental health services, foster youth services, homeless youth services, college and university trauma research departments, community organizations, and trauma experts and consultants may greatly enhance expanded learning programs' efforts to implement trauma-resilient informed practices.

### 3. ELEVATE SELF-CARE

Secondary traumatic stress, also known as vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, is emotional stress that may result from an individual hearing about a person's experience with trauma. Staff working with young people impacted by trauma are at risk of developing vicarious trauma. In order to address this, programs should emphasize self-care, provide resources, and ensure structural supports to address staff's own trauma and/or secondary traumatic stress.

### 4. CREATE FIELD-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Guidance, resources, and tools that take into account the context of expanded learning programs are needed to support staff when they are vetting and adapting the resources currently available, when fostering and navigating partnerships, and to provide direction with implementing systems-level trauma-resilient informed practices.



As expanded learning programs explore ways to better serve the needs of students in their programs who are impacted by trauma, we believe they should leverage the strengths and unique qualities of expanded learning programs and integrate a trauma-resilient informed lens in a comprehensive manner to support the young people in their programs suffering the impacts of trauma.