



San José Learns Initiative Year One Evaluation Learning Brief

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Alum Rock Union Elementary School District & THINK Together
Evergreen Elementary School District & YMCA of Silicon Valley
Franklin-McKinley School District & Catholic Charities/CORAL
Oak Grove School District & Silicon Valley Education Foundation, Bay Area Tutoring Association
San José Unified School District & Catholic Charities & Catholic Charities/CORAL (with other partners)

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**These Advisory Committee members also serve on the Working Group.*

Student Success & Engagement Stories

“ Our Kinder program was pretty phenomenal, based on what we heard from our after-school leaders about the dramatic changes they saw in the kindergartners in their **SEL [social and emotional learning] development**. For example, confidence, their ability to make friends, public speaking, ability to engage in critical thinking and discussion. [...] [The students] are shy [and] afraid when they first come in and then they blossom as a result of the engagement and connection with our staff.

Evergreen program partner

“ It's clear as an educator that **not all students learn the same way**. [...] We're giving opportunities for a lot of students to use their academic language in discussion, communicating through writing, collaborating. Writing is a big deal. [...] We're purposely looking for structured ways for those two components of literacy to help students when they're reading.

San José Unified program partner

“ Our feeling was that **access to technology is important**, because it will give [students] access to thousands of books that their parents may not be able to afford. We think that aspect will be innovative as well.

Oak Grove program partner

“ The positive outcomes have been staff's **relationship-building with the kids** – and part of that is being with adults for such a long time during the day. It's also the SEL [social and emotional learning] strategies that we embed with our programs.

Alum Rock program partner

“ One student was always acting up, and they recently did an eyesight screening, and that student improved once he'd had the screening and got glasses. The **10:1 [student-to-staff] ratio** makes a huge difference.

Franklin-McKinley program partner

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Introduction

About the San José Learns Initiative

The San José Learns Extended Learning Initiative (“SJ Learns”) aims to bolster academic achievement by expanding promising and innovative after-school programs for San José students in kindergarten through third grade. The initiative, launched in 2015 by Mayor Sam Liccardo, has been shaped by the SJ Learns Working Group and Advisory Committee – bodies composed of educational experts and stakeholders representing nonprofits, foundations, school districts, county offices of education, and the City of San José.

The Mayor’s Office partnered with Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) as the San José Learns Initiative Project Manager. As the largest community foundation in the world, SVCF brings both philanthropic and regional education expertise to the initiative. Through the work of local school districts and nonprofits, SVCF strategic grantmaking investments have helped teachers improve their skills and effectiveness in the classroom, while extended learning opportunities have helped thousands of students — particularly low-income students and students of color — outside of the classroom. As a valuable collaborator, SVCF has supported an effective SJ Learns RFP and grantmaking process, provided strong oversight of the programs and evaluation, and facilitated the development of a grantee learning community. SVCF’s stewardship and leadership are critical assets to the initiative.

The Need

SJ Learns is one response to low academic performance among students in low-income communities in San José, where approximately half of third-graders are not proficient in English language arts (ELA)/reading and math.¹ High-quality extended learning programs provide crucial academic support for students who are struggling in the classroom, and these services are especially important for students from low-income families who cannot afford fee-based alternatives. With fewer than 10% of San José elementary school children participating in state-funded after school programs,² it is clear that there are insufficient high-quality and affordable extended learning opportunities to meet student need.³

Early intervention strategies will help prepare San José students to succeed in K-12 and beyond. Students who are not proficient in reading by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than those who *are* proficient.⁴ Without a pathway to higher education, students cannot compete for good-paying jobs in the area. This is a special challenge in Silicon Valley, where the high cost of living⁵ puts families with low-wage jobs (and un- or under-employment) in even greater jeopardy than in lower-cost regions. By focusing on students in kindergarten through 3rd grade, SJ Learns is designed to catch struggling students early and set them on a path to succeed academically and in the workforce.

¹ City of San José. (2015). *Mayor Liccardo Announces an Expansion of After-School Learning Programs in San José*. [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.sanjoseinfo.org/external/content/document/1914/2747066/1/SJ%20Learns%20Release%20Final.pdf>

² Silicon Valley Community Foundation. (2015). Request for Proposals: SJ Learns: Closing the K-3rd Grade Achievement Gap through Extended Learning After the School Day.

³ The need for additional extended learning programs in San José mirrors national trends: Afterschool Alliance. (2014). *America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand*. Washington, D.C.

⁴ Hernandez, Donald J. 2012. *Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁵ Because the housing supply has failed to match the rate of growth in Silicon Valley, increasing housing prices make the area unaffordable for many individuals and families. In 2015, only 41% of potential first-time home buyers in Santa Clara County and 27% in San Mateo County could afford to purchase a median-priced home. (Silicon Valley Institute for Regional Studies. Available at <http://siliconvalleyindicators.org/data/place/housing/home-affordability/>)

The Investment

The City of San José's \$2 million investment, along with the participating districts' \$1.16 million⁶ matching investment, has supported five school districts to launch new or expand existing after-school programs in 16 schools during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

SJ Learns has invested in programs that:

- Serve students in kindergarten to third grade
- Provide academic supports in reading and/or math
- Support students who are below grade level, including English language learners
- Provide 10-15 hours per week of extended learning time
- Align with school-day curriculum
- Focus on developing 21st century skills (communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity)
- Incorporate innovative strategies that promote active engagement of students in hands-on learning
- Emphasize real-life applications for course content
- Are evidence-based
- Focus on quality
- Demonstrate potential for increased scale and replication
- Incorporate rigorous monitoring

In addition to providing funding, SJ Learns supports program partners' success by facilitating dialogue and learning among participating districts and with the broader extended learning community. District and provider staff from program partner sites come together during quarterly cohort convenings that are organized and hosted by SVCF. At these convenings, partners share information about their program models, successes to celebrate, challenges faced, and lessons learned during program launch and implementation. The collaborative space is designed to provide valuable support and learning to programs and also to serve as a space for partners to develop and evolve strategies to sustain and scale their programs, thereby contributing to larger field-building objectives. The value of such collaborative learning spaces is well-known and documented in the field. For example, research has shown that a well-structured community of practice working together towards solving specific problems can lead to innovations in educational practice.⁷

About the Learning Brief

This document serves as an interim report to provide program partners and other stakeholders with information about the implementation of SJ Learns at approximately the mid-point of the investment. Specifically, this report addresses the following questions:

- What program models have been implemented?
- What are the innovative approaches and practices of these programs?
- What level and types of service did students receive in Year One?
- What are the initiative and programs learning about what it takes to meet young students' early learning needs in the extended learning space?
- What are the opportunities to strengthen this work?

⁶ For three programs, the matching contribution reported in the programs' interim reports were used to calculate this figure. For Franklin-McKinley and San José Unified, the projections from the grant budget proposal were used.

⁷ Bryk, Anthony, Gomez, Louis, and Grunow, Alicia (2011), *Getting Ideas into Action: Building Networked Improvement Communities in Education*. *Frontiers in Sociology of Education*, https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/bryk-gomez_building-nics-education.pdf

A final implementation assessment and outcomes evaluation report will be released in approximately December 2017. That report will include a more comprehensive assessment of the work that has been implemented, as well as an evaluation of outcomes achieved at the student, school, and system levels.

Data Sources Informing the Learning Brief

Three main data sources inform the findings in this brief:

1. Grant and program materials (e.g., grant proposals and interim progress reports);
2. Interviews with 18 program partners (including 13 district/school staff, and five provider staff) and five initiative partners from the City of San José and the SJ Learns Advisory Committee; and
3. Reflections from evaluators' engagements with program partners and other stakeholders during cohort convenings and evaluation activities.

Structure of the Learning Brief

The learning brief is organized into four main sections:

- **Programs and Services:** Provides an overview of the five program models and the services that each provides;
- **Emerging Program Learnings:** Discusses how providers are implementing their programs, what providers are learning about what is critical to effective implementation, and shares reflections and recommendations about moving forward with programs;
- **Emerging Initiative Learnings:** Reflects on what partners are learning about the initiative as a whole; and
- **Conclusion:** Summarizes the report's key findings and offers several reflections and recommendations for the programs and the initiative.

Programs and Services

This section provides a brief overview of the five SJ Learns programs, including the services that each provides.

Overview of Programs

SJ Learns is funding programs in five school districts: Alum Rock, Evergreen, Franklin-McKinley, Oak Grove, and San José Unified. Each of these districts has partnered with local program providers to deliver a variety of programs (see Exhibit 1 for a description of each program).

Exhibit 1. Overview of Program Models

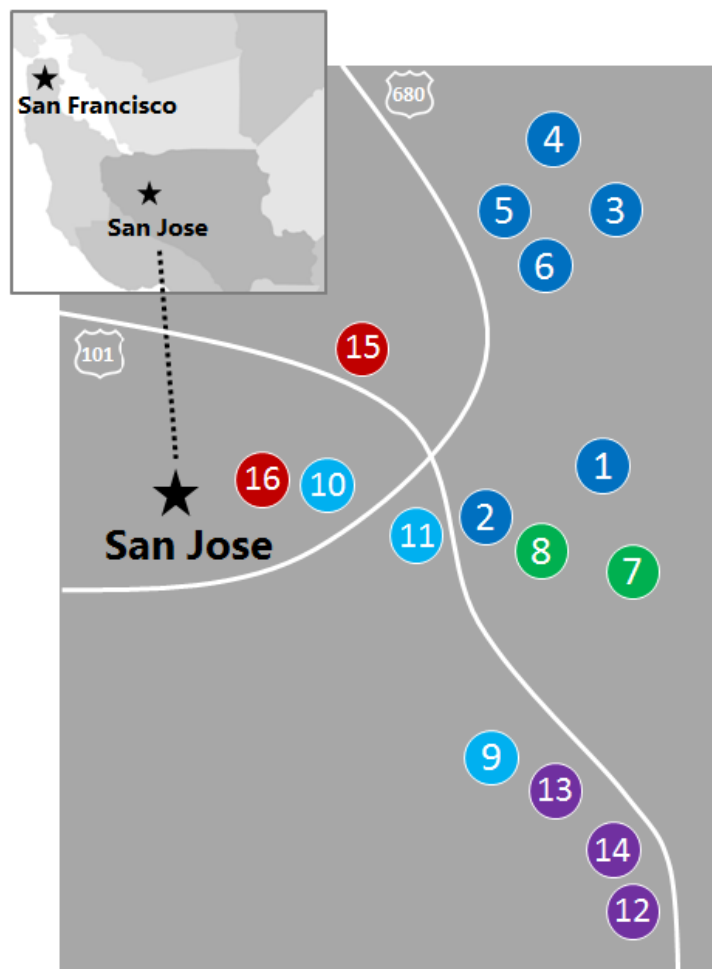
District	Provider	Grade(s) Served	Program Description
Alum Rock Union Elementary & THINK Together	THINK Together	K	Alum Rock and THINK Together's model focuses on developing students' ability to read grade-level sight words and perform basic number operations with increased automaticity. THINK Together piloted the "success folder" model, which uses daily assessments to progressively challenge students to increase their reading and math knowledge.
Evergreen Elementary & YMCA of Silicon Valley	YMCA of Silicon Valley	K-3	YMCA capitalizes on its experience with Four Blocks, a comprehensive language arts model that focuses on reading but allows for integration between and among all of the language arts areas and other curricular content areas. Project-Based Learning, a method in which students work for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge, is also a core component of the model.
Franklin-McKinley & Catholic Charities/CORAL	Catholic Charities/CORAL	3	Franklin McKinley has built on the success of the Catholic Charities' CORAL program with CORAL Learns, a curriculum that is aligned with Common Core Standards during the school day. The program focuses on increasing reading ability through Balanced Literacy. The program components include one-on-one academic support, parent engagement, and home visits.
Oak Grove & Silicon Valley Education Foundation, Bay Area Tutoring Association	Silicon Valley Education Foundation, Bay Area Tutoring Association	3	Oak Grove partnered with the Silicon Valley Education Foundation to design and implement a math-focused extended learning program and summer intensive that is closely aligned with Common Core Standards and individual classroom and student performance. The program focuses on math, but also integrates content literacy strategies and literacy strategies for English language learners (ELL), with the understanding that literacy and English comprehension are closely connected to math performance.
San José Unified & Catholic Charities/CORAL (with other partners)	Catholic Charities/CORAL (with other partners)	K-3	San José Unified's STE@M Enrichment program extends daily learning through project-based, multidisciplinary learning units. Each 6-8 week unit is led by a different partner provider and explores a topic ranging from science to technology to the arts, with a focus on building literacy and math skills. Intervention specialists work with classroom teachers and program providers to ensure the curricula for the program is linked and supportive of school-day curricula.

Schools Served

SJ Learns programs are serving 16 schools throughout San José (see Exhibit 2). All of the schools served have high-need student populations, based on the indicators of free and reduced lunch and students who are English language learners. In 13 of the 16 schools served by SJ Learns, 75% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. In 11 of the 16 schools, more than 50% of students are English language

learners. Based on these two indicators, most of the schools have a higher level of need than the district average (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 2. Geographic Distribution of Program Sites by District



- **THINK Together Kinder Academies**
Provider: THINK Together
School District: Alum Rock Elementary
 - 1: Adelante Dual Language Academy
 - 2: Hubbard Elementary School
 - 3: Linda Vista Elementary School
 - 4: Millard McCollam Elementary School
 - 5: Ben Painter Elementary School
 - 6: Russo-McEntee Academy
- **After School Extended Learning Expansion**
Provider: YMCA of Silicon Valley
School District: Evergreen Elementary
 - 7: Holly Oak Elementary School
 - 8: Katherine Smith Elementary School
- **FMSD Reading Intensive**
Provider: Catholic Charities/CORAL
School District: Franklin-McKinley
 - 9: Los Arboles Literacy & Technology Academy
 - 10: McKinley Elementary School
 - 11: Santee Elementary School
- **Integrating Math Extended Time and Professional Development in Grade 3**
Provider: Bay Area Tutoring Association
School District: Oak Grove
 - 12: Edenvale Elementary School
 - 13: Christopher Elementary School
 - 14: Samuel Stipe Elementary School
- **Program: STE@M Enrichment Program**
Provider: Catholic Charities/CORAL (with other partners)
School District: San Jose Unified
 - 15: Anne Darling Elementary School
 - 16: Olinder Elementary School

Grades Served

With all of the programs targeting kindergarten and/or 3rd grade students, the majority of students served are in these two grades (Exhibit 4). Of the total students served (678), 51% are in 3rd grade and 39% are in kindergarten. Evergreen Elementary and San José Unified also served 1st and 2nd grade students.

















Currently, SJ Learns serves only a small percentage of the total students that would benefit from extended learning. For example, 63 students in San José Unified School District are enrolled in SJ Learns, which is fewer than 7% of the total K-3 students in the district. Compare that 7% figure with the level of need: 43% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, and 23% are English language learners. These statistics highlight the gap between need and available services, and the gap is similar or greater in other districts.

Exhibit 3. Indicators of Need for Schools Served by SJ Learns (2015-2016)

	Free or Reduced Lunch	English Language Learners	Total Enrollment
Alum Rock Union Elementary School District^a	86%	47%	12,068
Adelante Dual Language Academy	66%	44%	586
Hubbard Elementary School	93%	63%	525
Linda Vista Elementary School	81%	49%	569
Millard McCollam Elementary School	67%	38%	423
Ben Painter Elementary School	88%	51%	401
Russo-McEntee Academy	84%	55%	589
Evergreen Elementary School District	31%	24%	12,282
Holly Oak Elementary School	47%	30%	614
Katherine Smith Elementary School	79%	55%	615
Franklin-McKinley School District	80%	49%	11,114
Los Arboles Literacy & Technology Academy	94%	69%	479
McKinley Elementary School	95%	77%	388
Santee Elementary School	96%	77%	440
Oak Grove School District	44%	29%	10,632
Edenvale Elementary School	89%	72%	510
Christopher Elementary School	80%	49%	439
Samuel Stipe Elementary School	83%	61%	394
San José Unified School District	44%	22%	32,454
Anne Darling Elementary School	84%	53%	441
Olinder Elementary School	84%	59%	441

^a In the grey rows, indicators of need are reported as a district average, and total enrollment includes all schools in the district. These figures include but are not exclusive to the SJ Learns schools listed in the white rows.

Exhibit 4. Number of Students Served, by District and Grade Level

	Kindergarten	1 st grade	2 nd grade	3 rd grade	Total
Alum Rock Union Elementary School District	 207	0	0	0	 207
Evergreen Elementary School District	 45	 14	 14	 12	 85
Franklin-McKinley School District	0	0	0	 90	 90
Oak Grove School District	0	0	0	 233	 233
San José Unified School District	 16	 16	 18	 13	 63
Total	268 (39% of total students in all grades)	30 (4%)	32 (5%)	348 (51%)	678 (100%)

Overview of Services

All five SJ Learns programs operate after the school day during the academic year, and two programs (Franklin-McKinley and Oak Grove) also operate a summer program.⁸ Most programs operate from school dismissal until 6:00 pm (over three hours per day). ELA/reading is a key focus of all five programs, and four programs also include math instruction. Most programs also include enrichment activities in areas such as arts, wellness, and physical fitness, and some incorporate a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach. Family and parent engagement – in the form of home visits and calls, monthly parents meetings, or events to showcase student work – is a key component of all five programs that serves to build families' investment in and tools to support their children's success at school. All programs also include various forms of training or professional development for staff and teachers, including foundational training in curriculum and support with classroom management. While all programs demonstrated a commitment to assessing program quality, three used a validated, field-tested quality assessment instrument during the 2015-16 school year. (See the following section, Emerging Program Learnings, for more information about how programs are assessing program quality.) All programs are designed to intentionally align their curricula with what students are learning during the school day. Exhibit 5 indicates which of these elements are included in each of the five programs.

⁸ At Franklin-McKinley, the summer program meets for four hours a day, five days per week, for three weeks. At Oak Grove, the summer program meets for 3.5 hours a day for 12 days over a three-week period.

Exhibit 5. Program Design

District	Instruction Time		Academics		Additional Program Components			Program Approaches		
	School Year	School Breaks	English Language Arts/ Reading	Math	Enrichment*	Training/ Professional Development for Staff/Teachers*	Family/Parent Engagement*	Social and Emotional Learning*	Quality Assessments**	Alignment with the School Day
Alum Rock Union Elementary School District	5 hours/day, 5 days/week	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evergreen Elementary School District	3 hours/day, 5 days/week	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Franklin-McKinley School District	4 hours/day, 5 days/week	Summer: 4 hours/day, 5 days/week for 4 weeks total	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Oak Grove School District	2.5 hours/day, 4 days/week	Summer: 3.5 hours/day for 12 days for 3 weeks	✓	✓		✓				✓
San José Unified School District	Minimum 1.5 hours/day, 4 days/week	N/A	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓

*Denotes a program component not specifically outlined in the SJ Learns RFP.

**Evergreen and Franklin-McKinley used a validated, field-tested quality assessment tool, and Alum Rock used a home-grown tool.

Emerging Program Learnings

This chapter highlights promising practices and approaches that are emerging from the programs' efforts to align with the school day, to focus on program quality, to monitor student assessment data, to engage parents, and to integrate technology. The findings in this chapter are intended to support learning among the SJ Learns programs by documenting practical ideas that programs may be able to borrow from each other to enhance their programming. Other after-school program providers operating outside of the school context (e.g., programs operated by the Public Library, Parks and Recreation, and other government entities) may also benefit from these findings. While some findings may be applicable only to programs operated by or in collaboration with schools, other learnings (especially those related to a focus on program quality and parent engagement) extend beyond the school context and may be valuable to a broad range of extended learning programs. Lastly, the chapter concludes with other reflections and recommendations to inform SJ Learns program refinements, as well as enhancements to the design and supports provided in future after-school investment by the City of San José or other investors.

Promising Program Practices and Approaches

Program Alignment with the School Day

The importance of alignment with the school day

Program alignment with the school day happens through purposeful linkages designed to strengthen student learning. Examples of alignment are continuity of academic objectives, there is communication among teachers and program staff, and academic content is presented through non-traditional means.⁹ Aligning after-school programs with classroom activities can be a powerful way to support children's learning and development: students consolidate their learning when after-school programs reinforce what is taught during the school day.

Promising Practices and Approaches

The SJ Learns programs' experiences point to two promising practices and approaches to create purposeful alignment with the school day:

1. Having a **dedicated program liaison** to promote regular communication between the school and program provider staff; and
2. Hosting **regular coordination meetings** between teachers and program staff to discuss alignment and students who need additional support.

The table below details what each of these practices and approaches has looked like in action.

⁹ Harvard Family Research Project. Promising Strategies for Connecting Out-of-School Time Programs to Schools: Learning What Works. The Evaluation Exchange, Volume XII, Number 1 & 2, Fall 2006

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a dedicated program liaison to promote regular communication between the school and program provider staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A school staff member acts as an intervention specialist for the SJUSD STE@M program. The intervention specialist coordinates on a regular basis with teachers and program providers to ensure that the after-school project-based programming aligns with the literacy and math units taught during the school day. At Oak Grove, the after-school tutoring program integrates classroom teachers in the program's delivery. Seeing the benefit of pairing teachers with tutors over the summer, SVEF adapted the program to incorporate teacher "leads" from every school. The teacher leads act as advocates for the students and a bridge to other teachers who work with the students.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosting regular coordination meetings between teachers and program staff to discuss alignment and students who need additional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the Evergreen and Alum Rock school sites, program staff and school staff meet and communicate regularly to ensure that all parties are on the same page about lesson plans and how to best support struggling students. The Kinder Academy providers at Alum Rock coordinate regularly with school partners to modify lessons plans so that those plans match the school day instruction. This coordination helps strengthen what students are learning during the school day.

What are other practices and approaches worth watching?

At SJUSD, the STE@M Enrichment program uses project-based learning units centered on topics such as cooking, dance, and engineering, while at the same time integrating the literacy and math content that students are working on in the classroom. Program providers report that students are excited to come to the after-school program because it does not look and feel like their in-school experience. At the same time, students are building and reinforcing classroom learning. The STE@M Enrichment program also has the opportunity to build upon the strong foundation of technology-based learning that is present in SJUSD classrooms. Because students use technology regularly as part of their in-school curriculum, they are well-positioned to demonstrate success with technology in the after-school program. This opens the door for the program to experiment with innovative uses of technology in the after-school space. Kinder Academy has a similar opportunity. Blended learning (which combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods) has been a focus of the Alum Rock district. Kinder Academy has been able to use the SJ Learns grant to essentially beta test an approach in which students use iPads and tailored software to increase their number and letter recognition. The grant paid for 12 licenses, allowing Kinder Academy to access the app. The lessons that Kinder Academy is learning about how to best implement this blended learning approach lays the groundwork for more effective replication when there is additional investment to use for scaling within the district.

Program Quality Assessment

The Importance of Program Quality Assessment

The quality of service delivery is critical to the capacity of programs to support academic achievement. After-school programs benefit youth *most* when they are of high quality; programs that are not of high quality tend to show small or no effect on academic outcomes, and may even *harm* youth.¹⁰ With the growing recognition of the importance of quality, providers are increasingly implementing program quality assessment: collecting quality data, reflecting on that data, and systematically implementing program quality improvement plans. They use program quality assessment as a way to continuously reinforce and expand their ability to provide youth with services that will provide the most benefit.

Program quality assessment tools range from homegrown check-lists to well-researched and validated instruments. The majority of validated program quality assessment tools involve an observation process in which a program staff member, volunteer, or other trained individual observes the program in action. During and after the observation, the individual takes notes and uses the assessment tool to assess how well the program is fulfilling predetermined goals for quality. These goals may differ slightly by instrument, but most include: program design; physical and emotional safety; student engagement; student and staff interaction; expectations for students and staff; and accessibility of the program for youth and families. After conducting the observation and assessing the program according to these domains, the observer typically shares notes with the staff member(s) leading the program. Observers share what they saw and where they believe program quality could be improved. Programs are often encouraged to share and compare program quality assessment data across different sessions of the same program in order to understand how different sites and instructors can learn from one another to improve program quality.

Promising Practices and Approaches

The SJ Learns programs' experiences point to three promising practices and approaches in assessing program quality:

1. Using a **validated, field-tested quality assessment tool** to understand program performance and to facilitate knowledge-sharing between sites;
2. Engaging in a **team-based assessment process** to support individual and cross site learning; and
3. Creating a **safe learning space** to build staff buy-in and engagement.

The table below details what each of these practices and approaches has looked like in action.

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using a validated, field-tested quality assessment tool to understand program performance and facilitate knowledge-sharing across sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Evergreen uses the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) to assess program quality. The YPQA is a validated instrument designed to measure the quality of youth programs in seven domains: safe environment, supportive environment, interaction, engagement, youth-centered policies and practices, high expectations for youth and staff, and access. Evergreen's process for collecting and reflecting on program quality data entails an observation and debrief process that is integrated into other program activities and meetings.

¹⁰ Durlak, Joseph, Weissberg, Roger, and Pachan, Molly (2010). A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3-4):294-309. http://www.flume.com.br/pdf/Durlak_A_meta-analysisof_after_school.pdf

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in action?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Franklin-McKinley measures program quality using a modified version of the California Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA Tool). The QSA is a versatile, validated instrument designed to assess the quality of youth programs in eleven program quality elements: program design and assessment, program administration and finance, community partnerships and collaboration, alignment and linkages with the school day, program environment and safety, youth development, staff recruitment and professional development, family involvement, nutrition and physical activity, promoting diversity, access, equity, and inclusion, and effectively supporting English learners. It is intended for self-assessment, and is designed to be adapted and condensed according to a program's needs. By using the same version of the tool consistently across sites, Franklin-McKinley site managers are able to track program implementation holistically – understanding how it is progressing across locations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging in a team-based assessment process to support individual and cross-site learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Franklin-McKinley, Evergreen, and Alum Rock all incorporate team reflection processes to understand and learn from their data. At all sites, once staff have either observed one another or engaged in self-assessment, they meet to compare their results and discuss what did and did not work well. These conversations happen among staff members at one site or across multiple sites, and help staff to gain new ideas and insights for their programs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a safe learning space to build staff buy-in and engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At Franklin-McKinley, site managers continually reinforce the goal of the assessment process: to support overall program quality, rather than to judge individual teacher performance. Having clarity about the purpose of the assessments makes hesitant teachers more comfortable with the program observation process.

What are other practices and approaches worth watching?

- Alum Rock assesses several aspects of program quality and fidelity using a home-grown tool they call the Core Program Checklist. The site supervisor at each site and a quality improvement coach complete the tool, assessing domains that include compliance with legislative requirements, student safety and program preparedness, youth behavior support system, staff support system, relationship development, communication, youth development, arts and enrichment, and academic areas including homework, ELA, math, and STEM. Using the data collected using the checklist, the quality improvement coach works collaboratively with program sites to use the data for program improvement. While this tool is not a validated instrument, it provides the program a way to consistently assess program quality and program compliance elements across sites and is tailored to their specific program needs.

Student Assessment

The Importance of Student Assessment

Using student assessments to monitor student improvement is critical for programs to understand how well they are achieving desired outcomes. Collecting baseline data helps programs gauge how much assistance new students may need to meet their goals, and enables programs to measure student progress during and after the program (by comparing new data with the baseline information). Once programs have this full data picture for the students in the aggregate, they can determine the extent to which their program supported student growth overall. This information will enable programs to tweak the intervention, and iterate to make sure that the curriculum and instruction are meeting their students' learning needs.

In addition to using assessment data to reflect on overall program effectiveness, providers can also use these data to better support *individual* students. By collecting data frequently during a program period and focusing on the results for each specific student, programs can watch student progress on an individual level. For example, students who are struggling in a particular subject may have a different learning style or learning need. If instructors are able to learn about individual students' needs through their data and by working with them in person, providers will be able to adjust instruction to meet those needs and help the student improve.¹¹

Promising Practices and Approaches

The SJ Learns programs' experiences point to three promising practices and approaches in monitoring student assessment data:

1. **Collecting student assessment data** to understand how the program is meeting student needs and making their desired impact;
2. Using student assessment data to **identify and serve students most in need** of the programming; and
3. Using student assessment data to **tailor programming** to individual students' learning needs.

SJ Learns Student Assessments

SJ Learns programs are using two types of student assessments: formative and summative.

- SJ Learns programs are able to choose what types of formative assessments they use to understand their students' progress. These assessments are used to collect data on an ongoing basis to understand how best to support individual students. They also provide staff with real-time data that they can use to learn about what's working well and less well, and continuously improve their programs.
- The formative assessments used by SJ Learns programs include computer adaptive skills assessments, such as Accelerated Reader and CPAA (Children's Progress Academic Assessment), as well as lower tech assessments such as the "success folders" used at the Kinder Academy.
- Programs also capitalize on summative assessments available as part of statewide standardized testing: the SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) test. The SBAC is administered to all students at California public schools, in grades 3-8 and high school, to measure student achievement and growth in English and math. Staff can use SBAC scores as an additional data source providing insight into how much students have learned at the end of the year.

¹¹ Tomlinson, C. A. (August, 2000). Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting student assessment data to understand how the program is meeting student needs and making their desired impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evergreen uses several assessment tools to monitor student reading skills, including Accelerated Reader (AR), California English Language Development Test (CELDT), Basic Phonic Skills Test (BPST), and A Developmental English Proficiency Test (ADEPT). Evergreen also uses the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) to evaluate areas of students' social-emotional wellbeing. Franklin-McKinley assesses student reading skills using the STAR Renaissance Reading Assessment and Lexia, an online measurement system that reveals gaps in student reading level. Alum Rock uses the Educational Software for Guiding Instruction (ESGI) to monitor student academic progress in math and reading. ESGI is a customizable digital assessment tool specifically designed for pre-K through first grade students, appropriate for Alum Rock's kindergarten program. Alum Rock takes advantage of the opportunities for learning that the tool offers, such as printing flash cards for home use included in letters to parents (flash cards are generated by the software based on assessment data, and contain the words and math facts that students need to learn next). Alum Rock also uses "success folders" to track students' work in three specific areas: letter recognition, sight word identification, and number recognition. These folders support reading and math fact fluency through documenting the expectations and successes of each student in these areas. San José Unified assesses student progress in math and reading using three tools: Smart Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Children's Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA), and the Writing Performance Assessment (WPA). The program plans to use data from these assessments along with other school data, such as attendance, to understand student outcomes. Oak Grove assesses student math and reading skills using SBAC and iReady, a reading and math assessment tool created specifically for the Common Core.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using student assessment data to identify and serve students most in need of the programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oak Grove used student assessment data from 2nd graders to invite incoming 3rd grade students not performing at grade level to join the summer and fall programs. In addition to determining student eligibility and need for the program using assessment data, Oak Grove also consulted the assessment data to determine the focus of the program's math curriculum.

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using student assessment data to tailor programming to individual students' learning needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oak Grove uses student assessment data to understand how to tailor programming in order to meet student needs. While Oak Grove knew that they had a high population of English language learners, they did not anticipate the effect that students' struggle with English comprehension has on their understanding of math. As the program got off the ground, program staff determined that many ELL students were having difficulty understanding word problems and math vocabulary, and this language barrier resulted in lower test scores. To address this challenge, staff tailored the program to emphasize vocabulary and language use with math, and integrated an ELL-specific instruction method into teaching math.

Parent Engagement

The importance of parent involvement

Parents play a central role in nearly all areas of their children's development. In the context of education and enrichment opportunities, family involvement is effective in advancing children's learning and social-emotional development.¹² Parent engagement in creating supportive home learning environments and in school-based environments, therefore, should be an important approach of after-school programs.

Promising Practices and Approaches

The SJ Learns programs' experiences point to two promising practices and approaches in parent engagement:

1. Providing **take-home learning resources** to help parents create supportive at-home learning environments; and
2. Planning **structured parent check-ins** (e.g., as part of the end-of-day sign out process, home visits, and culminating events) to facilitate parent engagement.

The table below details what each of these practices and approaches has looked like in action.

¹² Smith, S., Robbins, T., Stagman, S. & Mahur, D. (2013). Parent engagement from preschool through grade 3: A guide for policymakers. Report. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.

Promising Practice/Approach	What this practice/approach looked like in practice?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing take-home learning resources to help parents create supportive at-home learning environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alum Rock's Kinder Academies provide parents with tailored vocabulary and math facts flash cards. Using the ESGI assessment program, program staff generate and print individual reports that include a sheet of the words and math facts that the child is having trouble with. The report is sent home as a parent letter, and parents can cut up the sheet to create flash cards, which they can then use to reinforce learning at home. At Evergreen, YMCA program staff lend books to the parents. Parents who may not have many books are then able to read together with their children at home.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning structured parent check-ins (e.g., as part of the end-of-day sign out process, home visits, and culminating events) to facilitate parent engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Franklin-McKinley's CORAL program engages parents through monthly meetings and biannual home visits. The monthly meetings provide parents with resources, information, and strategies to support their children's learning. Home visits allow staff to get to know their students' families and to gain a better understanding of students' home environments. The programs at Alum Rock and San José Unified hold special culminating events at the end of each learning unit. During these events students demonstrate what they learned in front of their families, and program providers have an opportunity to connect with parents. At Evergreen, parents are required to sign their children out. Staff use sign-out time as an opportunity to check in with parents on a regular basis and to engage parents more deeply than teachers are usually able to.

Reflections and Recommendations

Alignment with School Day

- **Creating alignment between the school day and enrichment programs takes continuous collaboration and time.** It is encouraging to see that SJ Learns programs are actively creating linkages to bridge classroom and after-school activities, despite the fact that doing so requires resources and time beyond what is generally expected of teachers and after-school staff. SVCF should encourage programs to share with each other promising practices and approaches for building purposeful alignment in an efficient and effective manner.
- **Good alignment practices should be codified to ensure that coordination between program and school staff becomes part of standard routine,** remaining in place beyond any changes in staff or administration. Systematizing alignment practices will also aid in making such practices replicable in other programs and schools in San José.
- **SJ Learns programs that are not already doing so should institute regular, structured meetings between teachers and program staff as a time for sharing and reflection.** Alignment meetings are most effective when they are well-structured by using an agenda with clearly-stated objectives and assigning an “owner” to any action items generated during the meeting. Agenda items could include updates on curriculum and student progress, a review of any data to discuss continuous program refinement, and sharing what staff are learning about what works and what does not work.

Quality Assessment

- **Programs can benefit from using a validated quality assessment tool.** Program quality assessments are well-known in the out-of-school field as a tool for improving programs, and the SJ Learns programs that used quality assessments experienced positive results. Validated tools, such as California After-School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool and the Youth Program Quality Assessment, offer to programs a quality assessment that has been extensively tested and revised for optimal results. For example, the Youth Program Quality Assessment Validation Study involved a four-year effort that brought together expert practitioners and experts to develop and test the instrument across 300 observations and interviews.¹³ This testing process ensures that the tool is well-designed and appropriate for use with a variety of after-school program types. An assessment tool that has undergone such rigorous analysis and scrutiny is more likely to help programs achieve their desired outcome: improved program quality.

Student Assessment

- **Programs should be encouraged to use student assessment data to inform program planning, implementation, and improvement.** Using student assessment data helps programs to tailor services to individual student needs, to understand the rate at which students are improving, and to help programs identify service gaps and areas for improvement.

Parent Engagement

- **Schools can deepen their engagement with parents by capitalizing on the connection that after-school programs have with parents.** SJ Learns program staff shared that they have an easier time connecting with working parents because, unlike their school-day counterparts, after-school staff are more readily available after the work day. One program provider voiced that parents are more drawn to after-school programming because it is perceived as “fun” and less focused on grades and

¹³ Smith, Charles, Hohmann, Charles (2005). Full Findings from the Youth PQA Validation Study. *High/Scope Educational Research Foundation*. <http://cypq.org/content/full-findings-youth-pqa-validation-study>.

test scores. The opening that after-school programs have with parents is an opportunity that schools could capitalize on to deepen their engagement with parents. For example, schools could work with after-school staff to raise academic concerns (as Evergreen has done) and share in-class progress to get parents excited about their children's learning.

- **All SJ Learns programs should incorporate parent involvement in their program design.** There are different ways that parent participation can look, and each program should design an approach that works within their resources. Ideally, parent engagement with after-school programs includes face-time with program staff (through home visits or in-person student sign-outs), plus individualized learning resources (such as flash cards and books) that parents can use to create a learning environment at home.

Other Opportunities

- Programs should think about how they might support students beyond the school year. Some of the SJ Learns programs already provide summer programming. Other program partners in the SJ Learns Initiative might consider what supports they can provide before and during the summer months to prevent summer learning loss. One idea is to ensure that parents are set up with resources after the school-year ends to give continuity and/or deepen learning that happened during the academic year.

Technology Integration in SJ Learns programs

Technology opens the door to immense opportunities to support student learning. If integrated well, technology and digital media in the after-school space – through the use of computers and tablets to access the internet, apps, and more – can foster deeper learning and content engagement than with traditional media alone.¹ Dynamic, modern apps can be tailored to individual students' needs, helping students at varying levels to increase their knowledge and skills. SJ Learns is committed to supporting programs to use technology in the after-school space to advance students' learning and prepare them for a digital future.

How programs are using technology

Two SJ Learns programs are using technology regularly to support student learning. At Franklin-McKinley, staff regularly use Lexia Reading Core, a computer program that provides personalized reading instruction. Students look forward to using this game-based program, and staff are able to monitor students' performance with the progress-monitoring data generated. At Alum Rock, staff provide kinders with iPads loaded with ESGI (Education Software for Guiding Instruction). With this blended learning approach, staff work with the kinders on the iPad so that the students can increase their letter and number recognition.

Several ways in which Alum Rock and Franklin-McKinley are using technology in their programs align with field research findings about what supports successful integration of technology in the classroom. Research shows the importance of **students playing an active role in their learning** and **receiving frequent, personalized feedback**.¹⁴ With Lexia Reading Core, Franklin-McKinley students actively engage in reading exercises and activities. The program provides real-time feedback by indicating when students have responded to a question correctly or not. The programs also understand the importance of providing program staff with **high quality professional development** opportunities to equip them to effectively use digital tools in the afterschool space.¹⁵ Both programs train staff to use their respective technology-based programs and integrate them into the curriculum.

Opportunities to optimize technology

SJ Learns programs are continuing to explore innovative ways to integrate technology into their programs by sharing their experiences and ideas with one another in cohort meetings and learning about emerging models in the field. Programs can also capitalize on case studies and field research, including the following:

- Student engagement increases when teachers **connect classroom activities to real-world scenarios**.¹⁴ SJ Learns programs might consider integrating current events, history lessons, or science content into existing curricula.
- Technology can be a powerful and effective way to **communicate with parents**. Olinder Elementary uses the ParentLink app to share administrative information (e.g. school calendar updates) with parents. Programs could use a similar app to send parents friendly reminders to read to their children, schedule a library visit, or ask their children about what they are learning at school.

Challenges facing programs

While integrating technology into extended learning programs offers many exciting opportunities, SJ Learns programs face several challenges and tensions:

- **Insufficient access to technology** – Many students and parents do not have access to technology at home. This limits the extent to which the after-school programs can use technology to engage with parents and to invite students to carry their learning beyond the school doors. Some students have been able to find creative ways to access technology, for example using their parents' mobile devices instead of a desktop or laptop. Programs can consider using cloud computing, open-source software, and free online resources to integrate technology inexpensively. PBS Kids (pbskids.org) is one of many organizations that offers content that can be downloaded at no cost.¹³
- **Too much screen time** – Program staff have voiced the concern that, in an increasingly digital world, students already spend too much time in front of a screen. Programs must balance the benefits of using technology to aid student learning with the potential drawbacks of increased time spent in front of a computer monitor, tablet, or mobile device. Programs may choose to rotate screen-based activities with silent reading, teacher-led lessons, and other traditional classroom activities.

¹⁴ Vega, Vanessa (2013). Technology Integration Research Review. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/technology-integration-research-learning-outcomes>

¹⁵ The After-School Corporation (2012). Where The Kids Are: Digital Learning in Class and Beyond. www.expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/digital_learning_beyond_class.pdf

Emerging Initiative Learnings

The City of San José and Silicon Valley Community Foundation (along with an Advisory Group) designed the SJ Learns Initiative to encourage program innovation, and with an eye to how the programs might be sustained and scaled as the initiative comes to a close. This section discusses the ways that the initiative was set up to support innovation, sustainability, and scaling – but more importantly, it discusses the *challenges* discovered in these three areas. And what do these lessons mean for how the initiative could *better* support innovation, sustainability, and scaling? The chapter closes by offering some recommendations on how the initiative might be strengthened, as well as some reflections on how the City of San José can play a strategic role in the after-school space when the initiative ends.

Sustainability and Scalability

This section discusses the ways that the initiative was set up to support sustainability and scaling, and the *challenges* discovered in this area. Though there are some challenges that affect only one area, SJ Learns programs spoke about challenges that are intertwined.

How was the initiative set up to promote sustainability and scalability?

The initiative's designers focused on promoting sustainability and scalability during the grant's design phase. The original design included an intention to discuss these issues during the cohort convenings; however, deep, structured discussions about these issues have not happened thus far.

SJ Learns partners developed grantee selection criteria with a focus on sustainability and scaling.

The requirement that school partners (i.e. school districts, charter school networks, and elementary school coalitions) take the lead on the proposal was intended to ensure that the proposed programs had early buy-in and commitment from school partners, and that school partners would take an active role in the design and implementation of the after-school programs. Sustained buy-in, commitment, and engagement from school partners is critical to sustainability and scaling because school partners have the power to direct school resources to programs, and can help open doors at other school sites. The matching fund requirement was also intended to support sustainability and scaling by ensuring that programs identified public and private dollars to support the work at the outset, and by encouraging programs to think of ways to leverage these same sources to support programming at new sites.

What are the bottlenecks to sustainability and scaling?

The main bottlenecks the initiative is encountering in its efforts to support sustainability and scaling are leveraging expertise of partners, funding, staff recruitment/retention, school and partner staff time, and operating in an after-school system that could be better coordinated.

The expertise of stakeholders has not been continuously leveraged to support sustainability and scaling efforts. The initiative effectively engaged diverse stakeholders at the outset of the initiative to define the need and inform the City's investment. In particular, stakeholders helped shape the grantee selection criteria with a focus on sustainability and scaling (these criteria are discussed in more detail above). Stakeholders, however, have been less involved as the initiative has unfolded and this represents a missed opportunity to continue to leverage their expertise in areas that are critical for sustainability and scaling. For example, many stakeholders are field experts and have deep knowledge that could benefit ongoing program refinements. Some stakeholders are also funders and have access to financial resources as well as expertise in sustainability planning.

Additional funding and resource investment is needed to scale the programs to meet demand. The City's \$2 million investment has provided over 600 students with the opportunity to attend after-school programs. While program partners agree that this investment has made a great difference, three programs shared that they are encountering more demand from parents and schools than they can meet with current SJ Learns funding. At Evergreen schools, more parents have expressed interest in enrolling their children in the program, so the program is looking for ways to offer

more program slots. At Oak Grove the program is exploring ways to expand to 2nd grade, even though the original design was only for 3rd graders. Teachers advocated for this expansion after they saw how well the program was working. Alum Rock schools that did not initially participate have expressed great interest in the program, and partners are now looking for ways to expand to eleven additional elementary schools. While programs have efforts underway to identify additional resources, additional funding from the City or other investors could help programs to reach more students. Should there be an increase in funding for after-school programming through the SJ Learns Initiative or a similar mechanism, it could in turn require increased staff time and administrative resources from SVCF.

Recruiting and retaining qualified after-school staff is critical to sustainability and scaling. Providing high-quality programming requires that after-school providers have sufficient staff, and that the staff members are well-trained. Providers, however, find it challenging to recruit and retain staff given the high cost of living in the region and the part-time, low-wage nature of most positions. Staff turnover is also challenging for programs because it means that programs need to spend a significant amount of time and resources continuously training new staff. Resources that could otherwise be spent on sustainability efforts or on expanding programming are drained away by recruitment and retention challenges.

Scaling programs will require adequate time for set-up and coordination. Setting up and coordinating programs that are aligned to the school day required more time from school administrators and teachers than partners originally expected. In the early phases of implementation, programs had to spend a lot of time ensuring all partners were clear on roles and responsibilities, were trained on the program model, and were staying in close and continuous communication to tailor the program to meet the needs of each program site. While time is less of a concern now that programs are fairly established, set-up time needed is a key consideration that all partners will need to pay attention to as they consider scaling to new program sites. Though programs have established program models, the models do not just "plug and play" into new sites. Program partners need time at the front end to tailor the program to the specific needs and context of each new program site.

SJ Learns is operating in an after-school system that could be better coordinated. San José has an after-

A lot of parents have expressed interest in the program this coming year so we are trying to find a way to offer more slots.
Evergreen program partner

The [second grade] teachers weren't doing the extended program and now they want to do it. [...] It's catching.
Oak Grove program partner

California is experiencing a teaching shortage, so this [staffing issue] is across the board. And we have limited resources, for example for competitive wages.
Alum Rock program partner

Retention of the YMCA leaders is an issue. They aren't paid a lot – only \$14/15 hour for part time work. [...] We want them to stay. [...] In order to run this program successfully, you need people who are trained to lead the students. It is not sustainable to have to re-train staff every six to twelve months.
Evergreen program partner

school collaborative providing support services to the field (i.e. Region 5 After School Partnerships¹⁶), but the after-school system is not as coordinated as it could be. The San José region needs a champion that can convene key stakeholders in the field to identify system-level challenges and strategies. Operating in a fragmented field is a roadblock for investments such as SJ Learns because it means two things: 1) there is the danger of duplication of effort, and 2) sustainability and scaling efforts are more difficult when it is hard to identify and coordinate with other partners operating in the field.

Innovation

This section discusses the ways that the initiative was intentionally set up to support innovation, and the *challenges* discovered in this area.

How was the initiative set up to promote innovation?

The initiative's efforts to support innovation have focused in two areas: allowing for flexibility in program design; and encouraging cohort learning.

To support innovation, the initiative allowed for flexibility in program design. To encourage innovation, the initiative gave school districts the flexibility to choose a program provider and model. The hope was that by not dictating what models the school partners should use and whom they should work with, the school providers would be encouraged to think outside the box – taking a risk with something new. The additional (and flexible) funding of the initiative was also meant to allow schools to try out models beyond what is possible with public funding sources.

SJ Learns supports innovation by facilitating learning among programs. As partners from different programs and with different experiences come together to discuss challenges and what they're learning at SVCF cohort convenings, they are able to use this "community of practice" as a cross-pollination space to come up with new ideas that they may not have thought of otherwise.

What are the bottlenecks to innovation?

The main bottlenecks the initiative has encountered in its efforts to support innovation have been: the time programs had between planning and implementation; and the requirement to implement evidence-based programs. These aspects of how the initiative was designed and has unfolded appear to have discouraged programs from taking bigger risks with their program models.

Time pressures to identify partners and implement programs quickly may limit innovation. The one-month window that school districts had available to compile a grant application may have discouraged some school districts from exploring a broader set of programs to partner with. As one program partner commented, "finding outside providers, finding good ones is difficult and takes a lot [of time]." And because of the need to start implementing programs quickly (in less than one semester), school districts may have also felt pressured to work with an existing partner or with an entity with a known track record of success. These partnership choices are not wrong: leveraging existing partnership helped school districts launch

When I heard about the ramp-up time, I was nervous – my prediction was that the program would just continue what they're doing because that's what they know how to do – rather taking time to reflect and come together as a community of practice [to identify high-risk innovations to test].

Alum Rock program partner

¹⁶ The Region 5 After School Partnerships provides support services, including professional development training and resources, to ASES as well as to expanded learning programs in Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties that are funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC).

and implement programs in an impressively short timeframe. These partnership choices do, however, suggest that school districts may not have been in a position to take full advantage of the SJ Learns funding by taking bigger risks and trying new partnerships and more experimental models.

Requiring school districts to implement programs that are evidence-based may have limited innovation. School districts and program partners all incorporated elements that are new in some way (e.g., implementing an existing program at a new site, or borrowing a known approach from another context to try in the after-school context). However, most programs are not taking big risks by implementing untested or highly experimental approaches. A key reason programs may have chosen not to take on these bigger risks is the grant requirement to implement programs that are “evidence-based.” Implementing an evidence-based intervention typically means using a model that has been rigorously tested and strictly codified. When implementing an evidence-based model, the key to effectiveness is often seen as *implementing with fidelity*. By definition, implementing with fidelity to a codified model prevents innovation (although these models sometimes allow for local adaptations, and these adaptations are sometimes innovative). Ultimately, the privileging of codified models in the RFP means that applicants had less of an incentive to try more outside-the-box approaches.

Reflections and Recommendations

This section offers reflections and recommendations designed to strengthen the initiative and to inform the City of San José’s strategic role in the after-school space in coming years. The reflections and recommendations focus on how partners could be better engaged in the initiative, how to strengthen the cohort learning space, information the initiative needs to communicate to programs, and how to strengthen the after-school system in San José.

The initiative needs to more actively engage diverse stakeholders. Partners who were initially engaged in the design of the initiative are curious to know how the work is unfolding and eager to contribute their expertise to support the success of the programs. One idea for better partner engagement is to support intentional and structured connections between partners and the programs. For example, partners could be invited to program cohort meetings to present and share their work in the after-school space, can contribute to quality assessment by conducting site visits and sharing observations, or to act as thought partners as programs wrestle with solutions to emerging challenges.

To encourage innovation, the initiative needs to clarify what level of risk-taking and failure is acceptable. The initiative messaged to programs that innovation is important. At the same time, the initiative underscored the need to monitor student academic improvement. While documenting and reporting on student success is clearly not at odds with pursuing innovative work, the messages communicated by focusing on outcomes can actually *deter* risk-taking. Tracking progress works well as part of an innovation strategy *as long as programs are clear about what level of failure is okay*. If programs believe that grant compliance or eligibility for future funding is tied (even implicitly) to results, programs may not take big risks. To counter this potential disincentive, the initiative needs to clearly communicate what level of risk-taking and failure is considered an inherent part of SJ Learns. If the initiative wants to encourage programs to really push the envelope, then the initiative will need to give programs “permission to fail.” In addition, the initiative would need to communicate explicitly that current and future funding is not contingent on reaching specific student outcome targets.

Programs can benefit from deeper cohort conversations about sustainability and scaling. An original intention of the grant designers was that programs would use the cohort meetings to discuss issues related to sustainability and scaling. While these topics have come up during cohort meetings, the topics have not yet been discussed in an in-depth way. Cohort meetings have thus far focused on discussions related to launching the work, the programs’ local landscapes and planned activities, and evaluation

planning. While these topics are important, the initiative needs to facilitate deeper discussion about sustainability and scaling. For example, during an upcoming cohort meeting programs could present their sustainability and/or scaling plans and solicit input from their peers to further refine their plans.

Programs would appreciate more clarification about future funding resources. As programs enter the last year of the initiative they are naturally curious about what comes next. Will the City of San José make another investment? Will additional funding be able to scale promising programs? Providing programs with more detailed answers to these questions, including information about timeline and next steps, will help programs to plan and prepare for programming next school year. It also helps them to make decisions about where they should invest resources *now*. If future funding is uncertain, partners may hesitate to invest funds in ways that create the conditions for longer-term program institutionalization.

SJ Learns should support conversations with partners about how to coordinate the after-school field. The initiative has sparked conversations about the need for more system-level coordination, especially the need for an after-school field champion. However, there is not an established, permanent space where these conversations can be hosted. SJ Learns can add value to the field by hosting more intentional conversations with partners about what is needed at the field level, as well as next steps to identify a champion that can bring together diverse partners, facilitate strategic conversations, and coordinate regional efforts.

Conclusion

The SJ Learns initiative has accomplished a great deal since the launch of the initiative in 2015:

- The City of San José and school districts invested \$3.16 million dollars to make meaningful, extended learning opportunities available to students;
- Diverse partners contributed to a well-designed, rigorous investment;
- School district and program providers quickly assembled and launched research- and evidence-based programs at five school districts;
- Programs served 678 students in 16 high-need schools throughout San José;
- Programs demonstrated a strong commitment to program quality, as well as to rigorous monitoring and evaluation; and
- All partners engaged in and contributed to learning via program, cohort, and initiative learning activities (e.g., cohort learning meetings and evaluation activities).

These achievements took a lot of hard work, and SJ Learns partners should be proud of the dedication from all partners to support the academic success of students in San José. As the initiative looks to 2017, a number of exciting opportunities are on the horizon:

- Continuing to learn from the programs' experiences to develop a deeper understanding of what it takes to support San José students;
- Understanding what difference the initiative's efforts have made in improving student learning outcomes;
- Continuing efforts to scale the programs to other classrooms and schools as some districts and their partners have already started to do this year; and
- Working collaboratively with diverse partners to support the sustainability and scaling of efforts beyond the life of the initiative. Given the needs across the region, there is deep demand and need for more programs like those offered by SJ Learns.

To help the SJ Learns initiative meet these challenges, LFA offers the following high-level reflections and recommendations (summarized from reflections and recommendations discussed in detail above).

Reflections and Recommendations for Programs

- **Alignment with School Day**
 - Good alignment requires strong partnerships between school-day staff and program staff.
 - Good alignment practices should be codified to ensure that coordination between program and school staff becomes standard routine, remaining in place beyond changes in staff or administration.
 - SJ Learns programs that are not already doing so should institute regular, structured meetings between teachers and program staff as a time for sharing and reflection.
- **Quality Assessment**
 - Programs can benefit from using a standardized, validated quality assessment tool.
- **Student Assessment**
 - Programs should be encouraged to use student assessment data to inform program planning, implementation, and improvement.
- **Parent Engagement**
 - Schools could deepen their engagement with parents by capitalizing on the connection after-school programs have with parents.
 - All SJ Learns programs should have some form of parent involvement in their program design.
- **Other Opportunities**
 - Programs should think about how they might support students beyond the school year.

Reflections and Recommendations for the Initiative

- The initiative needs to more actively engage diverse stakeholders.
- To encourage innovation, the initiative needs to clarify what level of risk-taking and failure is acceptable.
- Programs could benefit from deeper cohort conversations about sustainability and scaling and would appreciate more clarification about future funding resources.
- SJ Learns should support conversations with partners about how to coordinate the after-school field.