

The California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI), established in 2016 led by Ten Strands, works statewide with guidance from a leadership council to create systems change to support and elevate the importance of environmental literacy in TK-12 schools. CAELI embraces approaches that operate at scale and that focus on equity and justice. CAELI maintains its focus on environmental literacy, while remaining nimble and responsive to the current conditions and context of our complex state and education system. At this moment in time, environmental literacy and outdoor learning provide an antidote for pandemic induced trauma and unfinished learning, promote English language development, improve social and emotional learning, and maintain a laser focus on the climate crisis and environmental justice. As CAELI evolves from a relatively small, highly focused work scope driven effort to a larger, more expansive, and more equitable initiative, its theory of action also evolves.

This theory of action is intended to strike a balance between guiding the work of CAELI Innovation Hubs and being descriptive of emergent work from the Innovation Hubs. Innovation Hub leaders should track the degree to which their goals, actions, and work groups align with the theory of action but should not feel bound by it when new opportunities and strategies emerge. This approach, while potentially less strategic, is more pluralistic, inclusive, and more likely to result in the type of collective impact necessary in a state as large as California. When new opportunities and strategies emerge, Innovation Hub leaders should bring them to the Executive Committee for discussion and explanation.

Vision

We envision future generations that are environmentally literate and prepared with the leadership skills to restore the health of living systems and communities upon which we all depend. CAELI strategies focus first on the students, families, and educators in marginalized communities where educational inequities and environmental injustice are felt the most. We envision education leaders and community leaders taking responsibility and immediate action to bring about climate and environmental justice and provide resources and opportunities to amplify students' voices. CAELI promotes bold, aspirational plans to achieve environmental literacy, social and emotional well-being, and sustainable, climate-resilient campuses. We envision a healthy planet, economic prosperity, and equitable communities. CAELI is a vibrant public-private partnership that powers continual positive change.

Statement of Purpose

Education in, for, and about the environment is not “enrichment”—it is a better way for all students to learn all the time. CAELI strives to change the education system to ensure that all students at all grade levels, with special emphasis on students of color and low-income students, routinely have outdoor and classroom-based environmental experiences that transform learning and improve physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being. Environmental literacy prepares students to take action to solve problems and improve their lives and communities. To accomplish this, CAELI actively works for equity and justice, dismantling systems of oppression and racism.

Guiding Principles

Every action that CAELI takes to advance environmental literacy in California addresses each of our guiding principles. These principles guide our decisions about what actions to prioritize.

EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND ACCESSIBILITY

All of California's students have the right to learn in, from, and about a healthy environment and become caretakers of the people, land, water and air in their communities. Students from Indigenous groups, students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income communities suffer the most from pollution, ecosystem degradation, and climate change, and face the greatest barriers to enjoying the benefits of healthy, healing outdoor spaces. *All CAELI Innovation Hubs and investments prioritize programs that are designed with and for these communities and should celebrate diversity and be inclusive. Indigenous ways of knowing about the land and water we occupy should be prominent in learning experiences for both students and educators.*

SCALABILITY

To reach all 5.8 million students in all 1,000 school districts in California, all CAELI Innovation Hubs and investments must focus on building infrastructure and strategies that can be expanded or adapted and scaled statewide. Environmental and climate literacy must be embedded and infused throughout the education systems of the state. To reach scale and to stay top of mind in a state the size of California, CAELI's approach to environmental literacy must always be responsive to the current context and immediate needs of education leaders. CAELI's approach recognizes that funding and decision-making occur at the school district level. *All CAELI Innovation Hubs and investments should prioritize resources and approaches for district leaders to engage with community-based partners and county offices of education on districtwide environmental literacy efforts.*

SHARED LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

CAELI is grounded in shared leadership practices that empower individuals and broadly distributes leadership opportunities and responsibilities to represent different perspectives and expertise. CAELI also integrates public-private partnerships, multi-sector involvement, and mutually beneficial



partnerships with community-based organizations that have a deep understanding of their local environment and the environmental injustices they face. While working collaboratively to form authentic, trustworthy, and mutually beneficial partnerships takes time, CAELI values that it is essential to advance environmental literacy for all students and communities and can accelerate impact in the long run. *All CAELI Innovation Hubs and investments should practice shared leadership and prioritize partnerships that design and deliver education programs and services, especially with and in marginalized communities.*

A WIDE RANGE OF ENVIRONMENT-BASED EXPERIENCES

There is no singular experience that leads to environmental literacy. Students need lifelong and wide-ranging environment-based, outdoor and in-class learning experiences. Every student should experience environmental learning routinely every year in classrooms, on schoolyards, in parks and open spaces, and in community-based partner programs, and should attend, at least once, a residential outdoor science program. These experiences must include student voices, civic engagement, and leadership development. *The CAELI portfolio of Innovation Hubs and investments should be managed to support a wide variety of strategic environment-based learning experiences for every student.*

CONNECTION AND CARE

Education has the power to positively impact students and how they interact with their world; in particular, their connection to people and the planet. Environmental literacy is essential to foster an understanding of how students' individual actions impact themselves, the people around them, and the planet, and to imagine—and realize—a better world. *CAELI Innovation Hubs and investments should always put students first, and prioritize care for each other, our communities, and our environment.*

Theory of Action Domains

Our Theory of Action is based on the premise that to achieve environmental literacy for every student in California, we must apply each of our guiding principles to concerted, intentional work in each of the following **five Domains**:

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

CAELI must build mutually beneficial power-sharing relationships and partnerships with a wide range of community-based organizations to design interdisciplinary programs and learning experiences that address community priorities and lead to environmental literacy and environmental justice.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

CAELI must develop an actionable, equitable, and just statewide policy agenda to advance environmental literacy in California's schools and support student leadership for environmental and climate justice.

SUSTAINABLE AND CLIMATE READY SCHOOLS

CAELI supports school buildings and grounds that slow climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation, are home to small schoolyard forests, protect the health of students and staff, and promote student learning through the study of sustainable technologies and practices.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

CAELI must establish strategic partnerships that lead to multiple streams of sustained, predictable funding to support healthy communities, healthy ecosystems, and environmental literacy.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

CAELI must ensure regular, effective, research-based classroom and outdoor learning experiences for all students, especially with those in the most marginalized communities, to build environmental literacy and environmental justice statewide. This requires high-quality instructional materials, the development of statewide systems for professional learning for all educators, and policies and practices at sites and districts that prioritize the teaching of science, social studies, health, arts, and other subjects through the context of the environment.



CAELI Innovation Hubs

By mid-2022, CAELI has launched seven Innovation Hubs that each focus on important aspects of equitable and just environmental literacy in school districts throughout the state. Each Innovation Hub addresses one or more of the five Domains and all five of the guiding principles described above. Innovation Hubs grow the number and diversity of leaders and collaborators directly involved with CAELI and accelerate the rate at which we advance student environmental literacy in California. The Innovation Hubs include:

The Community-Based Partner Innovation Hub strengthens and engages informal and nonformal providers around a unified approach to better address equity and inclusion and align with the needs of formal K-12 education to elevate environmental literacy across the state.

The County Office of Education Innovation Hub supports all 58 of California's county offices of education (COEs) to launch and maintain thriving environmental literacy and sustainability initiatives. Through the development of tools and professional learning opportunities, this Hub builds the capacity of COEs to support their districts and schools to

provide equitable, high-quality environmental education, and safe and healthy spaces for students and adults to learn and play.

The District Innovation Hub builds capacity within school districts to increase equitable, engaging, meaningful, rigorous, and culturally relevant environmental literacy learning experiences for students, and to support sustainable districtwide practices.

The Equity Innovation Hub promotes the equity literacy of all CAELI members by providing or linking members to professional learning opportunities so that they continue their individual learning and strengthen their ability to center equity in their respective work plans and efforts. This Hub provides support and guidance to other Hubs as each works toward centering equity to achieve their goals.

The Green Career Education Innovation Hub facilitates the development of an environmentally literate workforce by fostering the integration of environmental education into TK-14 CTE and other academic coursework, and by finding new ways to prioritize providing students of color with equitable access to high-wage careers, jobs, and trades that support a green economy.



The Professional Learning Innovation Hub coordinates and supports those who provide professional learning for educators related to environmental and climate literacy. Composed of leaders from higher education, state agencies, county offices of education, and community-based partners, this Hub establishes priorities for environmental and climate literacy professional learning for formal and informal educators, educational leaders, and community-based partners.

The Policy Innovation Hub develops an actionable, equitable and just policy agenda to advance environmental literacy in California's TK–12 public schools. This Hub identifies top priorities and relevant policies that will increase funding and political support for environmental literacy statewide.

