

NJAS ELO-P Alignment Brief

Nature Journaling Activity System | California Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, TK–6

A free companion to the NJAS Educator Guides. New Mettle Farms, LLC.

1. Program summary

The Nature Journaling Activity System (NJAS) is a set of outdoor garden flags with activity guides, indoor artistic journaling placemats with art guides, downloadable worksheets and facilitator guides built around four thinking routines: Notice, Wonder, Remember and Measure. Every session follows the same repeatable structure: an outdoor station, an indoor art station, with blank recording journals, downloadable worksheet, or use of supplement NMF Student Nature Journal Series. NJAS works indoors and outdoors, in any season.

This brief gives California expanded learning programs the language and evidence they need to describe NJAS in their ELO-P Program Plan. Programs may adapt any wording here for their own plan.

Program Plan statement (ready to adapt): "The Nature Journaling Activity System gives every session a standards-aligned science and literacy activity (Academic Support), a visual-arts journaling practice (Enrichment), and outdoor, social and stewardship experiences (Healthy Development), in one repeatable structure: outdoor station, indoor art, journal."

How NJAS fits ELO-P requirements

ELO-P requirement	How NJAS supports it
Serves TK through grade 6 (EC 46120)	NJAS Educator Guides cover Early Learners (TK–1) and School Age (grades 1–12), with skills described for each grade band.
Complements, but does not replicate, the regular school day (EC 8482.1(a), as cited by CDE)	NJAS uses hands-on observation, art and outdoor exploration rather than repeating school-day classwork. It gives learners practice with the same science and literacy skills in a different setting and format.
Educational and literacy element (EC 8482.3(c)(1)(A))	Science observation, counting and measuring with units, labeling, describing words, writing questions and facts, and citing reliable sources.
Educational enrichment element (EC 8482.3(c)(1)(B))	Visual arts (drawing, color, rubbings, collage), specimen archiving, photography, and outdoor recreation and movement.
Summer and intersession days (EC 46120(b))	The same session structure works on non-school days, and repeated visits to one spot support the Measure routine’s tracking of seasonal change.

2. The three program components

Many ELO-P programs organize their schedules into three components: Academic Support, Enrichment and Healthy Development. Every NJAS session covers all three: outdoor flags, then the indoor placemat, then the journal.

Component	NJAS evidence	NJAS products
Academic Support (STEM, literacy)	Science and engineering practices from the NGSS; counting and measuring with numerical units; describing words, sentence starters and labeling; writing questions and facts; citing reliable sources	Garden flags and Flag Facilitator Guides; Quick Prompt card; downloadable worksheets
Enrichment (arts, youth development)	Visual arts: drawing, color study, collage, printmaking with rubbings, specimen archiving and photography	Placemats; NJAS Art Guides
Healthy Development (social-emotional learning, physical activity)	Outdoor time and movement between stations; slowing down to look and listen; curiosity, collaboration and sharing; respect for living things through the specimen rules	Garden flags and the Standard Flag Set Up; Remember unit Specimen Station; Educator Guides (outdoor classroom and care)

Skills by component

Each of the 12 NJAS skills supports at least one component. Grade-band descriptions for every skill are in the NJAS Science Standards Alignment Rubric.

Routine	Skill	Component
NOTICE	Observing & drawing	Academic Support; Enrichment
NOTICE	Labels & describing words	Academic Support (literacy)
NOTICE	Counting & recording	Academic Support (math)
WONDER	Asking questions	Academic Support
WONDER	Changing perspective	Enrichment
WONDER	Using sources	Academic Support (literacy)
REMEMBER	Making connections	Academic Support
REMEMBER	Caring for nature	Healthy Development (social-emotional learning)
REMEMBER	Texture, pattern & color	Enrichment
MEASURE	Measuring with units	Academic Support (math)
MEASURE	Tracking change	Academic Support
MEASURE	Evidence & explanation	Academic Support (literacy)
Every routine	Sharing ideas	Healthy Development (collaboration)

3. Program Plan Guide crosswalk

The CDE ELO-P Program Plan Guide asks programs to describe how they meet the California Quality Standards for Expanded Learning. The table shows where NJAS can be cited as evidence. Sections marked "Program decides" describe the program's own management and are not supplied by NJAS.

Program Plan section	How NJAS supports it	Where to find it
1. Safe and Supportive Environment	Clear boundaries using the flags, one attention signal, buddy system, specimen and magnifier safety rules, weather plan, tool count and hand washing.	Educator Guides: Outdoor Classroom & Care
2. Active and Engaged Learning	Hands-on outdoor stations and indoor art; learners observe, draw, count and measure real specimens; the same routine question at every station.	Quick Prompt card; flags; placemats
3. Skill Building	12 skills that grow across grade bands, with a descriptor for each band.	Science Standards Alignment Rubric, section 7
4. Youth Voice and Leadership	Learners choose what to study and what to ask; each session ends with sharing; older learners lead stations and routines.	Educator Guides: session step 5 and grade pages
5. Healthy Choices and Behaviors	Outdoor movement, quiet observation and care for living things.	Remember unit; Educator Guides
6. Diversity, Access, and Equity	Visual, drawing-first activities with word banks and sentence starters; guide-led options for early learners; works in any indoor or outdoor space with basic supplies.	Educator Guides: grade pages and Early Learners Guide
7. Quality Staff	Facilitator prompt language, guiding moves and "when learners get stuck" responses so staff can lead sessions without science training.	Educator Guides; Flag Facilitator Guides; Staff Support List (page 5)
8. Clear Vision, Mission, and Purpose	Program decides. NJAS can be named as a program resource.	Program summary statement, page 1
9. Collaborative Partnerships	Program decides.	Program records
10. Continuous Quality Improvement	The skills rubric and journal pages can serve as observation evidence of learner growth over time.	Science Standards Alignment Rubric, section 7
11. Program Management	Program decides.	Program records

4. Transitional kindergarten and kindergarten

The Program Plan Guide asks how the program serves TK and kindergarten learners. NJAS supports this age with the Early Learners Guide (TK–1):

- An adult reads the routine question aloud and writes down the learner's words.
- Learners talk, point, draw and make rubbings before they write.
- Sessions are shorter, with more movement and one task at a time.
- "Ready for more" lines give a next step for learners who are ready.

5. Sample session for a program schedule

The Program Plan Guide asks for a sample schedule. One NJAS session fits a single enrichment block. Times below come from the NJAS Educator Guides.

Step	What happens	Grades 1–2	Grades 3–6
1. Gather	Circle up, review the boundaries and the attention signal, read the routine question.	3 min	3 min
2. Explore outdoors	Visit one or two garden flags, using the Quick Prompt card.	10–15 min	15–20 min
3. Create indoors	Placemat station after a demonstration of one art technique.	15 min	20 min
4. Record	Fill in the date, time, place and weather, then add words, numbers and pictures.	5 min	5 min
5. Share	Each learner shares one thing they noticed, wondered, connected or measured.	3 min	5 min
Total		about 40 min	about 50 min

TK and kindergarten session times are in the Early Learners Guide.

6. Materials and use conditions

These conditions help programs confirm that NJAS materials meet their purchasing and use requirements.

Condition	Detail
Supplies	Learners build supporting tools from basic classroom supplies, such as a Rubbings Library, Viewfinder Frame and Measuring Strip. Instructions are in the NJAS Art Guides. A thermometer and a clock come from the site.
Indoor and outdoor	All NJAS products work indoors and outdoors. Learners observe what is in their own space; no specimens ship with the core system.

Staff Support List

This list is separate from the alignment content above. It gives staff a short checklist for running NJAS sessions. Staff guide learners through skills they already practice in the school day; no science background is needed.

Program requirements to keep in mind

- Staff-to-pupil ratio: no more than 20 to 1, and no more than 10 to 1 in groups with TK or kindergarten learners (EC 46120; EC 8483.4).
- Staff who directly supervise learners meet the program's minimum qualifications (EC 8483.4).

Before the session

1. Set up the flags with the Standard Flag Set Up: spacing, visibility, rotation, station tools and a safety check.
2. Read the Flag Guide and/or the Quick Prompt card for the unit and use its exact words at flags and placemats.
3. Pack tools in a tray or bag at each station.

During the session

4. Practice the attention signal at the start, and use it every time.
5. Say the safety lines out loud: ask before touching, stay where you can see the guide, wash hands.
6. Follow the specimen rules: approved spaces and species, small quantities, and a photograph of living animals and insects.
7. Show one art technique and its routine question before indoor work.
8. Before measuring, show learners how to use the tool and say the unit. Focus on one measurement per session.
9. Point learners to reliable sources, such as field guides, library books, and museum, park or university websites, and show how to name the source.

After the session

10. Count the tools before leaving.
11. Plan time to study photos and drawings (Remember) and to return to the same spot (Measure).

Sources & Acknowledgments

The NJAS routines Notice, Wonder, Remember and Measure are New Mettle Farms' adaptation of the See, Think, Wonder routine from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

AI Use: This brief was drafted with the assistance of Claude, an AI model by Anthropic, working from New Mettle Farms' original NJAS materials. New Mettle Farms reviewed, edited and approved all content.

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California Department of Education. "Expanded Learning Opportunities Program Frequently Asked Questions." *California Department of Education*, www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/elofaq.asp.

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California Education Code. Sections 8482.3, 8483.4 and 46120.

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This brief supports program planning. It is not legal advice and does not replace CDE guidance. Programs should confirm current requirements with the California Department of Education.