

**Exploring the Intellectual, Social and
Organizational Capitals at LA's BEST**

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EXPLORING THE INTELLECTUAL, SOCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITALS AT LA'S BEST

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Abstract

This exploratory study sets out to investigate how LA's BEST, a non-profit after school organization providing services for at-risk students, leverages the organizational, social, and intellectual capitals to enhance student engagement. Six LA's BEST sites were selected to participate in this qualitative study. A grounded theory approach was employed and both interviews and focus groups were conducted with key LA's BEST program personnel and participants, as well as day school personnel, parents, and community members. To place our findings into context with our study population, Maslow's Theory on the Hierarchy of Needs (1954) was introduced. The findings revealed that in leveraging their intellectual, social, and organizational capitals, LA's BEST has provided an important level of support for the students. In addition, LA's BEST has realized that fostering and maintaining social capital is a continuous task calling for the efforts of "communities of practice." As a learning organization, LA's BEST has accepted this challenge and has expanded their efforts to continue learning and growing.

Study Overview

Introduction

A new concept in the field of education is that of social, intellectual, and organizational capitals. According to Public Policy Council, 2003, "In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, it is not capital equipment or technology that differentiates organizations; it is their work force and the processes by which that workforce is established, leveraged, and maintained." This pilot study has set out to explore how LA's BEST, a non-profit after school organization

providing services for at-risk students, leverages the organizational, social, and intellectual capitals to enhance student engagement.

Literature Review

Intellectual capital. There are several variations in the definition of intellectual capital. Outside of education, intellectual capital is generally defined as a composite of the wisdom, intelligence, flexibility, creativity, entrepreneurship, and core competencies necessary to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy where technology and knowledge dominate. The field of education defines intellectual capital as the capabilities of staff to create an effective learning environment and original, innovative research. For instance, Kirk (2000) defines intellectual capital as “the creative, scholarly, and pedagogical capability in the faculty and staff of colleges and universities.” Senge (1990) described five competencies for an organization in which innovative patterns of thinking are nurtured and learning how to learn is encouraged: a) continually clarifying the mission, b) challenging assumptions that influence how people think and act, c) sharing vision and motivating others, d) learning in teams, and e) “systems thinking.” Senge and colleagues (2000) applied their theories to education by arguing that intellectual capital involves a process of staff development and collaboration, constant adjustment, and flexibility to in an ever-evolving educational system. Kelly’s (2004) definition captures its more abstract theoretical aspects. That is, “Intellectual capital brings people and ideas together in a deliberate manipulation to create value from the transfer and codification of knowledge.”

Teaching and administration are thus considered primary skills that intellectual capital can capture toward the improvement of student learning and the overall effectiveness of schools. Within this framework, Kelly (2004) outlines the key human forms of intellectual capital in schools including: a) competency capital, or the sum of skills and know-how of teachers and administrators; b) attitude capital, which comprises motivation, strategic intent and work ethics; and c) intellectual agility, which entails the ability of teachers, administrators and students to innovate and change practice when problems arise. There are two ways in which intellectual capital can be increased: by the creation of new knowledge and by the transfer of knowledge between situations and people (Hargreaves, 2001). In after school programs, for example, intellectual capital is one of the invisible assets that is present among after school staff, parents, students, and the local community.

Competence is generally related to level of education or formal instruction and generates value through individual and collective “know-how.” *Know-how* is a combination of: a) problem-solving ability, b) technical/academic knowledge, and c) managerial and human relations skills. *Attitude* depends mostly on individual personality traits and is composed of qualities such as: strategic intent, good work behavior and a good work ethic. Strategic intent is the willingness to persist in the pursuit of school goals, and the desire and ability to envision a future, convince others to work towards it and eventually create it (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989). *Intellectual agility* is the ability to apply knowledge across contexts and situations, and to innovate and transform ideas that are critical to the success of the program. It relies on the ability to synthesize information and piece them together in an original way. Its features include innovation, imitation and adaptation. *Innovation* is the ability to generate new knowledge by building on experience, and by absorbing an existing body of know-how and contributing to it. It is the ability to turn an idea into a service and represents a link between human and structural capitals. That is, the program is able to generate renewal and manage change, thereby sustaining success. *Imitation* is the ability to replicate good practices, and to adapt and improve upon them. Imitation usually leads in the long- term to something new or better.

Adaptation comes about as a result of changes in the competitive environment, in dominant technology, in government regulation, in the nature of the market, and in consumer demand. Adaptation may either be reactive, anticipative, or creative (Kelly, 2004).

Social capital. Social capital pertains to the relationships between people. Within an educational context, it involves variables that affect learning primarily from a student-centered perspective. Further, it is defined as the compilation of networks, civic norms, and social trust a community or school offers youth. Its key factors include social relations, formal and informal social networks, group membership, trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement. For example, some of the academic variables it encompasses include teacher and parent expectations, parent involvement in schooling and homework, the perception of a caring environment in school, school climate, number of close friends in school, positive academic influences in the school and community, language proficiency, and specific family and community characteristics.

In this study, Putnam’s (1995) social capital definition and reference to social capital as relationships, trust, and norms was adapted. *Relationships* include the

network of associations, activities, or relationships that bring people together as a community through expectancies and trust. *Trust* is the psychological element that strengthens the relationships, which in turn impacts expectancies. *Social norms* are shared understandings, as well as informal rules and conventions for behavior (Productivity Commission, 2003). Norms are rarely represented in the form of laws or regulations, although they can take documented forms such as written music. Examples of social norms include honesty, obeying laws, ethics, respect for elders, acceptance of diversity, and helping those in need. Compliance with norms may be reinforced differently based on group differentiation. In some societies or groups, social norms are reinforced through guilt, shame, or even ostracism.

Organizational capital. Organizational capital, like intellectual capital, is a term used primarily in a business context. Principally, it refers to the corporate or institutional culture and organizational practices that work toward increasing autonomy, collaboration, and profitability. Within this context, Tomer (1987) first defined the term organizational capital as the “investment in resources in order to bring about lasting improvement in productivity, worker well-being, or social performance through changes in the functioning of the organization.” In the context of education, Kelly (2004) argues that schools must provide stakeholders with a broader and deeper understanding of what their schools are doing while measuring its success in terms of ability to innovate and manage change, utilize its organizational infrastructure to maximum effect, and create an environment for transferability of staff skills.

In considering organizational capital, Kelly separates intellectual capital into two sub-categories, human/intellectual capital (thinking capital), involving teachers and students, and structural/organizational capital (non-thinking capital). Structural capital is further divided into a) internal organizational capital, b) external organizational capital, and c) innovation and staff development capital. Internal organizational capital comprises processes, infrastructure, management, and culture attributes that relate to the effectiveness of the school including things like internal networks and intranets, intellectual property rights, library and information technology resources, student databases, mentoring guidelines, and teaching manuals. External organizational capital, on the other hand, relates to relationships (with parents, external suppliers, alumni, community members, and other state and federal educational institutions) that indirectly have an impact on the effectiveness of the school. And finally, innovation and staff development capital is value added to

the program with the intent to impact the future and could include curriculum development, restructuring processes, the development of new mentoring schemes, and professional development. As with intellectual capital, organizational capital is an intangible asset that is difficult to measure. Within an educational institution, it clearly relates to both relatively tangible assets (e.g., databases, computer networks, and manuals) and intangible assets (e.g., human networks, relationships, management styles, and culture).

The model presented in Figure 1 presents the pathways and interactions of members’ intellectual capital, social capital, and organizational capitals (i.e., internal and external); and how LA’s BEST can leverage these resources to increase program effectiveness (i.e., student engagement in learning).

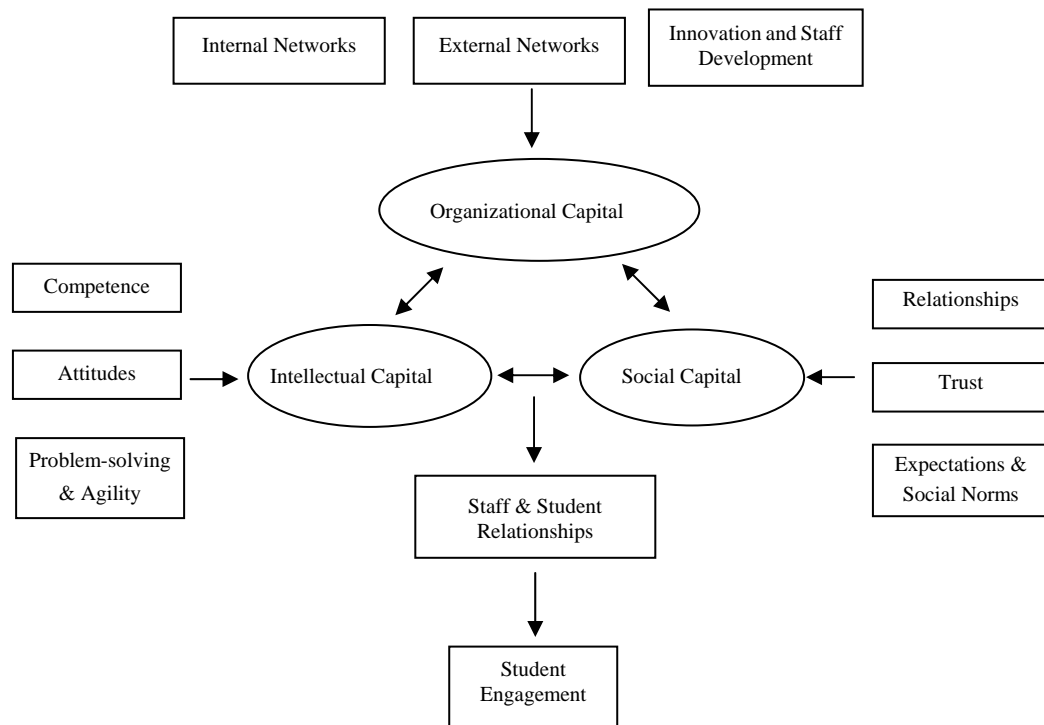


Figure 1. LA’s BEST Social, Intellectual and Organizational Capital Model.

The methodology used for this study is discussed next. Followed with the descriptions of the demographics of the students and the relationships between the intellectual, social, and organizational capital at six LA’s BEST study sites. A discussion and conclusion will follow where Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs will be considered as a platform to place findings into perspective.

Methodology

Study Goals and Evaluation Questions

This exploratory study examined the intellectual, social, and organizational capitals at six LA's BEST sites in order to better understand how these resources are being manipulated to benefit students. The following questions guided the study:

- Explore and describe the intellectual and social capitals at LA's BEST.
- How is LA's BEST leveraging its intellectual and social capitals to enhance the effectiveness of the organizational functioning and promote student engagement?
- Is LA's BEST employing effective practices to function as a learning organization?

Methods

This study employed qualitative research methodologies. Observations, interviews, and focus groups were conducted. Protocols were developed to guide the observation, focus group, and interview processes. The grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to code, analyze, and triangulate the findings.

Participants

The key participants for this study were LA's BEST's traveling program supervisors, activities consultants, site coordinators, program staff, students, and parents. Other participants included principals or assistant principals and teachers at each school site, LA's BEST central office personnel, and any community members who were identified during the course of the study as having an impact on social and intellectual capital formation at the participating school sites.

One school site was invited to participate as a pilot site and six school sites were invited to participate in the main study. These six sites were selected by the LA's BEST's central office. The criteria for site selection were based on Socioeconomic status (SES), experienced and relatively new sites, and geographic distribution that are representative of LA's BEST population. Principals from all seven sites were contacted based on their nomination as potential participants by LA's BEST central office.

The pilot study consisted of only program observations, so no participants other than the site itself and program staff facilitating the randomly selected activities were involved in this phase.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the total number of participants by site and by the participant’s role at the school site or in the LA’s BEST program.

Table 1
Study Participants by Site

Participants	Site						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interview							
Principal	1 ^a	1	1	1	1 ^a	1	6
Traveling program supervisor	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Activities coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Site coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Parents	13	8	10	11	11	11	64
Community members	--- ^b	--- ^b	--- ^b	2	--- ^b	--- ^b	2
LA’s BEST corporate office	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13
LA’s BEST operations office	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7
Focus group							
Teachers	6	7	7	7	8	9	44
Program staff	5	4	2	5	7	9	32
Students	18	12	15	15	17	16	93

^aThe Assistant Principal participated in the interview. ^bNo community members were interviewed.

Instruments

Observation, interview, and focus group protocols were developed by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). Table 2 provides a breakdown of the protocols, the allotted administration

time, and the protocol administration time frame. A description of each instrument is also provided below.

Table 2
Protocol and Administration Information

Protocol	Administration Time	Administration Time Frame
Observation	45 Minutes to 1 hour	fall 2004 and winter 2005
Site coordinator interview	1 Hour	February – May 2005
Principal interview	45 Minutes	February – May 2005
Parent interview (by Telephone)	30 Minutes	May – June 2005
TPS/AC interview	30 Minutes	May – June 2005
Community interview	30 Minutes	May – June 2005
LA’s BEST central office interview	30 Minutes	November 2005
Program staff focus group	45 Minutes	February – May 2005
Student focus group	45 Minutes	February – May 2005
Teacher focus group	45 Minutes	February – May 2005

Observation protocol. The observation protocol was developed to document the activities and interactions of the participants at LA’s BEST. It also served as a source for validation of the interview and focus group protocols. The observation protocol included descriptions of the program environment, classroom climate, location of the activities, grade level of the students participating in the activity, role and number of adults facilitating the activity, instructional format of the activity (e.g., student-to-student, program staff-to-student, and so forth), percentage of students perceived to be engaged in the activity, and types of student interaction.

Interview and focus group protocols. Interview and focus group protocols included topics on: a) background information, b) communication styles, c) teamwork and collaboration, d) trust, e) networks (including relationship with school, parent involvement, community involvement), and f) organizational capital (including professional development, program operation, management skills, and leadership abilities). Appendix A provides a matrix which cross-references question topics and protocols that address these topics.

Procedures

The LA's BEST operations office helped to coordinate the distribution and collection of the school participation (signed by principals), traveling program staff, and activities consultant consent forms. Consent forms for the principal, site coordinator, parent, and community member interviews; and for the teacher, student, and program staff focus groups were distributed and collected by CRESST researchers.

Observations. Program observations were conducted at one pilot site in October 2004 with the following three objectives: a) to familiarize the LA's BEST research team with the day-to-day LA's BEST operations; b) to test the observation protocol, and c) to help inform and refine the interview and focus group protocols.

For the main study, two CRESST researchers conducted a 2-day site observation at all six study sites in the late fall of 2004. After coordinating dates with the site coordinators, CRESST researchers visited the six sites and individually observed different grade levels and different activities offered at each site.

A 1-day site "follow-up" observation was conducted at all six sites in winter 2005 and the same observation protocol was used. This "follow-up" observation was primarily conducted to observe program consistency and to account for any differences in the program schedule due to holiday activities during the initial site observations in fall 2004.

Interviews and focus groups. Principal and site coordinator interviews, as well as teacher, program staff, and student focus groups were coordinated by the site coordinators and conducted at the six sites. CRESST made every effort to collect the data as efficiently as possible to minimize interruptions at the six participating sites. The principal and site coordinator interviews, and the teacher, staff, and student focus groups were all scheduled on one date with a second date serving as a back-up for rescheduled interviews, and focus groups resulting from unforeseen problems such as cancellations or time conflicts.

The principal interview for five of the six sites was held at a time during the day that was convenient for the administrator and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The only exception occurred at Site 5. The assistant principal at this site requested that her interview, which lasted 20 minutes, be conducted by telephone. Of the six teacher focus groups, five were conducted during the teachers' lunch period and lasted

approximately 40 minutes. The teacher focus group for Site 5 was conducted immediately after school, at the request of the administrators at this school site. Because there were no time constraints, the teacher focus group for Site 5 lasted approximately one hour. The site coordinator interviews were held during LA's BEST operating hours and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The program staff focus group was usually conducted before or after LA's BEST operating hours and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Finally, student focus groups were held during LA's BEST operating hours and lasted from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Every effort was made to schedule student focus groups around homework time.

Traveling program staff, activities consultant, parent, and community interviews were scheduled and coordinated by CRESST researchers. Of the 12 traveling program staff and activities consultant interviews, 10 interviews were conducted by telephone and 1 traveling program staff and 1 activities consultant interview were conducted in person at the school site. The traveling program staff and activities consultant interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. All parent interviews were conducted by telephone in Spanish, Cantonese, or English and lasted approximately 20 minutes. Likewise, two community interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The LA's BEST corporate and operations offices survey interview was distributed in November 2005 and May 2006 and it was anticipated that this instrument would take 30 minutes to complete. These participants submitted their responses to the questions by typing in responses and submitting this information via e-mail.

In addition, site coordinators from all six sites were asked to identify community members who provided service to LA's BEST students. Four community members were invited to participate in this study. After a dedicated effort in coordinating these interviews, only two of the four community members participated in telephone interviews. As a result, this data source was used for informational purposes only.

Data Analysis

Triangulation (Jick, 1979) was used to establish construct validity. The data were cross-referenced by six sites and by program stakeholders (e.g., traveling program supervisors, activities consultants, site coordinators, or students.). All interviews and focus groups were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed using Atlasti qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH,

Nassauische Str. 58, D-10717 Berlin Germany). Based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) data were analyzed on three different levels (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

At the first level of analysis, data was categorized according to constructs identified in the social capital literature. Two CRESST researchers developed codes independently and met to compare codes and to achieve consensus on a final code list. Based on the established themes and codes, four CRESST researchers coded sample data until an 80% coding agreement was achieved for each protocol. As a result, coding reliability was established for all protocols and coder agreement ranged from 80% to 93%.

At the second analysis level, cases were compiled to identify emergent themes by group (e.g., by site coordinators, program staff, or students). This involved the use of constant comparison methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in an iterative process.

Finally, at the third level of analysis, a cross-case analysis by site was conducted. The CRESST research team met regularly to conduct discussions, triangulation, and data analyses. Matrices were developed to draw comparisons (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The following section describes the LA's BEST program characteristics in general.

LA's BEST - The Program

LA's BEST, a comprehensive after school program based on education principles fostering resilience and success for at-risk children, was first implemented in the fall of 1988. The program is under the auspices of the Mayor of Los Angeles, the Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), a board of directors, and an advisory board consisting of leaders from business, labor, government, education, and the community.

The program is housed at selected LAUSD elementary schools and is designed for children in kindergarten through fifth grade. The LA's BEST sites are chosen based on certain criteria, such as low academic performance and their location in low-income, high-crime neighborhoods (see Appendix B).

LA's BEST seeks to provide a safe haven for at-risk students in neighborhoods where gang violence, drugs, and other types of anti-social behaviors are common. It provides students with a comprehensive, supervised after school program that includes homework help, enrichment, recreational activities, nutrition, personal skills, and self-esteem development.

Program Offerings

The education and enrichment offerings provided by the program may be categorized as follows:

Cognitive/Academic. This includes study hall, tutoring, academic incentive programs, math and science activities, reading and writing activities, library activities, computer activities, and psychological programs addressing conflict resolution skills.

Recreational. This includes arts and crafts, cooking, games, holiday activities, and sports such as aerobics, karate, and team sports.

Performing and Visual Arts. This includes choir and music, dance, drama/theater, flag/drill team, museum visits, art camps, etc.

Health and Nutrition. This includes study of nutrition, healthy habits, and exercises programs such as tennis, skating, and BEST Fit community health fair.

Community and Cultural. This includes community programs, such as adopt-a-grandparent, and community days; and cultural programs, such as those dedicated to Black history, "Folklorico," and other cultural holiday celebrations.

Parental Involvement Activities

These activities include:

- celebrations, for example: Halloween Kidfest, Community Jam, and Awards Days;
- fundraising, for example: bake sales and book sales;
- programs for children, for example: parents' volunteering for daily activities and field trip supervision;
- programs for parents, for example: parent workshops and parent education speakers; and
- communication/information, for example: open house events, assemblies, and parent-teacher meetings.

In addition to these activities, field trips have been a significant part of the LA's BEST program from 1988. Since the 1990-1991 school year, the program has increasingly emphasized performing arts, including a variety of field trips to performing arts events and visits from artists to LA's BEST sites.

Figure 2 provides the vision, mission, and values statements for LA's BEST, which play a critical role in guiding the LA's BEST organization.

Vision

All children need a safe place to be after school with caring, responsible adults and engaging activities that connect each child to his/her school, family and community.

Mission

The mission of LA's BEST is to provide a safe and supervised after school education, enrichment and recreation program for elementary school children, ages 5 to 12, in the City of Los Angeles.

Values

Nothing we do is as important as the effect it has on a child.

Engaging activities develop values, skills, and relationships. Activities are not seen as ends in themselves, but as vehicles for creating values, building skills, and solidifying peer and adult relationships. An engaging activity is one that holds children's attention, awakens their imagination, and inspires them to want to learn more.

All children have equal rights to be accepted, respected, and valued by others. Children are viewed as individuals to be developed, not problems to be solved.

Children should be involved in decision making and program design. If children get to choose how, when, in what, and with whom to be engaged, they are far more likely to enjoy themselves and behave cooperatively.

When we listen for understanding, everyone learns — children and adults alike. We are constantly able to learn from our children as well as each other. Everyone is a learner.

Figure 2. LA's BEST's Vision, Mission, and Values

A Brief History of LA's BEST

In 1988, when LA's BEST first began, the program was co-managed by the leadership appointments of the part time assignment of an LAUSD staff member plus a part time assignment of a field service staff member in the Office of Mayor Tom Bradley. In addition, the program was also guided by an Education Council consisting of 53 members. Over the years, such arrangements have proven to be non-efficient. It became evident that in order to run an effective program, a full time dedicated staff person was needed to facilitate communication between the Mayor's Office, the School District, and the program. As a result, the Education Council interviewed and hired the current President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of LA's BEST. The LAUSD staff person was put on full time as the program director,

who later retired and was replaced by the current Chief Operations Officer (COO). Eventually, the Education Council also transitioned into the Board of Directors.

Between the years 2000 to 2005, LA's BEST has expanded the program from 24 sites to the current 153 sites (2006). A new infrastructure was needed to accommodate this rapid expansion. Realizing this need, Bain & Company has donated half a million dollar worth of pro bono strategic planning for LA's BEST. Part of the strategic plan included the transition of the Board of Directors into the Governing and Advisory Boards. The Governing Board now has the fiduciary responsibilities and policy authority (above and beyond the LAUSD policy authority) and the Advisory Board has the program authority (above and beyond any LAUSD curriculum standards). The management team was also separated into the corporate office and the operations office. The corporate office generates fundraising events and writes proposals securing grants to support operations programming. It is also responsible for generating language for major after school legislation (both state and federal) meanwhile, producing quarterly newsletters, event programs as needed, and an annual report to keep all parties informed. The operations office manages the site staff and coordinates the day-to-day activities that occur on sites. System-wide decision making is co-managed by corporate leaders in a situational way, primarily involving the corporate and operations offices; for example CEO and COO, or Deputy Administrator and Grant Manager, etc.

Both the corporate and operations offices are led by the president and CEO, whose major responsibilities are to provide strategic leadership and stewardship of LA's BEST, including reporting to the Board of Directors; providing oversight for the design and management of all programs and initiatives; engaging support, and fiscal and financial resources; promoting community and institutional collaboration; and directing media, community and public relations. These duties are performed with the support of the following corporate staff members: Deputy Administrator, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Fund Development, Director of Communications, Director of Community Outreach, After School Arts Program (ASAP) Consultant, BEST Friends Coordinator (Harvard fellow for 1 year), and their associates and assistants.

For the purpose of this study, and to illustrate the share of responsibilities at LA's BEST, an abbreviated organization chart is presented in Figure 3.

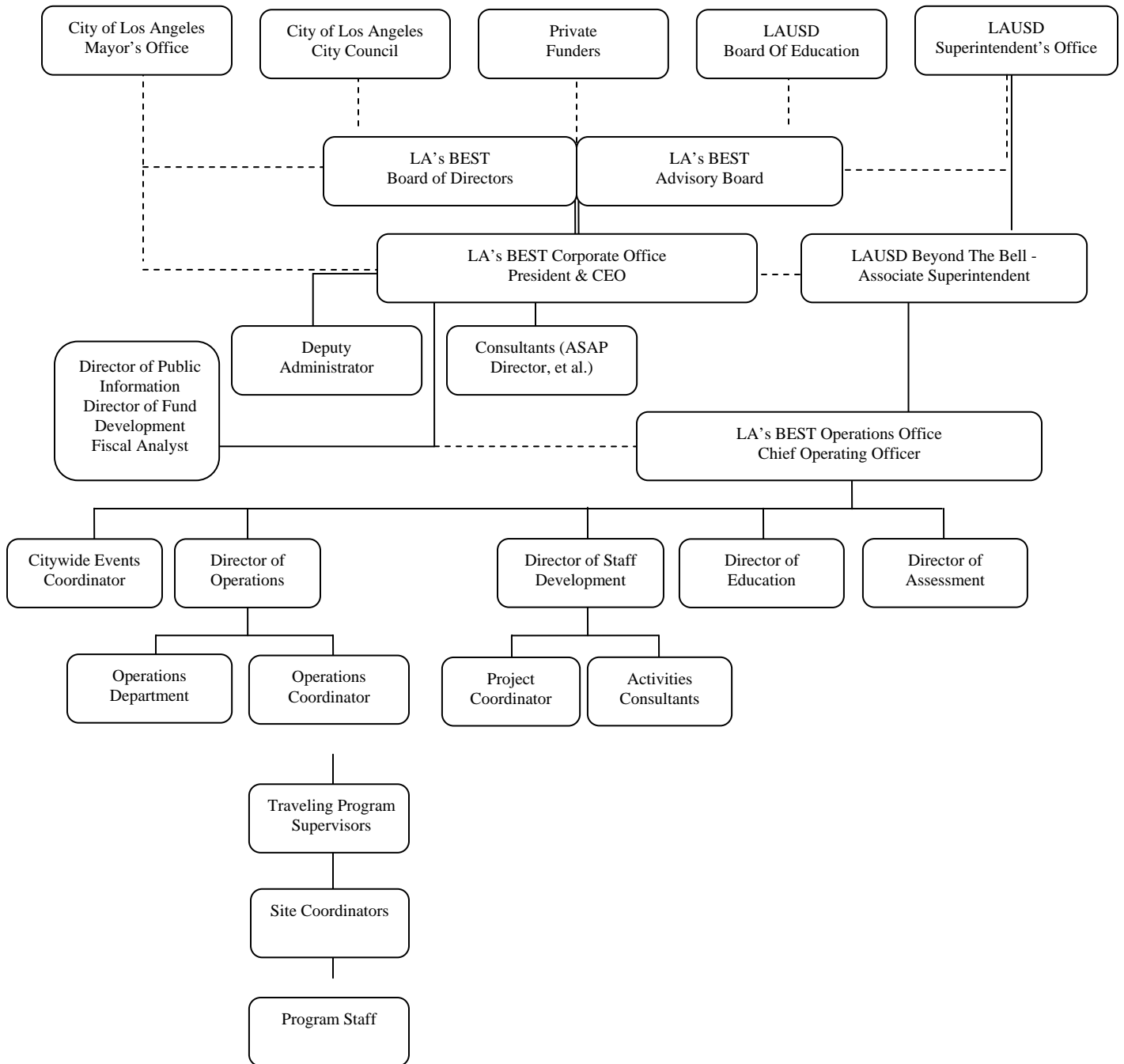


Figure 3. LA's BEST Modified Organization

It is important to define three terms here that will be used in this report: a) site staff, b) traveling staff, and c) leadership staff. Site staff includes the site coordinator and program staff, traveling staff refers to both the traveling program supervisor and

activities consultant, and the leadership staff refers to the traveling staff and the site coordinators. In order to further support participant confidentiality, a measure was taken to classify all traveling program supervisor participants as male; activities consultant participants as female; and site coordinators as female.

Demographics of the Six Sites

Social organizations such as LA's BEST are embedded within cultural values coming from families, schools, and neighborhoods. To place the study under context, neighborhood demographic data on the six LA's BEST sites were summarized.

Significance of LA's BEST School Site Demographics

The population of California is diverse and rapidly changing (Myers, Pitkin, & Park, 2005). This change is ever-present in the demographics of Los Angeles County and is personified in the LA's BEST student population. Undoubtedly, these changes have implications for the delivery of social services, including public education.

An examination of 2000 census socioeconomic data reveal that the six LA's BEST sites are found in neighborhoods that are comprised of: a) racial/ethnic majorities; b) a significant proportion of uneducated, impoverished households; and c) a considerable percentage of Los Angeles's violent crimes. Across all six sites investigated, Hispanics/Latinos constitute well over half of the school's population. In fact, Site 3 has the lowest percentage of Hispanic/Latino students, at 67%. Similarly, English language learners comprise at least half of the student population from each site. Of this population, the majority's primary language is Spanish; while the other percentage of the English learner population is composed of those whose first language is of Asian/Pacific origin. Asian and African American students also comprise a significant proportion of students at Sites 1, 2, and 3; specifically, Asian students represent 26% at Site 1, while African American students represent 25% and 32% of students at Sites 2 and 3.

The saliency of these social context factors on indicators of educational access and progress was illustrated in a study conducted by Young and Smith (1997). Data from "The Condition of Education, 1997" were used to demonstrate how changes in the composition of students (i.e., English language proficiency, family income, parents' education, and family structure) impact the social context of education.

Findings indicated the following: a) a decline in two-parent families, b) an increase in the percentage of children of minority background, c) an increase in the percentage of children who have difficulty speaking English, d) a stagnation of median family income and poverty rate for over the past 25 years, and e) Black and Hispanic children are more likely to live in poverty and to attend schools with a high level of poverty. It was also found that parent education level is a strong predictor of student achievement.

Although the percentage of families living in poverty constitutes 25% of the city's population, 5 of the 6 surrounding communities for each LA's BEST site are home to a greater percentage of those families (greater than or equal to 30%). In fact, the communities surrounding schools at Sites 1 and 3 have 42% and 55% of families living in poverty, respectively. Data on parents' educational attainment follows a similar trend. Although 25% of the City of Los Angeles holds a Bachelor's degree or higher, this percentage is much lower, on the whole, for all six sites investigated (2% - 16% hold Bachelor's degrees or higher). Furthermore, significant percentages of the population within these communities do not have a high school diploma or have less than a 9th-grade education.

The Los Angeles Police Department crime data was also reviewed for each division in which the LA's BEST site was located.¹ Although crime rates have been found to be generally decreased since 2003, two of the six sites, Site 2 and Site 3, reside in a district that had reported a high rate of 1,744 violent crimes (The city of Los Angeles reported a total of 17,761 total for the year-to-date).

Voices from the Field

As evidence to the demographic statistics, program staff and the site coordinators at four of the six sites provided descriptions of impoverished communities that have frequent gang and crime problems (the staff at the remaining two sites provided positive descriptions, saying that their communities are relatively safe). As one program staff described surrounding the site where he works:

I would describe it as a community that needs help. I think that someone needs to come and take a drive around this community to see what is actually going on down here, because there is gang banging. There is drug dealing. There's

¹ This data represents the crime statistics for the first seven months in 2005.

prostitution. There are killings that go on. There is a lot of police activity. It's really not a positive place for children to be.

Other site coordinators described the perspectives of the students and the reality of their everyday life:

If you grew up somewhere else where there is no tagging on the walls, and where there aren't people sleeping on the streets, and the sidewalks are all dirty, and everything else, then to those children that's unacceptable. But to our children, it's life and it's reality to them, so they don't really see anything different. They know that they don't want to be in that position, but it's not uncommon to them.

One site coordinator summarized that LA's BEST is the only positive resource these families have. She stated, "I don't think there is anything positive here. There is no Girls and Boys Center that they can go to. There isn't a gym that they can go to. There is nothing that they can do really. LA's BEST is the only safe place they can go to after school."

To counter these adversities, LA's BEST seeks to provide a safe haven for the at-risk students by mobilizing the intellectual, social, and organizational capitals. First, the resources available to the organization in terms of intellectual and social capitals are described to provide a setting in which to frame the interrelations and leverages of these capitals.

Intellectual and Social Capital at LA's BEST

Intellectual Capital

According to Kelly (2004), the key human forms of intellectual capital in schools include: a) *competency* capital, or the sum of skills and know-how of teachers and administrators; b) *attitude* capital, which comprises motivation, strategic intent and work ethics; and c) *intellectual agility*, which entails the ability of teachers, administrators and students to innovate and change practices when problems arise. The following section describes *competencies* of LA's BEST staff in terms of technical knowledge (defined here as work experience), managerial and human relations skills, and problem-solving skills as demonstrated through *intellectual agility*.

In terms of intellectual capital, competency is considered one of the most important organizational assets. Based on the flow of the LA's BEST organization chart, we first examine competencies of the traveling staff, followed with site coordinators, and the program staff participants.

Competency – Traveling Staff

Work experience. The work experience for the activities consultants ranged from 5 to 12 years. Almost all of the activities consultants reported that they have worked in other capacities within LA's BEST before being promoted to their current position.

The work experience for the traveling program supervisors ranged from 5 to 18 years. Similar to the activities consultants, nearly all traveling program supervisors also have held other positions within LA's BEST.

With their backgrounds, the traveling staff brings a wide range of experiences in working with children. They are also very familiar with the structure of the organization since they all had previous experience working in different capacities at LA's BEST. For example, one site coordinator worked as a playground worker and program staff. Another traveling program supervisor reported a wide range of experience within LA's BEST, having worked as a playground worker, co-coordinator, site coordinator, and activities consultant. They stated that working up through the LA's BEST organization has provided benefits "both professionally and experience-wise."

Additionally, most traveling staff members also reported relevant prior work experience outside of LA's BEST. This included volunteering at an elementary school, working with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and working with other after school programs.

Managerial and human relations, competencies and strategies. An important role of the traveling staff is to help maintain staff unity at each site and to develop local sites' abilities to work together and to solve problems. Traveling staff thus must have strong human relations and conflict resolution skills. These in turn are shared with local sites. Traveling staff shared effective strategies to address staff conflicts and noted that the vast majority of their program staff gets along well. These strategies include encouraging open communication with the site coordinator and program staff; addressing issues formally at site meetings; constant reminders to staff

of the program mission, that the students always come first; and informing staff to leave personal opinions and feelings aside and not to let them interfere with work. It is particularly important for the traveling staff to mentor site coordinators who ultimately need to oversee program staff relationships. For example, one of the traveling staff stated that she advises site coordinators to make informed decisions based on hearing all voices. She explained

I tell them it's okay if you don't get along, but you do need to address it. You need to talk it over. Sit down and you need to listen to both sides of the story and then you need to come to some type of solution.

The traveling staff also described manners in which they support and provide alternative strategies to help program staff manage student behavior problems, such as classroom management training and getting staff to look for the deeper cause of the behavior, and to consider things from the student's perspective. One activities consultant responded that behavior problems are partly attributable to activities that are not engaging. She stated,

I'm trying to tell them, 'look, most of the classroom management issues that you have are going to be because of your activities. If your activities aren't good, or they're not engaging, the students are going to turn out and they're going to find something else to do that might not be productive.'

Competency – Site Coordinators

Work experience. Similar to the traveling staff, the work experience of site coordinators ranged from 5 to 10 years. Further, they were all promoted through the ranks by way of volunteer and/or program staff experience with LA's BEST. Promotions usually occur when staff members demonstrate leadership potential and express a desire to continue working for LA's BEST.

Managerial and human relations, competencies and strategies. Site coordinators are responsible for directing all site programming aspects, with their duties spanning from the day-to-day operations of the program to serving as the bridge between the after school program and the day school, as well as the after school program and LA's BEST central office. Hence, in order for the site coordinator to run a successful program, a range of competencies, such as effective communication and management skills, is necessary.

One of the main responsibilities of the site coordinators is to maintain effective communication and relationships with the host school. Data on the six sites illustrate that most communication systems between site coordinators and principals and teachers are informal face-to-face conversations or notes (to principals) left in mailboxes. All of the site coordinators reported that their discussion usually involved classroom use issues with principals and homework, or behavior issues with teachers. These conversations were not on a regular basis, but rather on an “as-needed” basis.

Site coordinators are also the bridge between parents and the LA’s BEST program. Many site coordinators reported that they communicate with parents on a daily basis. However, these conversations were brief and informal, as most of these conversations occurred when parents pick-up their child(ren). Other topics of communication were on an “as-needed” basis for special events or during LA’s BEST meetings with parents. While site coordinators reported that face-to-face conversations and flyers are the most effective method to communicate with parents, they acknowledged that parent communication and participation was not as strong as they would like it to be. Several reasons were cited for the low participation rate; the most often reported were language barriers and work constraints.

In addition, site coordinators play a key role in setting the site climate and developing a system that would invite open communication and trust. It appeared that most of the site coordinators are quite successful in establishing a productive environment on site. Traveling staff reported that program staff members are “comfortable” to “very comfortable” approaching site coordinators. As one activities consultant stated, “I would say for a lot of sites, the site coordinators have given the vibe that staff can come up and be open and vocal.” There were a few incidents where communication was a concern for program staff. One traveling program supervisor indicated that at one site, there was hesitancy on the part of program staff to be open and direct with the site coordinator, because the site coordinator does not use discretion when sharing information. Another activities consultant reported that the program staff are concerned about their site coordinator’s reaction to what they have to say. The activities consultant explained, “They feel like they are going to be punished for saying how they feel.”

Despite these examples, overall, all of the program staff participants reported that they look to the site coordinator for leadership, and there is a climate on site that is conducive to building relationships and teamwork.

Competency – Program Staff

Work experience. The experience of the program staff participants with LA's BEST ranged from one month to over ten years. Staff at Sites 1, 3, and 6 have a steady work force, with the majority of program staff participants reporting that they have worked with LA's BEST for at least three years. Staff participants at Site 2 include a balance of new and experienced program staff with two new program staff (less than 1 year with LA's BEST) and two veteran program staff (greater than 5 years with LA's BEST). Finally, the majority of program staff participants at Sites 4 and 5 have less than one year experience with the LA's BEST program. One of the site coordinators confirmed that she has experienced high program staff turnover and attributed this to job dissatisfaction. She stated, "They find the job too hard, you know, too many rules, too many policies. It's too much and they get overwhelmed," and added, "I'm trying to make sure my staff doesn't get overwhelmed, so I'll give them a day off every now and then so they don't get overwhelmed." The other site coordinator reported that the high program staff turnover at her site was due to a flurry of program staff graduating at the same time and wanting full time employment after they graduated. She added, "So, it's not good because we can't do our regular activities, and we have to have coaches take two groups or we have to split the groups. The children don't like it."

The prior related work experiences of the program staff include the following: a) the California Cadet program, b) teacher at a church, c) junior and high school coach, d) Youth Services, e) YMCA, f) teacher assistant, and g) a daycare center. At least one program staff participant at Sites 2, 3, 4, and 6 reported that they worked or are currently working as a teacher assistant during the day at the LA's BEST school site.

Relational competencies. To serve as a safe haven and build student resiliency, the most important skill for the staff members is to be able to relate well and provide support to the students. One strategy that staff participants from all six sites use is to adjust their communicative styles with students based on personal knowledge of the students' age, language, behavior, and the type of information that is being communicated. Program staff responded that they rely on personal knowledge of the student and stressed the importance in doing this. As one program staff stated:

Yes, you have to do that especially in this neighborhood. Every child is an individual and different. I've been working for 25 years in the LAUSD, and especially in these schools. Over the years, I've noticed if you scream at a child

who is aggressive then they don't respond. If you are more soft and caring they respond. Most of the children are only used to being screamed at when they're home. They know that's the only way. When you talk softly and gently to them they do respond differently.

Many of the staff participants who are bilingual speak in Spanish to students when it is appropriate. Some staff participants added that they used different tones and manners based on student behavior. For example, one program staff stated

Well I know from the way I handle my kids, if they're difficult students, then I tend to have a louder tone in my voice, or a more aggressive tone and stuff. And if kids are good, then I just talk to them like normal... talk to them like regular people, not just little kids.

Finally, one program staff participant reported that how she speaks to students really depends on the type of information that she is trying to communicate to her students. She added:

It depends on what you're trying to convey. If you're teaching a lesson, you'll reiterate the different steps that you teach. For me for dance, it's very hard to get dance sometimes, so I have to just stay on that eight count or stay on that 16 count for about an hour before they get in there, and once I think they have it, I say, "Two of you get up there and show me what we do." Then I have another two get up there and so on. Then I have them do it all together.

Program staff participants also reported that they take into consideration the students' home life and its affect on behavior. As one program staff reported, "Sometimes when I'm really open with them, they tell me the stuff that's going on at home, and that's when I understand, you know, that's why you're acting like that." Program staff understanding of students' needs is evidenced by their problem-solving strategies with regard to student misbehavior. That is, all program staff members place student misbehavior in context and ask themselves why a student is misbehaving before reacting.

Finally, program staff serve as a bridge between families and school by alleviating language constraints that most LA's BEST families face. Since a majority of the LA's BEST program staff speaks Spanish, this skill is effective in building relationships with families, and is even more important since a majority of the regular school teachers do not speak Spanish (only two out of eight teacher participants indicated that they are able to effectively communicate in Spanish).

Several program staff reported, “The parents’ only form of help would be us.” One Spanish-speaking parent responded, “[My daughter] attends LA’s BEST...mostly for homework assistance, because I can’t teach her in English, even if I take her home directly from school, I can’t read her homework assignment.”

It should be noted here, that while program staff are able to fluently communicate with Spanish-speaking students (which represents over 75% of the entire student population) that communication challenges were present for students and parents whose first language is something other than Spanish or English. For example, a traveling program supervisor at a site with a relatively high Chinese population discussed the difficulty in trying to replace a former program staff member who spoke English and Cantonese. Currently, the children are translating information for their Cantonese-speaking parents.

Intellectual Agility – Problem-solving Skills

Intellectual agility is the ability to apply knowledge across contexts and situations, and to innovate and transform ideas that are critical to the success of the program organization (Kelly, 2004). The demonstration of intellectual agility is an added asset to any organization, but especially important in after school programs where daily, unexpected crisis are common occurrences. Evidences of intellectual agility, as demonstrated in the creative ways that the staff problem-solve everyday challenges, emerged in the data across all six sites. It involved innovative ways that the traveling staff, site coordinators and program staff worked together to transform crisis into learning experiences. The following are some examples.

At one site, students’ behavioral problems were managed in a unique and innovative way. Due to recent challenges in misbehavior of upper grade level students, the site coordinator decided to implement mixed grade level groups to break up the fifth-grade cliques and behavior challenges that came with these cliques. An added benefit in configuring mixed grade level groups was the use of a buddy system, whereby the older students were called upon to help the younger students. As a result, behavioral problems reduced, and students’ relations and collaboration skills were enhanced.

At another site, one of the program staff members brought in local police officers in an effort to address behavior problems and the prevailing lack of respect or regard for police officers by some of the students. The program staff reported that

some of the children have parents who have been arrested by the local police force and these students come to LA's BEST with a negative attitude toward police officers. When queried why they feel this way, the students shared that their parents, the same ones who were arrested for violating a law, have told them that police officers are bad and that they should not trust them. In an effort to address this attitude on the part of students, police officers were invited into the program to share with students the ways in which they keep the community safe, including why they have to arrest people.

The activities consultant at another site shared an effective way in which playground safety is taught to the program staff at her sites. She prompts program staff to look for signs of boredom and ways in which program staff can maintain student engagement. In addition to providing program staff with written tips, she has them play the games that students play, looks for areas that might compromise safety, and then shares ideas for how to adapt the game while considering the safety and developmental needs of the children. She stated:

What I do with that workshop is we play games such as steal the bacon and hop scotch and games like that. I do those games and we teach the staff how to look for the safety issues, how to modify the games based on kinder to fifth grade. Also, how to look for boredom in the kids and decide, 'Do I need to break it smaller, do I need to take a break, do I need to add something to this?' We do that. Like how to make card games fun, how to do the lighting, how to add math into a card game--everything.

These examples indicated that all staff members are quite competent in delivering their job responsibilities. However, competency alone does not guarantee success. Kelly (2004) asserts that the individual must be capable and also motivated to use their competency in manners that add value to the school and students, and this is reflected in attitude.

Attitudes

According to Hamel and Prahalad, (1989), attitude is composed of qualities such as: strategic intent, good work behavior, and a good work ethic. Strategic intent is generally defined as the willingness to persist in the pursuit of the program goals, and the desire and ability to envision a future, convince others to work towards it, and eventually create it.

Strategic intent. One of the primary responsibilities of the traveling staff is to convey the LA's BEST mission to the site staff, and to provide guidance and support for them. To accomplish this effectively, first they would have to "buy-in" to the mission themselves. Interview data revealed that the traveling staff at all six sites believed in the program mission and were passionate in their role of delivering the program's mission. Three traveling staff participants reiterated one of the LA's BEST values statements: "Nothing we do is as important as the effect that it has on a child." These participants mentioned the importance in providing emotional safety, making students feel comfortable, giving students choices and voices, and providing staff with tools to help the students to be successful. Two of the traveling program supervisors emphasized program features such as having good activities, responsible adults, and caring environments. One traveling program supervisor provided a definition that encompassed the vision, mission, and values statements. He stated:

When I go visit their sites and see how everything is run, I make sure that we provide that philosophy of helping out the children. Our mission is to help provide that safe environment that every kid needs, as being taken care of. And every child is comfortable there. It's happy there, and they have a choice.

The traveling staff usually shared the program's mission implicitly through conversations with staff. For example, traveling staff reported that there are frequent reminders to program staff about their role in safety and accountability. Activity consultants also reported that the mission is more formally discussed at staff meetings such as the Leadership Institutes.² During these meetings, program staff reviewed the mission statement and discussed what it meant to them. The traveling program supervisor added: "Then from that mission statement, I have them reword it and create a mission in terms of how we understand it and how they want their sites to support the LA's BEST mission."

With these efforts, the site staff is committed to fulfill the program's mission. Many of the program staff understood the impact and influence that they can play in the lives of their students and ways in which they, as a group, can serve as role models and work together to make a difference for their students. Throughout the six sites, the site coordinators and program staff continuously send encouraging

² Leadership Institute is the cluster leadership staff meetings that the traveling staff and site coordinators of a cluster attend once a month.

messages to students about getting good grades, studying hard, behaving properly, going to college, being a positive community member, and being successful. As one program staff stated,

They [students] want to go to college now. Some of them feel motivated to do that now. They look forward to it, and it feels good when they tell you, 'Oh, I want to be like you, I want to go to college.' It's like a reward. I feel rewarded, like oh I feel so cool, YES!

Keeping students engaged. To achieve these goals, students have to be interested and participating actively in the program activities. Site coordinators recognized the importance in keeping students motivated and engaged, and they strategized to achieve this goal. Positive attitudes and work ethics energized the site coordinators and program staff to strive for excellence. For example, five of the six site coordinators reported that they developed Fun Fridays as part of their weekly schedule to keep students interested. The main rationale for adopting this activity was to motivate students by giving them an opportunity to play and express themselves.

To give students "voice" and "choice", program staff also mentioned that they take into consideration what children want and whether activities will be fun for the students when creating their schedules. One program staff commented, "I teach dance. I have to make it fun. If dance is not fun then they're not going to want to do it. Sometimes things can be playful, but the children actually learn something."

At another site, a strategy called "LA's BEST bucks" is employed. Many of the student participants reported that this is one of their favorite features of the program. LA's BEST bucks are handed out to students for good behavior throughout the week. Students use this play money to purchase items from the LA's BEST store on Fridays. In addition to being a behavior management tool, the site coordinator reported that attendance has improved since implementing this incentive, since students want to attend on Fridays to cash in their LA's BEST bucks for prizes. She stated:

We're doing the things where on Fridays the kids have something to look forward to. We bring out things, like the LA's BEST bookstore, which is their reward for the whole week. They get little reward tickets, and they get to buy things at the end of the week. We also have... sales, fun games, activities. So we want to be known as a fun place. We don't like the kids saying, "Oh, it's boring, I don't want to go to LA's BEST."

Dedication. Dedication enforces good work habits and work ethics; when the leadership staff actively demonstrated devotion to their work, they facilitated the work climate by acting as role models and providing incentives to the program staff. The leadership staff expressed dedication to their work in a myriad of ways. For example, one traveling program supervisor stated

I have a drill team coach at one site who hasn't been coming into work. Competition is May 21st. She's having problems with her car, so I'm going in, and I'm taking the drill team girls and having them practice. I know that sometimes we have to stick to what our job duties are, but I'm not really here for the money. This is my job.

Dedication and enthusiasm such as this influenced the program staff to contribute in a similar fashion at their sites. In fact, program staff at over half of the six sites indicated that they or their coworkers dedicate extra time to the program. For example:

My staff doesn't try to run off and leave everyday in a hurry. They're willing to stay. Sometimes they stay on their own time and they dance with the kids and my volunteers.

In addition to contributing time to the students, program staff from two sites indicated that they sometimes spend their own money on the students. For example, program staff provided candies for students and the traveling program supervisor remarked that he has spent his tax return on this site. He responded: "I find myself, 'What do you guys need? Tell me right now because I have some money and I can spend it. I can help you guys out.' So I run around and I do that with my tax return."

In acknowledging the dedication, efforts, and contributions of the staff members, LA's BEST central office is making a concerted effort to listen to their colleagues at the site level and support as many suggestions as possible. A participant at LA's BEST central office said, "A great part of working with LA's BEST is the flexibility allowed to use one's experiences, creativity and judgment in handling situations." This sentiment echoed Kelly's (2004) definition of intellectual capital, "where people and ideas come together in a deliberate manipulation to create value from the transfer and codification of knowledge."

Meanwhile, LA's BEST is also aware of the importance of fostering the development of the intellectual capitals through building social capital, in terms of relationships, trust, and expectation among and between LA's BEST central office and local sites; between local sites, parents, and communities; between sites and staff; and between staff and students.

Social Capital

Social capital pertains to the relationships between people. Its key factors include a) social relations, b) formal and informal social networks, c) group membership, d) trust, and e) reciprocity. It is defined as the compilation of networks and civic norms that a community or school offers youth. In this study, Putnam's (1995) definition was adapted. He refers to social capital as trust, relationships, and social norms. More specifically, relationships include the network of associations, activities, or relationships that bring people together as a community through expectations and trust. Trust is the psychological element that strengthens the relationships, which in turn impacts expectations that create social norms. Social norms are shared expectations and understandings, as well as informal rules and conventions for behavior (Productivity Commission, 2003). With specific regard to LA's BEST, relationships and networks need to be cultivated to facilitate the connection between sites and the central office, to provide support to the sites, distribute resources, and maintain a liaison with the school.

In building relationships, trust is essential. It is the psychological element that strengthens relationships. For example, site coordinators and program staff need to feel comfortable sharing problems and concerns amongst themselves, and with the traveling staff; and trust that there will be no negative effects. Traveling staff members need to trust site coordinators to carry out their work, while supporting and empowering site coordinators so that they can do an even better job. The following section describes trust and these relationships, as reported by participants at the six study sites.

Trust – Traveling Staff

Most of the traveling staff emphatically remarked that the site coordinators felt comfortable approaching them and trusted their decisions and confidentiality. In fact, most of the traveling staff expressed that they felt trusted and respected by all

program staff, because the staff know that they can count on them to be there when they need support. One traveling program supervisor recalled, “Everything from advice to problems that they’re facing. I’m the person they trust to be there to get them out of trouble.” Others noted that staff members looked up to them for advice and guidance, because they provided positive role modeling, were accessible, and developed trusting relationships with them.

The traveling staff employed several strategies to build and foster trusting relationships with the program staff. They provided the staff with honest feedback; telling program staff that they are appreciated; being enthusiastic and open to new ideas; providing assurance and reminding staff that though problems will always arise, they can always count on them to resolve any problem together; and empowering staff by building the program around what staff request and like. Their support of the site coordinators sometimes extended beyond working hours. A few traveling staff added that site coordinators called them frequently, and aside from work, they also shared personal issues with them. An example of this is, “Every hour of the day they call me, even at night...And they do this both in their professional life and also their personal life. So when they have family problems, they also talk to me about it. They know they can trust me.”

Trust – Site Coordinators

All site coordinators noted there was trust between themselves, the traveling staff, and the rest of the program staff. Half of site coordinators described the environment at LA’s BEST as a “family-like.” Other words used to describe the environment included: non-stressful, comfortable, welcoming, supportive, happy, and trusting. According to one site coordinator, “It’s a real community. We have a sense of family here that’s been around for a long time.” Some examples provided by site coordinators included feeling open and comfortable taking suggestions, ideas, and opinions from other program staff members; and honesty between the site coordinators and program staff. In addition, many site coordinators also described settings where they were comfortable leaving their staff or assistant in charge in their absence.

To enhance program climate, most of the site coordinators made intentional efforts to develop practices that would foster the development of trusting relationships, decision making, and staff empowerment. As one site coordinator expressed, “We created a sense of ownership where the staff feel comfortable with

making the right decisions without coming to me for everything. If it's something that they feel like I need to take care of, if it's something big, then we'd handle it together."

Trust – Program Staff

Similar to site coordinators, program staff from all six sites reported that they trusted each other and were comfortable in sharing ideas with their colleagues. Sometimes these discussions were between two staff members, and in other cases the problem warranted a formal meeting with all staff. As one program staff participant shared:

Like, you feel open and you tell them, oh I have this idea. For example, last Friday we had a nacho sale. That was an idea I had because we're trying to fundraise for the drill team. So I called for a meeting and asked for opinions, I know they will be honest with me, and yeah, they all gave me support so we went ahead and we did the nacho sale.

Program staff from nearly all of the sites also reported that they trusted and discussed problems or concerns with each other. The types of problems varied across sites, but they generally concerned program planning or issues with the day school. As one program staff stated:

No, if we have a problem we're open, and I'll just tell them, you know...you guys trashed the floor. You have to pick it up...because the plant manager here...there will be complaints of anything. So they come to me and I have to talk to them. And I'm very open. I mean, I tell them in a good way, I think. I don't need to be rude at all, and we resolve the problem together without being mad at each other.

In addition, the majority of program staff reported that they felt trusted by the traveling staff and especially by their site coordinator. In concurrence with being trusted by their site coordinator, the program staff expressed trust of their site coordinators as well. Phrases such as "consistent," "supportive," "communicates effectively," "comfortable," and "punctual" were used to describe their site coordinators. One program staff expressed emphatically, "She does everything a site coordinator is suppose to do as far as making sure the we're okay and have everything we need." She added, "We can talk to our [site coordinator]. It's comfortable. I'll call her, and tell her I'm in class and will be late to work. I ask her to

have somebody take over my group until I can get there. She tells me it's taken care of. When I get there, it's really taken care of."

With trusting relationships established, networks can be constructed to facilitate communications and liaisons between and among the sites and central office.

Relationships and Networks

For traveling staff, the ability to collaborate, build relationships, and construct networks between and among the sites and operations office is essential for program success, especially since the restructuring of the program. Recently, LA's BEST has reconfigured sites into clusters of ten, wherein two activities consultants and one traveling program supervisor work together to provide resources and support to their respective sites.³ Traveling staff members describe their primary responsibility as providing support to the site coordinators, staff, and students. One activities consultant described her role as being like a rubber bumper:

I'd describe it as like a rubber [band] because we're pulled in every direction, with the bumper in between the traveling program supervisor and site coordinator. We're also that bumper in between the site coordinator and their staff. We also can be the bumper between the children and the site staff. Were pulled in every direction, but we're their support...

Three specific themes emerged from the data on how the staff works towards building relationships, which are: a) collaboration and team work in setting the site climates, b) building relationships among staff, and c) between staff and students.

Collaboration and teamwork. The new program structure for the traveling staff encouraged teamwork and their related responsibilities facilitated collaboration. One traveling staff member commented, "I think we overlap our responsibilities to help each other out. If I see something that needs addressing, I can point that out...I feel comfortable enough to share my opinions or suggestions and know that the other traveling staff will do the same." Traveling staff also targeted site coordinators with similar skill-sets. That is, traveling staff hired site coordinators with strong leadership capabilities, as well as the ability to work with others, and good communication and relational skills.

³ Prior to the cluster reconfiguration, one activities consultant and traveling program supervisor supported six to seven sites.

Together, the leadership staff strived to cultivate and maintain the site environments to be conducive to collaboration. One traveling program supervisor stated, "It's very welcoming in all the environments, but specifically [at Site 5] I've never had any issues. It's very collaborative." Others reiterated the sense of "family" prevalent at several sites. One traveling staff member responded, "Every Monday, they worked together as a family and at the end of the day, or on a Friday, they'll go out to eat, have dinner. When there's a training they'll all carpool together to go to that training and then afterward have lunch, so it's like a family."

Working together as a team is especially beneficial to the new program staff. One staff participant pointed out that if you are new to the program, it is beneficial to work as a team with a colleague who has more experience. Since the more experienced staff member is well versed on LA's BEST and school policy, this arrangement provides immediate feedback and guidance for a new staff member.

As efforts for team building, the traveling staff served as facilitators and role models. They demonstrated how they collaborate with each other and with the site coordinators. In turn, all site coordinators constantly encourage staff to work together, especially for large projects and special events. According to one site coordinator, her staff members regularly collaborate and support each other. She stated:

The staff members support one another. They back one another up. We've been working on it, so when we're all together as a group, this isn't just my grade because I'm a second grade leader, no. When we're all together as a group, we're all responsible for these children. So it's not, 'That's her group and those are her children running around.' No. Everybody has to work together. We're one another's backbone. We try to be collaborative because some of them work together on their projects or activities that we're going to have in the future.

In essence, a spirit of collaboration and teamwork has been adopted at all six sites, not only at the staff level, but are stressed at the student level as well. Students revealed that a teamwork ethic was enforced by program staff. The program climates and structures related to the students that it was imperative for them to collaborate, especially during the homework session of the program.

However, it is noted that while many of the program staff reported that they collaborate on large projects and special events such as the science fair, drill team competitions and holiday programs, many of the program staff reported that very

little time is provided for collaborating during work hours. As a result, practically all of the program staff reported that they usually collaborate on their own time.

Site Climates. Since a majority of the leadership and program staff stressed the importance of building relationships, most of the participants in this study characterized their sites as “family.” One traveling program supervisor expressed, “Again, I can just speak for the cluster that I’m working with. We have a very respectful environment. We see ourselves as family. We respect each other. We try to be very honest, and I do that with them. I model it myself.”

The sense of a “family” extended to the students as well. As characterized by another site coordinator and activities consultant, both students and program staff at their respective sites were treated as family. The site coordinator stated:

The environment at my site is very family-like... One day the children are happy with each other. Then another day they’re mad, and then they’re back being happy. They really feel comfortable with the staff. They feel so comfortable with the program staff, it’s as if the program staff is a family member. I encourage that.

As a response, several program staff added that it is important to create a program climate that students would feel comfortable coming forward to them in. This is a program priority enforced and demonstrated by the site coordinator and has reinforced their actions. As commented by a program staff:

She does everything a site coordinator is supposed to do, as far as making sure the children are okay. That is her number one priority. Children are what we are here for, children will be our number one priority...

Relationships with students. When asked if they felt that LA’s BEST was taking good care of them, all student participants responded, “Yes.” Specifically, student participants reported that staff help them with “homework and problems,” and protect them by staying abreast of their whereabouts during program hours. Site coordinators reported that students respected program staff. Students were also comfortable approaching program staff for assistance. Over two-thirds of the student participants reported that they would seek the assistance of a program staff member to help resolve a problem.

In fact, the students feel so comfortable with program staff that staff members from several sites remarked that students, especially girls, would often share too

much information with them. For example, one program staff participant stated, "It's interesting sometimes how the small children will come to you and tell you things. 'Why would you tell me that?' They'll tell you things you really don't need to know." In contrast, another program staff participant reported that while boys are comfortable approaching program staff, they are not as forthcoming with information. She stated:

They want to be macho. You have to try to get it out of them. If you know something is wrong, really, really wrong, and they try to hold it back, and you know they want to tell you, then you have to sit there for a while, and eventually they break out and tell you. It's all in the comfort zone.

Program staff from several sites reported on gender preference by students. That is, the girls tended to feel more comfortable communicating with female program staff and the boys tended to feel more comfortable communicating with the male program staff. For example, one male program staff reported:

There is that one occasion, one or two kids I've had. I've had that situation. I deal with fifth graders all the time. Mostly the girls, for some reason, sometimes they're kind of shy to talk to me because I'm a guy. Usually they tend to go with the female staff when there's a problem. That's pretty much what happens. They feel more comfortable talking to the female staff.

Throughout all six sites, program staff members reported that they were comfortable communicating with students and the students stated that they were comfortable coming to the program staff with problems. With relationships strengthened, staff were able to communicate openly and collaborate with each other to set expectations for behaviors and norms within the program.

Expectations and Social Norms

Social norms are shared understandings, expectations, as well as informal rules and conventions for behavior (Productivity Commission, 2003). Some of the academic variables encompassed include teacher and parent expectations, the perception of a caring environment in school, school climate, positive academic influences in the school and community, and specific family and community characteristics.

For this study, several themes for program norms emerged from the data:

Safety. As evidenced in the demographic data, the six study sites were located in high crime areas that have had frequent occurrences of shootings, robberies, and aggravated assaults. As a norm, there was consensus in the expectation that central to the program goal is keeping the students safe.

Student safety as the “number 1” priority, emerged across all six sites. Other than the mandatory professional development on safety issues, many formal measures were taken on site to address the prevailing safety concerns. This included the practice of the “pancake” drill⁴, and taking measures such as changing the LA’s BEST program schedule at one site so that students were not exposed to middle and high school student influences. Although there were variations in strategies implemented, such as the manner by which students were checked out at the end of the day, or the use of a partner system when going to the restroom, the uniform agreement of “all eyes on all students” mode of operation for site staff was consistent across all six sites. As one program staff participant pointed out:

We kind of see all the kids. We're waiting for them to line up and stuff and we're not just looking at our kids. I mean, if we see somebody from like, second grade, misbehaving or something, and that staff is for some reason, turned around and handling another situation, then, you know, we let them know, like, 'head's up,' you know? 'There's something going on.'

Additionally, site coordinators mentioned attending community safety meetings. Program staff at one of the sites also mentioned preparing students for potential dangerous encounters. A program staff participant described:

We tell them that when we tell them to do something that it's for their safety and not ours. We tell them that if push comes to shove it would be us and not them. Then they will take heed to these drills. You know the sound when the child steps on the carton and it's a very loud pop sound. It sounds like a gunshot. You have a lot of children reacting to that. When they hear the sound they know to drop automatically and to put their heads on the ground.

Staff from five of the sites, including four site coordinators and program staff members from two sites, described how the program provides students with a safe

⁴ The pancake drill was defined by a program staff participant as a drill that students practice for when a gunshot is heard. Students are commanded to lay flat on the ground “like a pancake” to lessen the chances of being the victim of a random bullet.

environment: “And especially around here because I’ve been here for 30 years, and the neighborhood has changed a lot. This is a safer place for some of these children now. So if we can provide safety and security that is what I want for the students.”

Students as priority. Another prevailing theme across the six sites was that the priority *is* the student. In other words, students are central to the program philosophy and activities. Earlier discussion about the demonstrated efforts by the traveling staff and site coordinators to communicate the program mission and vision to program staff is showing evidence of success. The program staff strived to prepare a positive LA’s BEST environment for the students so that the students could benefit from the program. As simply stated by one program staff, “Self-esteem and self-motivation, whatever they wish to do, they should know they can do it, without thinking that they can’t do it. No matter how hard their homework is, they can ask for help. We’re here for them. We can help them.”

Promoting student engagement. As such, there is an atmosphere across the LA’s BEST organization that is working towards keeping students focused and engaged. For example, traveling staff and site staff strived to provide a range of activities geared towards enhancing student engagement; activities consultants discussed how they provided ideas and trainings to staff in developing interesting activities; site coordinators frequently met and discussed with program staff the importance of developing motivating activities for students. As a result of these efforts, program staff demonstrated an understanding of the value and a desire for developing engaging activities. In fact, several of the traveling staff, site coordinators and program staff shared the same rationale that is taken from the value statement of LA’s BEST:

If children get to choose how, when, in what and with whom to be engaged, they are far more likely to enjoy themselves and behave cooperatively.

One traveling program supervisor added:

Then we need to remember this is basically what our program was created for—to help these children who need that extra help and need that attention... It’s getting them engaged in the program, finding out what they want, what they want to do that would interest them, making them leaders for the day or giving them more responsibilities so that they feel important.

Encouragement and high expectations. At the same time, there were frequent words of encouragement reminding students that they can do whatever they want with their future goals and stressing the importance of education. Site coordinators and program staff reported that they were sending encouraging messages to students about getting good grades, studying hard, behaving properly, going to college, being a positive community member and being successful. More specifically, program staff reported they would like students to take away a number of experiences from LA's BEST. They want students to be exposed to information or activities that they might not otherwise get from home or school, such as non-academic preparation for high school (e.g., ways to handle peer pressure), information about college, dance, sports, and arts and crafts. Finally, staff participants shared types of advice that they consistently emphasized with their students:

To be better in life, to have a better future, to keep them out of the street. We do our best to motivate them and keep them here.

One thing is I want them to feel like they want to be there, not because they have to be there. I guess that would be one thing. Oh, and also Discipline. Acceptance. Structure.

College. Don't be satisfied just with high school. There's a lot more. Because after high school you go to college... a lot more money from education and you can have a better job.

Things that they wouldn't get outside of school like at home. The students that don't usually do homework at home can sit in here and do it. We have arts and crafts. Even with that, they don't do much in school, but they do it here. A lot of times the parents can't take them to places, and we're able to do that for them.

As indicated in their quotations, program staff strived to prepare a positive program environment for the students. In turn, they expected students to get "better opportunities" for "a better life"; and for students to gain "acceptance" in the society, and to go to "college." The next section looks at LA's BEST organizational capital.

Organizational Capital at LA's BEST

Organizational capital of LA's BEST is defined as the added value to program sites by the corporate and operations offices and those external entities that share a vested interest in LA's BEST students. The three strands of organizational capital

include the following: a) internal organizational capital, b) external organizational capital, and c) innovation and staff development capital.

Internal Organizational Capital

Internal organizational capital is comprised of a program's infrastructure, organizational routines, and processes. Kelly (2004) points out that the infrastructure must be flexible enough to grow organically, but bureaucratic enough to offer security and predictability. For LA's BEST, the corporate office serves as the foundation from which the program is build. The corporate staff developed the vision, mission statement, and values of LA's BEST, which in turn function as a supporting beam to the operations office and the program structure.

Corporate Structure

The motto of the corporate office is "It takes a village to raise a child." Corporate staff developed the vision, mission statement, and values of LA's BEST as they built shared buy-in from operations and field staff. The corporate office is described by the corporate staff as a welcoming place where every staff member has assigned responsibilities, yet all work together as a team, sharing information as needed and providing assistance and support to each other, as needed or requested. Communication is fluid, constant and open, reflecting the values and style of the President and CEO, and individually internalized by staff members. There appeared to be a high level of dedication and collaborations throughout the corporate office. For example, as described by a staff member:

When major events occur—such as a major press conference, fundraiser, or deadline for submission of documents to local, state, regional or Federal agencies, all staff members with responsibility for information to be integrated into the final document work as needed, for as long as it takes, to be sure that their individual components are submitted on a timely basis, and that the overall documents meet the highest standards of quality and comprehensiveness. Sometimes, this involves working late into the evenings, arriving long before 9:00 a.m., emailing and coordinating on weekends, and otherwise doing whatever it takes to 'get the job done' in a manner all of us can be proud of, regardless of our individual responsibilities or titles.

Challenges

As evidenced above, due to the nature of the after school environment, unexpected events and incidences that demand immediate attention happen unannounced and frequently. Therefore clear communication, flexibility, and the ability to accommodate are necessary for all staff members. As a large operation, it is not unusual for the staff members to feel disconnected at times. One staff member mentioned that "...Operations staff work their butts off, but may be losing steam because of too much work..." Understandably all the last minute events can put additional stress on the already heavy work load and affect morale. Several staff members stated that morale can be low at times: "...sometimes operations folk feel less than fully supported by corporate office and that their concerns are not always listened to"; "Relations can be tense at times. I feel sometimes there is this 'us vs. them' attitude and operations sees corporate as not working as hard as they do. I'd say tensions flare up every so often." However, as explained by another staff member, these are "...typical HR issues..." and more importantly, it appeared that the corporate office is taking steps to improve communication and raise morale, as one staff responded, "I see development meetings with both offices as a help because it disseminates information, questions get answered, then everyone is on the same page." Another staff member commented the following:

As a whole, the environment is welcoming and supportive. I feel like I have the autonomy to create and implement my own program. There are times when morale is low, when work is not being recognized, or when co-workers do not work well together. However, I sense that this happens largely due to staffing constraints. I know in the past the relationship has been described to me as distant and the operation office felt disenfranchised. Since I have been at LA's BEST, I see frequent attempts for collaboration and partnership. All of my interactions have been positive.

The typical sentiments of the staff morale can be best summarized by the following remark: "Dreams are as important as frustrations as we share non-negotiable commitments to the work of LA's BEST."

Staff Buy-In

The staff "buy-in" is evidenced by their staying true to the program's vision and mission. One of the consultants for LA's BEST stated, "At bottom, our vision,

mission, and value statement is summarized as 'Nothing is more important than the impact of what we do upon each and every child entrusted to LA's BEST between the close of school and 6 p.m. everyday of the week, year-round, at no cost to either children or parents.'

The buy-in by the operations staff can be seen in the cautious and careful selection of staff for the operations office; in the planning of citywide and individual site activities; in the assurance by operations staff that resources needed by sites are made available quickly; by the continuous review and support which operations provide to site staff at the schools; by the operations staff's on-going review and assessment of the program quality measures for each site; by the analysis of staff development needs and the provision of staff development seminars and other trainings for staff members, etc.

Site staff buy-in is evidenced by the continuous, open and honest self-evaluation by and among staff members and by the staff at each site as a whole, on a regular basis; by reviewing case studies of operational challenges or special needs of individual students or parents and analyzing evaluating methods by which they were addressed by staff; by the extraordinary commitment of the staff to go the "last mile," with or without pay, to assure that students and parents have been served well by LA's BEST, consistent with the program mission.

Another corporate staff member summarized the environment at the corporate office:

The point of view of each staff member is valued and received openly. This is a cohesive group that recognizes the importance of open and honest communication. Due to work and life experience and maturity, some individuals have to push through their personal barriers so that their voices can be heard. All staff opinions are welcomed and encouraged which insures growth of the individual and organization as a whole.

As for the relationships between corporate and operations office:

The cultures are very different, but the values recognized as to what we do for children and families are the priority in both offices. Our biggest challenge is communication with each other...to make sure the other person in the other office has received (heard, opened email, received written documentation) the message and understands the expectations. There has been great improvement over the last 9 years but we are still stretching and growing.

Communication and Collaborations

As stated, in order to function effectively the corporate and operations offices need to communicate efficiently. Data revealed that the corporate office and the operations office maintain close contact with each other as demonstrated by the multiple daily conversations between the CEO and COO. These conversations range from individual personnel cases to major policy decision making, as well as keeping the operations office informed about relevant issues that relate to after school activities nationwide. A description of this was expressed by one corporate staff member:

Well, coming from the corporate office, we talk to them (operations office) about everything. We advise them on all new directives or information that has come down the pike as far as after school is concerned. We have a really close relationship with operations. They advise and guide us, and vice versa, on everything.

This sentiment is echoed by most of the corporate and operations staff. They depend on teamwork in both offices to put ideas into operations and manage donations so that the students can reap the maximum benefits, while promoting community involvement. The following incident illustrates an example of this collaboration in work. When the corporate office gets last minute tickets donated to an outstanding live theatre event, the operations staff acts on it immediately to get parent permission slips signed, buses ordered and staff time assigned. One of the corporate staff said:

What we do, we couldn't do it without the support of the operations office, because they are the one that have the children, they're the one that schedule the buses, they are the ones who have the support staff to set it up. What we do, we're the one that develop the theme and they are the ones that put on the show. Corporate office may have the idea, operations makes it happen. All of the events we do, we have to work together as a team.

Meanwhile, the corporate office also sees itself as a "warm blanket" around the operations office, in providing guidance, advice, assistance, and funding to the operations office that they otherwise might not have. Corporate staff trouble shoots with administrators, personnel, and the community as needed, on behalf of the operations office. In addition, they are always on the look-out for fresh venues and

ideas to share with the operations office. For example, through the corporate office the program sites are connected with human and fiscal resources (e.g., LA Shares⁵, and more than 100 community based organizations⁶). Corporate staff members also originated signature city-wide events and content areas including: Community Jam against Violence⁷; JPL Science Days⁸; Science Fair⁹; Halloween Kid Fest¹⁰; Camperships to Idlewilde Music & Arts Camp¹¹; KidzLit¹²; Literacy Loop¹³; AAF Sports Program Support¹⁴; ASAP¹⁵; BEST fit¹⁶, among others. One corporate staff member put it well:

Yes, we always say that we're like the warm blanket. We're warm and fuzzy. We were very small here, starting out with 4, now we're at 17, and it's more like a family. It's all built on and also with the operations office; our relationships are built on building relationships. And also with the City Hall. It's kind of like who

⁵ LA shares- a non-profit organization collecting supplies and materials from through out the state that are re-cycled to non profit.

⁶ See Appendix C

⁷ Community Jam Against Violence is one of the most popular events on the LA's BEST calendar, brings together children from across the city, and providing them with an outlet to decry the violence that affects their neighborhood. Each year students dance, sing, rap, act and recite original poems in a talent showcase themed at taking a stand against violence.

⁸ JPL Science Days-provides opportunities for LA's BEST students to have fun, engaging in interactive science experiences under a "team-inquiry" model developed under the guidance of NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

⁹ Science Fair- the JPL Science Days culminate with the Citywide Celebrate Science Fair where winning teams are awarded all expense paid trips to a parent-child weekend at U.S. Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama.

¹⁰ Halloween Kid Fest transform LA's BEST sites across the city into the place to be on All Hallows Eve, providing a safe and fun alternative to trick-or-treating in dark neighborhoods-often with support from local business which donate candy and other event supplies.

¹¹ Campership-The Idyllwild Summer Program— after 50 years, this annual tradition continues to offer rare opportunities for creative self-discovery in the arts. Every summer, more than 1,300 children, teens, and adults attend Idyllwild's workshops under the pines, pursuing interests in creative writing, dance, music, theatre, and visual arts—and taught by some of America's finest artists. Weeklong festivals and special programs, including our famed Native American Arts program, bring an added dimension and depth to specific artistic pursuits. The resulting experience is unforgettable, stimulating, and fun.

¹² KidzLit- a research based literacy program developed specifically for use in after school programs by the Developmental Studies Center (Oakland, CA), helps LA's BEST foster a love of reading in its students.

¹³ Literacy Loop-developed by Action Learning systems, is a cross-age, academic after school tutoring program. The program pairs LA's BEST students with high school tutors to increase reading enjoyment and achievement as a complement to the LAUSD reading and writing curriculum of Open Court.

¹⁴ Amateur Athletic Foundation League generously provides ongoing support ensuring that LA's BEST students have the opportunity to participate in seasonal sports leagues including soccer, kickball, flag football, basketball, volley ball, and softball. Students learn lessons about competition, sportsmanship and being part of a team.

¹⁵ After School Arts Program-includes visual art, music, dance, drama and poetry classes, and features artists/educators-in-residence working with LA's BEST students. Each 10 week residency concludes with a special culmination event which brings together students, families and community members to celebrate the talents and accomplishments of the students.

¹⁶ BEST Fit-provides fun and innovative opportunities for LA's BEST students and their families to increase their physical activity, encourages healthy habits including drinking more water and making healthy eating choices, and teaches parents and students to understand and monitor food labels.

you know. If you know enough people, your ball will roll a little faster than the next person.

To develop trust and establish accountability to the program staff, LA's BEST held cluster dinners (when funding permitted) wherein corporate staff invited the entire site staff of all schools within a cluster to come to a free dinner in the neighborhood to talk about "growing" experiences with themselves, parents, or students of LA's BEST. In addition, the corporate office regularly schedules site visits with Board members, prospective and current funders, and legislators to observe and hear the extent to which the staff reflects the vision, mission, and value statements. To maintain close contacts and gain insights from the field, the corporate staff conducts frequent site visits, regularly attends scheduled meetings, and participates in site events (Dr. Suess and other special days). As a result, data revealed that the corporate office, the operations office, and all staff members have demonstrated a genuine buy-in to the program's mission; they felt that they were there for the students' benefit, and to make a difference. One specific staff member stated the relationships eloquently:

The two offices represent the two heads of one organization, separated by recognized responsibilities and functions appropriate to each. We make a point of collaborating, conferencing, advising, and generally sharing information on nearly all matters between the two offices. Our Annual Staff Retreat is a very special engagement for all staff members of the two Offices where priorities, responsibilities, frustrations, successes, problems, wish lists, and other matters affecting the corporate office, on the one hand, and the operations office, on the other, are freely articulated and shared. It is an occasion for value-free, uninhibited communication for every participant, about any area of the organization's operations. Dreams are as important as frustrations as we share non-negotiable commitments to the work of LA's BEST: we value our staff and their diverse opinions in the same way that we value our students and the impact that we seek to have on them short-term and long-term.

Operations in Action

More specifically, at site level, as represented by the studied six sites and supervised by the operations office, there appeared to be a common infrastructure that offered security and predictability to the staff members. Further more, LA's

BEST was also fostering the program's value and providing constancy in the following ways:

Building Bridges

At the site level, the organization has established a chain of command that appears to be functioning effectively and maximizes the competencies of staff members. The traveling staff maintained close and personal contacts with the site coordinators and the operations office, while the site coordinators shared their ideas with the operations office personnel at monthly site coordinator meetings. This meeting also facilitated collaboration and teamwork throughout the organization levels by setting time aside for group reflections and discussion. Further more, clusters and regions also had monthly meetings at which site coordinators shared their ideas and experiences with their peers. In addition, activities consultants also provided monthly reports as a way to share and spread novel ideas throughout the organization.

This system appeared to be functioning effectively. The majority of traveling staff reported that they felt supported by the LA's BEST operations office. Whether expressing concerns or ideas, they felt respected in receiving the freedom to execute their ideas, and support to resolve their concerns.

Although site coordinators were generally not in direct communication with the LA's BEST operations and corporate office, most of them also felt supported by them. As one site coordinator commented, "When we have our site coordinator meetings,¹⁷ if site coordinators speak up, the [operations] office usually takes the comment into consideration and tries their best to make our job a little bit easier." One operations office participant added, "Site leadership is encouraged to take advantage of the LA's BEST 'open-door policy.' This can be done formally at meetings or informally through emails or direct phone calls."

Another activities consultant concluded, "The support of the operations and corporate offices and the trainings that they do. They totally build us up, and they're only a phone call away. They're very supportive."

When funds permitted, LA's BEST held cluster dinners (a total of five were held). The corporate staff invited the entire site staff of all schools within a cluster to

¹⁷ There is a regular monthly site coordinators meeting with operations office personnel.

come to a free dinner in their neighborhood to talk about “growing” experiences with themselves, parents, or students of LA’s BEST. In addition, the corporate office regularly schedules site visits with board members, prospective and current funders, and legislators to observe and hear the extent to which staff reflect the program’s vision, mission, and value statements. To maintain close communications and contact, the corporate staff attends various site coordinator meetings throughout the year.

Mentorship

With such an organizational structure, the expertise of the leadership staff was especially critical. To support the professional development of the staff members, mentorship by the leadership staff played a pivotal role. Realizing this challenge, LA’s BEST was careful in selecting leadership staff, and intentionally employed staff members from current employment who had demonstrated outstanding performances. This strategy provided constancy in fostering loyalty to program policies, while providing experienced staff opportunities to mobilize their knowledge with tested leadership ability and relational skills in order to mentor staff under their supervision. This mentorship and role modeling was particularly beneficial to the “rookie” staff which had less experience in the field and with LA’s BEST.

Similar to the organization strategy, traveling staff also cited purposely hiring from within the program when looking to fill supervisory positions. One traveling staff member commented:

If you hire from within the program then you know all the policies and procedures. You know how to follow them from all your role models that you had in the past. So experience from within the program and then you become supervisor I think is the best way to go about training and mentoring somebody.

Motivation

This system of promotion and hiring from within also served as a source for staff motivation. Another organizational-wide practice for staff motivation was matching talents to tasks. For example:

Program Staff #1 is our sports coach. I hired him because he was really good. He was fresh out of high school. He had a lot of good ideas, and he really likes sports. Program Staff #2, I met her when I first started with LA's BEST. She

worked at another site, and she's really good at communicating with the kids. She can get their attention really quick. Now Program Staff #3, I hired her to do drill team, because she's fresh out of high school, and she still has a lot of new ideas and dance routines that they can do with the kids. Program Staff #4, she and Program Staff #5, they're two of our Spanish speaking originals. They were there since the program started. But they really help us out when it comes down to communicating with the parents. Program Staff #6—she's our girls' sports coach and she's there because she loves sports herself.

Meanwhile, it was also essential for traveling staff to keep the site staff motivated in order to maintain rapport among staff members and positive environments for students. Most methods employed by traveling staff for motivating and supporting staff included encouragement and empowerment through teamwork. As one activities consultant commented, "When we have a situation where the staff are stuck so they aren't motivated, I make it known that it's not their problem...but it's something that we have to work at together." Other ways in which the traveling staff reported that they motivate and/or support site coordinators and program staff included positive feedback, words of assurance and appreciation, and showing that they care through actions such as working alongside the site coordinators and program staff.

In turn, site coordinators reported that they find ways to show their support for program staff. For example, some of the site coordinators reported that they help with lesson plans, assist program staff by finding requested resources, and ask staff members for opinions and suggestions, as well as share ideas to demonstrate support. Another site coordinator motivated her staff through empowerment, "We created a sense of ownership where my program staff feels comfortable with making decisions without coming to me for everything. If it's something that they feel like I need to take care of, if it's something big, then we'd handle it together."

Flexibility

Meanwhile, the corporate office's emphasis on the "open door" policy demonstrated flexibility. This "openness" provided an avenue for site staff to demonstrate creative ideas and innovations that can serve their individual site needs better. For example, one site coordinator mentioned a unique stance on the placement of students with program staff. This site coordinator perceived at her site that there is urgency in building stronger adult-student relationships. Therefore, she designed a

program structure where she has cohorts of students stay with the same program staff members from year to year. She believed this strategy helped to maintain stronger mentoring relationships and helped the staff to fulfill individual student needs better.

Leveraging Internal Organization Capitals

In reviewing the data, several themes emerged as the strengths of LA's BEST internal organizational capitals:

First, the program's philosophy of hiring staff from the community leveraged staff capitals in sharing similar culture, values, and language with the families that the program served. This allowed the site staff to share innate understandings of the students they served.

Secondly, the practice of working through the ranks for each promotion means that there was stability in staffing at the leadership level (i.e., site coordinators, activities consultants, and traveling program supervisors), which served as a foundation for building strong relationships. This working through the ranks (promotion) practice also provided a checkpoint for site staffs' attitude and dedication to the program and students.

Finally, through the "open door" policy, LA's BEST supported intellectual agility that was demonstrated through problem-solving at the site level. In many cases, the intellectual agility demonstrated by the site staff becomes formal procedure at the site level or even taken up throughout the LA's BEST program. This encouragement of staff autonomy allowed flexibility for the program to match site structure with student needs and permitted the program to grow as an organization.

External Organizational Capital

In considering external organizational capital, four specific areas were explored in this study: a) leveraging external resources, b) bonding with parents, c) linkages with school sites, and d) partnering with communities.

Leveraging External Resources

LA's BEST corporate office has created external partnerships with political, economical, and financial organizations both within the city and nationally. Their

networks included other community based organizations, other corporate organizations, the city, and the State. The following are examples of the external resources leveraged in legislation, financial resources, and communication.

Legislation. LA's BEST corporate office worked with Sacramento Start¹⁸ and San Diego Six to Six¹⁹ to create the first After School State Legislation of its kind (e.g., getting rid of 1:14 ratio, credential staff, etc.; making it less regulatory and more relational and connecting to families and students). To provide additional leverage for the program, the CEO and President of LA's BEST has been and is involved in all major proposed legislation affecting after school programs. For example, LA's BEST President and CEO worked nationally with many stakeholders²⁰ to move federal 21st Century programming from 1 million dollar appropriation to 1 billion dollar appropriation in 5 years. As another example, a lobbyist is hired by LA's BEST to work on important State legislations such as the appointment of a State Advisory Board on after school²¹ to ensure that there is accountability for the State Department in implementing after school dollars. In addition, LA's BEST president and CEO also worked with Governor Schwarzenegger to draft Proposition 49, which was passed by voters, and worked with legislation to draft bills to implement Proposition 49 so that large urban areas with multiple sunseting federal 21st Century grants would be grandfathered into Proposition 49. More currently, LA's BEST president and CEO is working with the office of Senator Feinstein on a 200 million dollar national bill to replicate LA's BEST in major U.S. cities.

More locally, LA's BEST corporate office, by nature of being in the Office of the Mayor, has been afforded the opportunity to involve the Mayor in many LA's BEST activities as well as identifying LA's BEST students to perform at many civic events at the request of current and prior mayors. One corporate staff member also described LA's BEST as having a very good relationship with every councilman in all council districts that LA's BEST is serving; more specifically, this staff member stated: "So...let's say if we need to have a problem solved or if they (councilmen) need

18 Sacramento START is a public/private collaboration that is working to build the capacity of children to succeed academically and socially while reconnecting families and neighborhoods with schools.

19 San Diego's "6 to 6" Program was the third phase of the Mayor's Safe Schools Initiative. Funded by the City of San Diego and with various state and federal grants, San Diego's "6 to 6" Extended School Day Program serves all public elementary and middle school sites within the city limits and some private schools.

20 As part of the numerous national task forces on which she sat

21 Of which President and CEO is also an appointed member

information from us, if they need some children, or if they want to know something about after school, etc., they know they can get that from us..." In addition, the CEO of LA's BEST is very active in promoting public policies for after school programs; for example, LA's BEST corporate office has created LA PASE (a subsidiary of New York PASE) to network providers of all after school programs in Los Angeles. Another corporate staff member proudly stated, "With support as needed from staff, our President and CEO is the most revered and leading spoke-person locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally in all areas of existing and proposed legislation affecting after school programs."

Financial networks. Since a lot of LA's BEST funding comes from private donations, LA's BEST is active in forming ties with different corporate structures. In order to maximize funding opportunities, a Fund Development unit is housed in the corporate office to research for potential donors and write corporate, foundation, and government grant proposals. This unit also conducts special events that focus on Board and BEST Friends.²² With such effort, in-kind contributions are substantial, averaging 3 million dollars per year.

One corporate staff member mentioned:

When we look for funding...we have to go out to foundations and contact foundations and different corporations in order for them to fund the program. Corporations like to fund different types of things, some may be into science, some may be into health, some may be into sports, and we connect them to fund our various programs and activities...

A couple examples of the result of such efforts are: a) LA's BEST Corporate office has set up a relationship with LA SHARES (a non-profit organization collecting supplies and materials from through out the state that are re-cycled to non-profit organizations) so that each of the 153 LA's BEST sites has designated shopping days with them; b) the corporate office also negotiates community outreach such that LA's BEST has first refusal for extra tickets to various cultural venues throughout the city.

Communication to the public. As an organization, LA's BEST has made specific efforts to establish relationships with multiple media connections in order to introduce the LA's BEST program and communicate its mission, goal, and

²² BEST Friends- Volunteer network of like-minded young professionals who have a shared commitment to the children of LA's BEST and to ensuring the program's existence for future generations through innovative fundraising efforts.

effectiveness to the public. The different types of media outlets that they regularly correspond with include television, radio, and the local press. Other strategic efforts they employed regularly to communicate include: a) internet (web site), b) quarterly newsletters, c) annual reports, d) Public service announcement²³, e) city meetings, f) press releases, and g) other informal communication styles such as pictures, participations in community events, shared calendars, and word of mouth.

Bonding with Parents

Levine and Lezotte (1990) suggest parent involvement is a prerequisite to educational success. In after school settings, parent involvement can play a key role as the liaison between school and home. Realizing this importance, the operations office collaborates with individual sites to promote parent involvement.

Data from this study revealed that the majority of parents rated their level of participation with LA's BEST from moderate to low. Similarly, site coordinators and program staff participants also agreed that LA's BEST parent involvement was low. One site coordinator stated, "Parent participation is so-so. We have events and if they can make it, they do come out." One activities consultant added:

You see how heartbreaking it is when a kid gets up all the courage to go there [LA's BEST activity or event] and do what he or she is going to do, and then the parent isn't there. They feel like, 'What did I do this for? What is the point? They're not here. They don't care.' It's heartbreaking.

Across all six sites, parent participants cited work conflicts as the main reason for limiting their involvement at LA's BEST activities. Another area that impacted parent involvement and communication was language. Some of the Spanish-speaking parent participants and all of the Asian-speaking parent participants stated that their limited LA's BEST involvement was "because of language." Communication with Asian parents is particularly challenging, as reported by one site coordinator; when you do not have staff who can speak the Asian languages of the students, the Asian students have to serve as the parents' interpreters.

²³ A public service announcement (PSA) or community service announcement (CSA) is a non-commercial advertisement, typically on radio or television, broadcast for the public good.

Even though parent participation is low, LA's BEST recognized the value in parent support and were intentional in providing opportunities and encouragement for parents to be involved. One site coordinator mentioned that they have a parent volunteer program where parents can come in and introduce a hobby to the students. Another site coordinator noted that they hold parent meetings every other month to keep the parents informed and involved. Spanish translators were often provided during parent gatherings and meetings.

Parents were most likely to participate by attending special events and performances. Other examples of parent involvement included volunteering for fieldtrips, donating goods, and approaching the site coordinator to discuss LA's BEST-related issues. To place the issue of parent involvement into context, one site coordinator reasoned, "Overall, parents care about their children's education, but they differ in how often homework or behavior is discussed with their children, because of their work demands." Additionally, the majority of parent participants responded that LA's BEST helped them become more involved with their children's education by bridging the language barrier between home and school; and all parents responded that though they don't have time to be involved in the program, they often talk with their child about what happens at school and LA's BEST.

Linkage with School Sites

Classroom access and usage was the most cited challenge by the six sites under study. One site coordinator noted, "Yeah, it's a little bit difficult to get classroom spaces around here." Thus, the value in building a relationship with the school site principal was essential and could result in fewer classroom usage issues. There was some evidence that site coordinators who had more frequent communication with the principal and teachers, in general, perceived teacher concerns about homework and classroom use as less of a problem or roadblock than site coordinators who reported that communication with the principal and school personnel occurred only on an "as-needed" basis.

In general, most of the principals described a cooperative working relationship with LA's BEST, as well as their support for the program. Only one principal expressed poor communication with the LA's BEST site staff, which she hoped to improve. Additionally, practically all of the principals recommended LA's BEST to parents, because as one principal stated, "It is a great program for students and it is in

a safe learning environment.” According to one of the principals, “LA’s BEST is an extension and is part of our learning community.”

Principals cited a number of school site resources that were provided to LA’s BEST students at their schools. These resources included donations from the community (e.g., books, gift certificates, movie tickets, money), volunteers (e.g., parents, college students and staff/faculty, local middle and high school students), and educational partnerships (e.g., NAUW, state and city politicians, and local churches).

Traveling staff members were keen on establishing positive relationships with schools and echoed that the relationship between schools and LA’s BEST should be one in which there is open communication, collaboration and support. One traveling staff added, “From the principal to our janitor, our teachers, our office manager, we have to work as a team.” Traveling staff provided some examples of the efforts that they have made at various sites to construct networks. For instance, one traveling staff participant reported that he placed himself on the teacher’s meeting agenda in an effort to keep teachers abreast of LA’s BEST activities. Other efforts included extending an invitation to teachers and principals to attend special events, checking in with principals and teachers, and staying in constant communication with teachers regarding classroom usage and homework. The traveling staff also encouraged site coordinators to be proactive in fostering better relationships with principals and teachers.

As an organization, LA’s BEST facilitated the site–school relationships by making their presence known in the district, and had representatives staffed in the district to keep the district informed of the program activities and functioning. To ensure principals’ buy-in and cooperation from the school staff, the principals’ support was recruited into the program from the very start. A procedure was set up so that the principals had to petition for the program in order for LA’s BEST to be placed at their school site. In addition, there were LA’s BEST central office staff members that were hired by the district to facilitate this communication and to intervene and facilitate when necessary, to ensure smooth program operations and relations with school.

Partnering with Communities

LA's BEST shares many resources with the LAUSD, including staff, funds, school sites, and supplies. In addition, the two entities also share political support, community networks, media contacts, and information. These networks ensure that elements of the program functioning such as: a) staffing, b) funding, c) parent involvement, d) community engagement, and e) visibility can work together coherently within an infrastructure that can address both short- and long-term needs. One of the corporate staff member expressed, "...sharing a common purpose with like-minded people who share the commitment to the children of Los Angeles/LA's BEST is the success of this organization." Another consultant added "LA's BEST is networked throughout the community at a level that can only be described as extraordinary."

In addition to LAUSD, LA's BEST has relationships with 100 community organizations (see notes in Appendix C), ranging from arts programs to parent groups. One specific example is the ASAP program, wherein a corporate consultant is hired especially for this project to raise funds and develop financial resources to support the annual operation of this project, including: a) external evaluation of this project, b) support for all performances such as the ASAP 68th Street School Choir, and c) to recruit potential artists to conduct ASAP residences in Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Theatre Arts (artists in the field hired to teach the 10 week residences at LA's BEST). This effort resulted in the establishment of a broad network with all the major art institutions throughout the Greater Los Angeles area (e.g. Los Angeles County Museum of Art [LACMA], Museum of Contemporary Art [MOCA], the Music Center, Angels Gate Cultural Center, Performing for Los Angeles Youth, Cultura Arts Space, the Armory Center for the Arts, Arts Corp LA, Sound Art, the Young Musicians Foundation, Debbie Allen Dance Academy, among others).

To promote a high leverage of networking with communities, LA's BEST CEO and President also participated in the After School Alliance and various other local, regional, and national associations that focus on the welfare, well-being, and funding opportunities to improve and expand the availability of after school programs for inner city children across the United States, and especially in California and Los Angeles.

At the site level, most site coordinators described interacting with the community on an as-needed basis. Community interaction was usually limited to

securing donations of goods such as supplies and food for activities. However, there were a few exceptional incidents where the sites and the community leveraged resources together for students and community benefits. At one site the coordinator reported that she took her students into the community to interact with local businesses in an effort to give students and local business owners an opportunity to meet each other. Another site coordinator described how her outreach and volunteer work in the community allowed her to establish networks, which facilitated the leveraging of more resources for LA's BEST. She added that the school is now a focal point for the community and that the community is much closer.

Just within the normal school day since I've been working here, I see that it's kind of come together. I know when I first started here 15 years ago it was totally segregated. I think now that it's totally come together. I think it's because of the school and LA's BEST. There is so much going on throughout the morning and the evening that it's like a safe haven for everybody to come and be together to enjoy all of the activities and things that the school has for the community. I think the school is a focal point of the community. It's brought everybody together because all of their children come here.

Additionally, over three-fourths of the parents stated that their community provides some type of support to families. However, for some of these parents their affirmative response was tentatively stated. That is, when asked if the community provides support to families such as health clinics or adult education classes, these parents provided responses such as, "Yes, I believe they do somewhere," "Yes, I believe so," or "Yes, I think so." Of the parents who were certain of the types of community services available, they provided examples such as art, computer, dance, fitness, math, language, and parenting classes. The most common support cited by parents was English as a Second Language classes. In addition to education related services, health care was also mentioned as a form of support provided by the community.

Innovation and Staff Development

Innovation and staff development capital is the intangible component that has the potential to generate value in the future, but does not yet have an impact (Kelly, 2004). This section will look at current professional development and suggestions for future professional development.

First of all, at the organization level, several positions were recently created as an intentional effort to keep abreast of innovations in the field, and to gather knowledge, support, and expertise from across organizational and geographic boundaries. These positions included: a) Director of Evaluation, b) Citywide Events Coordinator, c) Director of Staff Development, and d) Director of Education. For example, the Director of Evaluation connects program evidences with program practices; the Citywide Events Coordinator establishes liaison with other Activity Agencies and brings in additional exposures and resources; the Director of Education and Director of Staff Development focus on building relationships and networks among national leaders in the field, share knowledge and experiences with other organizations, and bring in additional training opportunities for the LA's BEST staff. These relationships also provide opportunities to combine resources across organizations. Internally, knowledge and information are shared as the directors participate in leadership level conversations with regard to curricula, trainings, and materials that are useful to staff in making informed decisions.

At the site level, evidences showed that, while LA's BEST program provides a wide range of professional development opportunities to their staff members, some clarification and clear communication to the staff members about the types of services provided was needed. Inconsistencies emerged in the field data when the staff discussed mandatory versus voluntary professional development; frequency and timeliness of what was deemed mandatory professional development, and the different terminology used when referencing to professional development. For example, the majority of traveling program staff and activities consultants cited Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)/First Aid/Emergency Procedures, classroom management, and an LA's BEST orientation as mandatory training. Some of the traveling program staff and activities consultants also cited activity and enrichment workshops such as Kids Lit, science, dance, and theatre as mandatory training, but other traveling program staff and activities consultants reported that these activity and enrichment workshops were optional. As one traveling program staff member tried to clarify, the confusion could be due to the matter of choice. While some training was mandatory, the site coordinator or a program staff member could decide whether to participate. Further probing with one of the LA's BEST central office participants clarified the mandatory versus optional training, and reported that mandatory training included the following list:

- New Staff Orientation (once monthly – ALL new LA's BEST Staff)

- Classroom Management (monthly often multiple times within a given month – primarily site staff)
- First Aid/CPR (twice monthly – traveling & site staff)
- Homework (monthly – site staff)
- Youth Development (periodically throughout the year – traveling staff & site coordinators)
- Inclusion Training (periodically – site coordinators)

He added that optional training includes the following list:

- Curriculum based programs (e.g., AfterSchool KidzLit & AfterSchool KidzMath; as needed – site staff)
- Kinder and... series (e.g., Kinder & Literacy) (Kindergarten Staff)
- Words Can Heal (periodically – site staff)
- Time Management (periodically – traveling staff & site coordinators)
- Heart of Values – Understanding the LA's BEST Philosophy (periodically – site staff)
- Conflict Resolution (periodically – traveling & site staff)

According to the traveling program staff and activities consultants, the frequency of professional development was dependent on the type of training and interest of program staff members, which ranged from multiple times a week to once a year. One of the activities consultants illustrated this point in stating, "There's ongoing training. What happens now is that anyone who hosts a training will have to open it up to all of LA's BEST. So if there's a high demand, we'll have about two or three sessions depending on the response from the site."

Unlike program staff participants, site coordinator, traveling program staff, and activities consultant, participants across the six sites reported that they did not receive formal training for their current positions, but perfected their skills through shadowing. A few of these participants noted that they have subsequently received

training after assuming their new role in order to oversee their program site(s) more effectively.

As a matter of interest for the LA's BEST program, the study requested the participants to state their desired future professional development areas/topics. In particular, the site coordinators reported that they would especially like classroom/behavior management training. Additional topics for professional development that were mentioned included: a) budgeting, b) dealing with/supporting staff, c) what to do/not to do as traveling program staff/AC, d) establishing better relationships with schools, e) developing and motivating staff, f) assisting kids/staff that need extra help, g) classroom/behavior management training/discipline action, and h) getting to know schools better.

When asked about future professional development options, an LA's BEST central office participant reported that the following was being developed: "An internal youth development seminar, a Kindergarten series; understanding children—A closer look at child development; and making transitions work."

The following section synthesizes and discusses the leverages of intellectual, social, and organizational capital under the contextual environments at the six studied sites. Maslow's (1954) model on the Hierarchy of Needs provided theoretical and philosophical backgrounds for the synthesis of data provided by participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

In 1954, Maslow developed a Hierarchy of Needs model that classified human needs into five general levels. He asserted that there was a hierarchy of these five levels of needs in human development. The higher needs, at the top of the hierarchy, such as self-actualization were most important for the development of personality. However, these higher needs could not be satisfied until the lower needs, such as physiological needs, and safety needs were satisfied. If two needs were in conflict, the lower need would dominate. According to Maslow, the environment provides an opportunity for the satisfaction of the needs, and if the environment does not allow the needs to be satisfied, appropriate development will not occur. In other words, if the students are concerned with basic survival and safety needs, then it is difficult for them to achieve any other higher goals. Table 3 lists Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs.

Table 3

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Higher Needs	5. Self-actualization needs—growth through the realization of one's potential and capacities; the need for comprehension and insight.
	4. Esteem needs—need to achieve, to gain approval and recognition
	3. Needs for belonging and love—need for love, affection, security, social acceptance; need for identity.
	2. Safety needs—need for security and protection from pain, fear, anxiety, and disorganization; need for sheltering, dependency, order, lawfulness, and rules of behavior.
Lower Needs	1. Physiological need—hunger, thirst, sexuality, etc. Homeostatic and organism needs.

In interpreting data from this study, Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs provides a theoretical background in which we can place LA's BEST students' and

families' life experiences into perspective. The six sites in this study are located in low to middle lower-income communities, with four of the six sites near housing projects. Communities are described as very needy and having a lot of gang influence. Traveling staff used words like "tough," "high-risk," "poverty-stricken," and "heavily infested" (with gang activity) to describe the neighborhoods. The following is a quote illustrating similar sentiments:

[The site] is right across the street from a high school. They've had to literally change schedules so that the high school and our elementary school kids don't intermingle at the time of dismissal. We used to get out at the same time. Our kids were facing whatever fights or gang problems from the high school would come and spill over to our school. Literally the schedule had to be changed.

Site staff reported limited trust among the students, attributing this mostly to the environment in which they are being raised. One site staff stated:

I have a child and it turns out the mother is a prostitute right here on the street. So basically the other children know she's a prostitute. So behavior-wise, the children know, and they tease him, and that makes him angry. So half of the time, he's dealing with that situation.

Another site staff added, "I remember the time when it was very dangerous in the area with a lot of shooting. All the children knew exactly what happened that night. "They shoot here and they shoot here. They would tell us all the information regarding what had happened." According to one activities consultant, LA's BEST seems to be the students' only refuge. She stated, "The program is there to keep them safe, and so a lot of times LA's BEST is the only place that they do feel safe."

Evident from the quotations and in accordance with Maslow's (1954) theory, the students in these neighborhoods are struggling with safety, sense of belonging, and esteem needs. They need to fulfill these basic needs before they can move forward to self-actualization. Thus, in terms of social capital, LA's BEST becomes the source that can provide some stability to the families and communities in these neighborhoods. Through leveraging of organizational capital, the program captures available resources (intellectual and social), gathers external support and funding from government and private agencies, and provides for the basic needs of safety, belonging and love, as well as the esteem needs of the students. This is achieved by providing students with a safe place to go after school, free of gang disturbances and

other negative influences; by offering supportive relationships as part of the program's mission and vision; and by providing different activities to enhance students' development (e.g., enhancement of self-concepts through activities in conflict resolution skills, building self-esteem by capturing student talents in arts activities and drill teams, etc.). In helping the students to fulfill their basic needs, the program offers a chance for students to be able to move forward and achieve higher self-actualization (in terms of citizenship, education, academic achievement). Therefore, LA's BEST can serve as a bridge for students in these neighborhoods to eventually approach self fulfillment. In the following section, a closer inspection describes the procedures that LA's BEST has been leveraging the resources with.

Leveraging Resources to Serve Students

As an organization, one strategy that LA's BEST used to leverage resources was by recruiting staff from the community. The data from the six sites indicated that the majority of LA's BEST site staff members were hired from the community or from a "similar" community. Some of the benefits found in hiring site staff from the community included a shared language, culture, and values. These are considered as an organization's staff capitals.

Mobilizing staff capitals. Since the majority of program staff was recruited from the community, many of them possessed the language skills (i.e., Spanish) to communicate effectively with the students and parents. This was especially important since the majority of teachers from these schools reported that they were not bilingual and experienced many challenges in communicating with parents (only two of the eight teacher participants reported that they were bilingual and able to communicate effectively with students and parents).

Another benefit in hiring staff from the local or a similar community was that many program staff were able to articulate a clear understanding of the culture and values that, in many cases, was based on personal experience or knowledge of the area surrounding the school site. For example, practically all of the program staff reported that their students' home and community environments lacked resources and that they had made efforts to provide students with opportunities that they might otherwise not receive. This included encouraging students to participate in some of LA's BEST enrichment activities such as sports, dance, and music. As one program staff member stated, "I think a lot of our students get what they can't get from their home environment. They get it here."

In addition, with life circumstances similar to those of the students and having the experience of overcoming the odds, these staff members can bring a personal perspective to the students' everyday life experiences, relate to the students at a personal level, and serve as role models. As one program staff stated:

I tell them, "Well, I know my parents don't have money, but there is assistance available for us. It's called financial aid. You guys come from [the inner city]...[you are] inner city kids. There's money for you guys." I work two jobs and I am a full-time student. I'm here for them (LA's BEST students) and they understand that part. I am here to help them and be here for them. I explained to them what I have accomplished, and by going to school what I'm going to accomplish, and they get all happy. That motivates them.

Connecting with families. Perhaps as a result of recruiting from the community for staff capital, the student and staff participants in this study both reported that students were comfortable communicating with staff members, and that there was a good rapport between them. Many students cited the LA's BEST staff as one of the positive features of the program. This was particularly important since the majority of LA's BEST site staff reported that they were bilingual and were able to communicate in the language of their students' families. In contrast, the majority of teacher participants reported that they only spoke English and had to resort to other options for communicating with parents and students who did not speak English. In fact, teachers at one site reported that they sometimes relied on LA's BEST site staff to pass on messages to families. In this sense, LA's BEST served as a leverage to improve students' attitudes towards school by linking the day and after school experiences for the students.

Additionally, the balance gained in hiring both male and female staff also served the program purposes well. The results from the student focus groups indicated that, in general, girls preferred to approach female staff members, and boys would tend to feel more comfortable communicating with male staff members and looked up to male staff members as role models.

There was also evidence that staff attempted to fill in for student and family needs. For example, at Site 1, program staff stated that many students were English Language Learners and parents did not understand English well. Thus the staff responded to language needs by translating for students to assist them in completing their homework assignments. At times, program staff also translated school

documents for parents. Non-English speaking parents appreciated this assistance; several parents mentioned sending their children to LA's BEST for reasons similar to this one "...attends LA's BEST...mostly for homework assistance, because I can't teach her in English. ...I can't read her homework assignment..." While LA's BEST has reached out to the majority of the families, to those who are Spanish-speaking, the staff was less able to assist the less visible groups such as Armenian, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The interview data suggested these parents would welcome representation of their voices both in school and in the LA's BEST program.

Supporting staff through organizational practices. However, just tapping the neighborhood for staff members would not be sufficient, if organizational strategies were not in place to motivate them. As a motivational strategy, and also as a demonstration of the program's ability to recognize talent and leverage staff capitals to maximize the program's mission and benefits, staff members who demonstrated exceptional performance were promoted. The following is an example of one staff member's promotion to the site coordinator position:

I've been with LA's BEST over three years. This is my third site. At the first site, I was staff. I was the second in charge under the coordinator. I handled all of the paperwork, minor problems that went on at the site when the site coordinator was away. Then at the other site, I was also a regular staff but I was the active site coordinator when she would be at meetings or off-campus. Now I am the site coordinator of this site.

This practice of working through the ranks for each promotion ensures that there is stability in staffing at the leadership level (i.e., site coordinators, activities consultants, and traveling program supervisors), which in turn serves as a foundation for building strong relationships. More importantly, this working through the ranks (promotion) practice also provides a checkpoint for site staff members' attitudes and dedication to the program and students.

In addition, as Senge (1990) has indicated, sharing the mission and vision is an important organizational asset and effective motivation strategy. The corporate and operations offices worked together to develop the vision, mission statement, and values of LA's BEST as they developed shared buy-in from field staff. As stated by a corporate office staff member: "At bottom, our vision, mission, and value statement is summarized as 'Nothing is more important than the impact of what we do upon each and every child entrusted to LA's BEST between the close of school and 6 p.m.,

everyday of the week, year-round, at no cost to either children or parents.'" Site staff buy-in to the program mission is evidenced by the continuous, open and honest self-evaluation on a regular basis by and among staff members; by reviewing case studies of operational challenges or special needs of individual students or parents; by the extraordinary commitment of the staff to go the "last mile," with or without pay; to assure that, consistent with the program mission, students and parents have been served well by LA's BEST and, specifically, in the careful selection of the site staff members. For example, in hiring procedures, even though the traveling program supervisors have targeted varying skills in their selection of program staff (e.g., leadership skills and responsibility), more importantly, they have focused on maximizing the highest leverage of personality alignment to the program mission. One traveling program supervisor reported that caring for children was central to the positions, while another focused on personality and stated, "I can teach skills, but I cannot teach personality..." The voices of the staff members clearly expressed how they share the mission and vision of LA's BEST and that "The child always comes first." The following is an exemplary quote from the site coordinator of Site 1 illustrating this ideal:

Then we need to remember this is basically what our program was created for—to help these children who need that extra help and need that attention... It's getting them engaged in the program, finding out what they want, what they want to do that would interest them, making them leaders for the day or giving them more responsibilities so that they feel important...

Armed with the internal motivation of "making a difference," the staff was further motivated by tailoring tasks to their interest. Indeed, several activities consultants and site coordinators described hiring individuals based on personalities and interest in the subject they would be teaching. One schoolteacher mentioned how she appreciated this strategy:

What I do like about LA's BEST and the way the staff is placed with their talent or their skills, for instance, if they know dance, they have the dance teacher teach that, and if they're high in science, they teach that. I've seen that here and at other LA's BEST sites. I see what's strong for each school. The dance group is high because the staff member leading it is her passion. They've won so many awards with the LA's BEST competition because it's her passion. The way she teaches it, she's teaching 30 students, and all of them are listening, and all of them are dancing. I think that's very cool. Even the boys are dancing. Dance and

boys don't go together, but they're doing it. There are a lot of fifth grade boys and first grade boys dancing. It's beautiful.

Finally, program staff demonstrated that they were personally motivated to work for and thoroughly enjoy the LA's BEST program. One site coordinator provided an example:

Christmas last year...the last day of school there wasn't that many kids. There wasn't that many kids, and I had to let go of half of my staff, because you have to keep it a 20-to-1 ratio, right? And I asked everybody, "Who wants to go home?" because I had to send about five people home and none of my staff wanted to leave. They all wanted to stay here because they wanted to see the kids for the last day before we went on break. They wanted to stay here. That's the type of attitude that my staff has. And they love coming to work.

Staff stability. To set up positive working environments, the organization emphasizes "an open door policy." Communication is set up to be fluid, constant, and open. As described by some staff members, the point of view of each staff member is valued and received openly, and all staff opinions are welcomed and encouraged. For example, although site coordinators were generally not in direct communication with LA's BEST operations and corporate office, most of the coordinators felt supported by them, just as one site coordinator commented, "When we have our site coordinator meetings, if site coordinators speak up, the [operations] office usually takes the comment into consideration and tries their best to make our job a little bit easier." One operations office participant added, "Site leadership is encouraged to take advantage of the LA's BEST 'open-door policy.' This can be done formally at meetings or informally through emails or direct phone calls."

This strategy not only ensures the growth of the individual and the organization as a whole, but also creates a match between staff and program needs, which in turn may have been one of the reasons that the majority of traveling program supervisors reported that staff turnover among the sites was low. The majority of staff participants worked with the program for 3 years and the leadership staff stayed with the program even longer, ranging from 5 to 18 years. These sites were then able to focus more on the program goals, construct better safety nets, and build closer relationships with students and parents. Conversely, at the few sites where staff turnover was a problem, it had impacted the site negatively. At those sites, traveling program supervisors and activities consultants highlighted the importance of

consistency, stability, and more time spent on training and communicating with new staff.

Leveraging Social Capitals, Building Relations and Teamwork

Other than sharing mission and vision, central to the high leverage of intellectual and social capital of an organization, is the development of relationships, teamwork, and trust. Team building starts from the very top. Data revealed that the corporate office and the operations office maintain close contact with each other as demonstrated by the multiple daily conversations between the CEO and COO. The corporate and the operations office depend on teamwork in both offices to put ideas into operation and manage donations so that the students can reap the maximum benefit. One of the corporate staff members said: “Corporate office may have the idea, and operations office makes it happen. All the events we do, we have to work together as a team.” Meanwhile, the corporate office also sees itself as a “warm blanket” around the operations office, in providing guidance, advice, assistance, and funding to the operations office that they otherwise might not have, and the operations office, in turn, shares these opportunities and experiences with the site staff.

At the site level, the organization has established a chain of command that appears to be functioning effectively and maximizes the competencies of staff members. More specifically, data showed that all site coordinators from the six sites understood the importance of teamwork, although the leadership ability to facilitate collective efficacy varied. Site 3 is a prime example of collaboration and team effort. The activities consultant at this particular site intentionally worked to create a “sense of ownership” so that staff felt free to make their own decisions, but were comfortable and trusting enough to come to her for assistance if needed. In constantly providing positive words of encouragement, positive role modeling, and making sure the staff members had the materials they needed, the site coordinator motivated them to continuously improve their work. In return, program staff at this site had great respect and trust for the site coordinator’s leadership. One staff participant provided a quote that is echoed throughout all the interview data. He stated, “We really stress teamwork here. We really think if everyone is doing their own thing, it is like you’re separating people, and its going to be a mess; but if we all come together like one big family then we get things done.”

In addition, teamwork was also stressed at the student level. Students revealed that staff enforced a teamwork ethic. There was a program climate and structure stated to the students that it was imperative for them to collaborate, especially during the homework session of the program. As a result of sharing the program mission, motivating staff, developing relationships and trust, the sites were able to learn in teams and developed system thinking (Senge, 1990).

Maximizing external capitals. In general, as described in the section entitled Organizational Capital at LA's BEST, the students' experiences were further enhanced by the corporate and operations offices leverage of their external resources, including the fore-mentioned connections with legislations, financial networks, and public communications. At the site level, more local efforts were also expanded.

Linking with the community. Positive attitudes and intellectual agility are important components of competencies for after school programs where daily unexpected challenges and crisis are common. Several examples of agility and innovations were described earlier, where negative experiences of the students were turned into positive learning experiences. Some of these encounters were created with community resources.

In several sites, according to program staff, there were frequent behavior incidents and a general dislike of the police enforcement among the participating families and LA's BEST students. At one of these sites, a program staff member brought in local law enforcement to confront behavior problems, as well as address the disrespect for law enforcement that typically begins in the home. During this program, police officers were given the opportunity to talk about their jobs, including why they have to arrest people:

Oh, with the [program] they're opening up finally, because a lot of these kids have a lot of hate towards police officers. And we just found out, it's a lot of the reasons, the negativity is coming from the parents... Like one of the parents got arrested because he had narcotics and a gun. And he's "Oh, they took my dad in front of me. They took him to jail and they raided the house. Oh, I don't like cops." And they started saying a lot of negatives about the police officers. Then we invite the police to come and talk to them and explained to them.

This is a prime example where LA's BEST has leveraged its connection with the community and attempted to establish a relationship of communication and trust between the students and the agencies in the community.

Partnership with schools. Since the LA's BEST program operates on school sites, relationships with schools are very important in maintaining physical resources such as access to space and equipment, and human resources such as linkages with the district, principals, and teachers. Data reveal that specific efforts were made to facilitate these relationships.

LA's BEST, as an organization, makes their presence known in the district, and have representatives staffed in the district to keep the district informed of the program activities and functioning. To ensure principals' buy-in and cooperation from the school staff, the principals' support is recruited into the program from the very start. A procedure was set up so that the principals had to petition for the program in order for LA's BEST to be placed at their school site. In addition, there were LA's BEST operations office staff members that were hired by the district to facilitate this communication and to intervene and facilitate when necessary to ensure smooth program operations and relations with the schools. As one of the traveling staff members eloquently stated, "The relationship between school and LA's BEST should be one in which there is open communication, collaboration and support." One traveling program supervisor added, "There has to be communication, or else we can't run our program on our own. We need our staff support there too. From principal to our janitor, to our teachers, our office manager, I mean, we have to work as a team."

With these messages from the leadership staff, conscientious site coordinators such as those in Sites 1, 3 and 4 intentionally spent time networking with school principals and regular schoolteachers, both in meeting forums and by volunteering, in order to maintain healthy relationships with the school. Many of the participants at Site 4 also provided suggestions on how to increase communication between the LA's BEST staff and teachers. One suggestion involved having the teachers become more involved with the program. For instance, the traveling program supervisor would like the site coordinator to invite the teachers to program events. One teacher participant also said that she would like program staff to become more involved in the school through attendance at the governing body meetings.

Traveling staff recommended Site 1 as a "prime example" of a solid relationship between a school and LA's BEST. This site had such strong support from the principal that the site coordinator stated that she was given keys to every room at the site and that the school had given her access to the alarms so that she could work on the weekends.

Involving families. Parent involvement is consistently cited as an important precursor to student achievement (Ascher, 1988; Davis, 2000; Yap & Enoki, 1995). However, across the six sites, parent involvement in the traditional sense was limited. Work conflict was the main reason cited for restricted parent involvement at LA's BEST activities. Language barriers and lack of confidence were other main reasons. Parent involvement from high-poverty families should be viewed quite differently than it is in the traditional middle-class model, in light of Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs. Since survival and providing daily basic needs are the highest priorities for most of these low-income families, physical involvement might not be possible, and barriers such as language and culture could complicate matters even more. Circumstances, parental concern, expectations, and involvement can be interpreted in other, less prescribed actions. Examples might be pursuing three jobs in order to place a decent meal on the dinner table, providing a quiet place for students to do their school work, emphasizing the importance of education, setting appropriate limits, scraping together funds to buy a new pair of shoes for school, or taking a brief moment to ask children about their school day. The students who perceived from their parents a sense of love and belonging, recognition and approval, could still have their needs fulfilled and develop positive identities.

Understanding the importance of involving families, all six sites, regardless of the characteristics of the community, sent consistent expectations and encouragement to the parents to become involved in whatever ways they could. Overwhelmingly, traveling staff said that they expected parents to be supportive in terms of attending special events and showing interest in projects and special performances. Others mentioned expecting parents to try to understand the purpose of LA's BEST, follow rules, and recognize that LA's BEST is an enrichment program and not a child care center. Other examples of parent involvement included volunteering on a field trip, donating goods, attending special events or activities or approaching the site coordinator to discuss LA's BEST-related issues. As a result, despite the limited physical involvement in some sites, most parent participants were involved in forms of stressing the importance of finishing homework and behaving. Several of the parent participants also mentioned that they told their children to put effort into their studies and work hard. Finally, across all sites, parents reported that there always was a quiet place for their child(ren) to complete homework at home.

From the description above, it can be summarized that LA's BEST is leveraging intellectual, social, and organizational capitals to the benefit of the students and their

families. These evidences of teamwork, trust, and intellectual agility among the corporate office, operations office, leadership staff, and the site staff reflected the mission and values of the organization, and the staff stability further enhanced bonding between staff, students, and families. These capitals thus provided the foundations needed in setting up social norms for positive program environments in order to counter the challenging experiences students faced in their communities.

Setting up a Norm

In leveraging staff capital with the networks from the families, schools, and communities, supportive environments were created for the students. These program environments had a definite impact on the students. As described in the demographic section, the majority of students in this study resided in communities that lacked trusting relationships. In demonstrating collaboration, cooperation, and trusting interactions among program adults and LA's BEST students, LA's BEST could provide positive role models, demonstrate supportive relationships, and compensate for their lack in the environment.

Site 3 was a prime example, with the highest crime rate and most low-income households among the six sites. Despite the fact that (as most staff participants mentioned) it was an uphill battle trying to counter some of the negative social behavioral influences in the community, in this site there was one simple coherent message to the students: that they were in control of their own destiny. This message was consistent across the board. "For every action, for everything you do, there is a consequence." There was high expectation for students to think critically and build character with the caring support from the staff participants. Similar sentiments occurred in the other sites. Many staff participants reported that they were sending encouraging messages to students about getting good grades, studying hard, behaving properly, going to college, being a positive community member and being successful.

The majority of the students in all six sites reported that the staff cared about them and listened to them. The following is an example of one student who evidently felt safe and secure in this LA's BEST site and had developed a trusting relationship with the staff participants:

There was a little girl that was scared to tell her mom that she lost her jacket. It was a brand new jacket. She came to me "Please tell my mom I lost it....She'll listen to you..." So I ended up telling the mom.... The little girl felt better.

In addition, many staff participants reported a vision of their students getting a better life from the LA's BEST program. They held high expectations for the students. They want their students to be exposed to information or activities that they might not otherwise get from home or school, such as non-academic preparation for high school (e.g., ways to handle peer pressure), information about college, dance, sports, and arts and crafts. Staff participants also reported that they want to help maintain or raise their students' self-esteem and self-motivation.

To be better in life, to have a better future, to keep them off the streets....we do our best to motivate them and keep them here...

Through expectancy, family support, and leveraging of community and staff resources, students were offered opportunities that they otherwise would not have. The LA's BEST students were given the tools to build resiliency through supportive relationships, academic enrichments, and opportunities to participate in extra-curricula activities.

LA's BEST: A Community of Practice

Communities of practice are formed when people engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain. It is a group of people who share a common passion for something they do and interact regularly to learn how to do it better (Wenger, 1998). As an organization, a system needs to be in place in order for a community of practice to occur.

LA's BEST has taken the necessary steps to set up this system. Sharing mission and vision is an essential first step, which is evidenced by the networking and partnerships with legislators, financial institutions, communities, schools, and families at the corporate and operations level. It is further evidenced at the site level

by the traveling program supervisor, activities consultant, and most of the six site coordinators interviewed. In sharing this passion of “Better Educated Students for Tomorrow,” the leadership staff communicated regularly in order to problem-solve and brainstorm for ideas and more effective strategies to further engage staff and students. More specifically, LA’s BEST as an organization is fostering a community of practice by implementing the following practices:

Establishing cross-functional teams. As an organization, LA’s BEST has established a chain of command that appears to be functional for the team members and maximizes their expertise. The motto of the corporate office is “It takes a village to raise a child.” Corporate staff developed the vision, mission statement, and values of LA’s BEST as they built shared buy-in from operations and field staff. Communication is set up to be fluid, constant, and open throughout the organization, reflecting the values and style of the President and CEO, and individually internalized by staff members. There appeared to be a high level of dedication and collaborations among corporate and operations offices. Together, they put ideas into actions for the benefits of families and students.

At the site level, leadership staff utilized the knowledge gained from their years of experience with LA’s BEST to monitor and facilitate sites under their supervision. As a result, in the six sites under study, sufficient trust and relationships have been established, communication was open, and team efforts were apparent in strategizing to promote site benefits for staff and students. For example, site staff and coordinators shared their ideas with their activities consultants and traveling program supervisors. In concerted efforts of networking and drawing knowledge and skills across functional teams, these ideas were brought under the attention of specific units of expertise to be put into action. These specific units include: a) the Citywide Events Coordinator for activities ideas and connections to different city departments; b) the Director of Education for matters relating to curriculum development and learning; and c) the Director of Staff Development for opportunities and ideas for training and specific staff development needs. The networking and flow of expertise also expanded beyond the operations and corporate office to the partners of LA’s BEST nationwide.

Creating a direct link between learning and performance. A system is set up in LA’s BEST so that field experiences, challenges and solutions, and innovative ideas can be shared across sites for practical purposes through the “open-door policy.” In

many cases, intellectual agility that was demonstrated through problem-solving at the site level became formal procedures throughout the LA's BEST program.

More regularly, site coordinators shared their ideas at monthly site coordinator meetings, which often included time for reflection and discussion. Clusters and regions had monthly meetings in which site coordinators further shared their ideas and experiences with their peers. Monthly activities consultant reports also provided a way for novel ideas to spread within the organization. Additionally, staff initiated development workshops often involved innovative ideas while addressing important issues and served as a vehicle for disseminating good ideas that emerged from the sites. This encouragement of staff autonomy allowed flexibility for the program to match site structure with student needs and permitted the program to grow as an organization.

Connecting participants across organizational and geographic boundaries.

The positions of Citywide Events Coordinator, Director of Staff Development, and Director of Education were created partially as an intentional effort to keep abreast of innovations in the field, and to gather knowledge, support, and expertise from across organizational, and geographic boundaries. For example, the Director of Staff Development focused on building relationships and networks among national leaders in the field. Knowing staff development counterparts in other organizations allowed for the opportunity to bring additional training resources to LA's BEST staff. These relationships also provided opportunities to negotiate prices for program curricula and training fees. In addition, knowledge and information were shared internally as the Directors participated in leadership level conversations with regard to curricula, trainings, and materials that are useful to staff to make informed decisions.

Providing student support and fostering resiliency skills. The program's policy of hiring staff from the community has leveraged staff capital in sharing similar culture, values, and language with the families that the program served. This allowed the site staff to share innate understandings of the students under their care. As a result, the student and staff participants in this study both reported that students were comfortable communicating with staff members, and there was a good rapport between them. This created opportunities for LA's BEST to improve students' attitudes towards school by linking the day and after school experiences. The presence of male staff members in these communities, which were heavily populated with single-parent families, could also enhance students' daily

experiences by providing role models. By encouraging families to get involved in their children's experiences, LA's BEST could be a positive source to improve family and community ties.

In summary, fostering and maintaining social capital is a continuous task calling for the efforts of communities of practice. LA's BEST, positioning the program as a learning organization, has realized this challenge and has mobilized their efforts to maintain high leverage of their social capitals and continue learning and growing.

Conclusion

In accordance with Maslow's (1954) theory and as described by the data collected, the students in the six studied LA's BEST neighborhoods are struggling with safety, sense of belonging, and esteem needs. They need to fulfill these basic needs before they can move forward to self-actualization and become productive citizens. Thus, in terms of social capital, LA's BEST becomes the source that can provide some stability to these students, families, and communities.

As an organization, one strategy that LA's BEST used to leverage intellectual/human resources is by recruiting staff from the community. This program philosophy leveraged staff capitals in sharing similar culture, values, and language with the families that the program served. This allowed the site staff to share innate understandings of the students, build rapport with them, and act as mentors. The practice of having staff work through the ranks for each promotion further ensured that there was stability in staffing at the leadership level (i.e., site coordinators, activities consultants, and traveling program supervisors), which further served as a foundation for building strong relationships.

At the same time, internal organizational practices were established to motivate staff and keep them energized. A common infrastructure and chain of command were provided to the staff members to offer security and predictability. At the same time, the corporate staff developed the vision, mission statement, and values of LA's BEST as they built shared buy-in from operations and field staff. Teamwork, collaboration, and trust were modeled by the corporate and operations office, as they worked together to provide guidance, support, and resources to the sites. Open communication and innovations were encouraged throughout the organization. With the practice of the "open door" policy, LA's BEST supported intellectual agility that

was demonstrated at the site level. In many cases, the intellectual agility demonstrated by the site staff became formal procedures at many other sites and sometimes were even taken up throughout the LA's BEST program. This encouragement of staff autonomy allowed flexibility for the program to match site structure with student needs and permitted the program to grow as an organization.

Furthermore, LA's BEST has mobilized and maintained a high leverage of the external networks from families, schools, communities, private business, other national organizations, and government legislations. As a result, an abundance of resources were generated and supportive environments were created for the students. Opportunities were given to students to participate in experiences and activities that they otherwise could not have, such as non-academic preparation for high school, information about college, dance, sports, and arts and crafts. At the same time, schools and families were able to communicate better with LA's BEST serving as a liaison, helping students with homework completion, study and behavioral skills, and translating for teachers and families with language barriers. But most importantly, a norm was created in the LA's BEST setting where students' physical and emotional securities become the priority. In addition, there was a high expectation for students to think critically and build character with caring support from site staff members. Many staff members passionately described that they were sending encouraging messages to students about getting good grades, studying hard, behaving properly, going to college, being a positive community member and being successful.

Therefore, through leveraging of organizational capital, the program captured available resources (intellectual and social), gathered external support and funding from government and private agencies, and provided for the basic needs of safety, belonging and love, as well as the esteem needs of the students. Meanwhile, understanding that fostering and maintaining a high leverage of social capital was a continuous task calling for the efforts of "communities of practice," LA's BEST, as a learning organization, has also expanded their innovation and staff development capitals and is well on its way to becoming a community of practice for better educated students for tomorrow.

Recommendations

In light of the importance of parent involvement (Ascher, 1988; Yap & Enoki, 1995; Davis, 2000), it is recommended that LA's BEST strengthen their efforts to encourage parent participation. Evidence showed that across the six sites under study, parent involvement in the traditional sense was limited. Work conflict was the main reason cited for restricted parent involvement at LA's BEST activities. Language barriers and lack of confidence were other main reasons. In particular, while LA's BEST has reached out to the majority of the families, the staff was less able to assist those who were Spanish-speaking, and especially the less visible groups such as Armenian, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The interview data suggested these parents would welcome representation of their voices both in school and in the LA's BEST program.

Data also showed that the staff at all six sites understood the importance of involving families, and all staff interviewed mentioned that regardless of the characteristics of the community, LA's BEST staff sent consistent expectations and encouragement to the parents to become involved in whatever ways they could. As a result, despite the limited physical involvement in some sites, most parent participants were involved in forms of stressing the importance of finishing homework and behaving.

However, more can be done to bring these parents into the program. LA's BEST can further leverage their capitals and resources to meet the parents' needs, such as bringing in more family events during the weekends, employing more staff of the under-represented minorities (Vietnamese, Korean, etc.), and providing exercises that raise the parents' confidence level, and keep them motivated and engaged as they get involved. LA's BEST has accomplished their mission and vision in keeping students engaged, perhaps similar energies and attention can be directed to invite more parents into the program.

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Appendices

Appendix A:
Protocols - Cross-Referenced Items

LA's BEST: Social Capital

Protocols: Cross-referenced Items

Item	TPS/ AC	SC	Staff	Teacher	Principal	Student	Parent
LAB – years involved, capacity(ies)	X	X	X			X	
Prior work experience	X	X	X	X	X		
Communication w/ students – L1, style , tailor to student needs	X	X	X	X			X
Staff role definition and execution	X	X	X		X		
Problems - Students	X	X	X	X		X	X
Problems - Staff	X	X	X				
Teamwork – Students & Staff		X	X	X	X	X	
Communication w/ students – L1, style , tailor to student needs	X	X	X	X			X
Problems - Students	X	X	X	X		X	X
Staff trust	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communication (trust) with and support from TPS and LAB central office in dealing with staff issues	X	X	X				
Student trust		X	X			X	X
Teamwork – Staff		X	X	X	X	X	
LAB Environment – collaborative, encouraging, supportive, conducive to learning	X	X	X			X	
Students Trust of Staff/LAB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Staff Trust w/in LAB		X	X				X
Student – Adults Care - Transparency						X	
Student-Rely on Each Other		X				X	
Homework – quality, support, etc.				X		X	X
Social behavioral values		X	X	X		X	X
Communication between LAB and day school	X	X	X	X	X		
Community - support, resources, interaction (in other resources)	X	X	X		X		X
LAB Environment – collaborative, encouraging, supportive, conducive to learning	X	X	X			X	
Communication (trust) with and support from TPS and LAB central office in dealing with staff issues	X	X	X				
Communication (trust) with and support from TPS and LAB central office in dealing with staff issues	X	X	X				

Interaction/ Communication with parents		X	X	X	X			X
Communication between LAB and day school	X	X	X	X	X			
Access to resources	X	X	X	X	X			
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X			X		X
Access to resources	X	X	X	X	X			
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X			X		X
School support of LAB					X	X		
Academic values		X	X					X
Parental involvement	X	X				X	X	X
Local community description	X	X	X				X	X
Parental values		X	X					X
Homework – quality, support, etc.					X		X	X
Program organization – schedule design, activity design	X	X						
Perceived benefits, positive aspects of LAB							X	X
Least favorite thing about LAB							X	
Staff role definition and execution	X	X	X			X		
LAB – years involved, capacity(ies)	X	X	X				X	
Staff role definition and execution	X	X	X			X		
Staff turnover and site impact	X	X		X		X		
LAB Environment – collaborative, encouraging, supportive, conducive to learning	X	X	X				X	
Perceived benefits, positive aspects of LAB							X	X
Least favorite thing about LAB							X	
Motivate students			X					X
LAB Environment – collaborative, encouraging, supportive, conducive to learning	X	X	X				X	
Student trust		X	X				X	X
Resources for students	X	X	X					
Perceived benefits, positive aspects of LAB							X	X
Staff role definition and execution	X	X	X			X		
Staff respects and looks to for leadership; motivates & supports staff as instructors	X	X	X					
Staff respects and looks to for leadership; motivates & supports staff as instructors	X	X	X					
Student trust		X	X				X	X

Perceived benefits, positive aspects of LAB						X	X
Least favorite thing about LAB						X	
Staff respects and looks to for leadership; motivates & supports staff as instructors	X	X	X				
Social behavioral values		X	X	X		X	X
Student trust		X	X			X	X
Staff turnover and site impact	X	X		X	X		
Staff training – formal and informal	X	X	X	X	X		
Communication w/ students – L1, style , tailor to student needs	X	X	X	X			X
Resources for students	X	X	X				
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X		X		X
Interaction/ Communication with parents		X	X	X	X		X
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X		X		X
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X		X		X
Community - support, resources, interaction	X	X	X		X		X
School support of LAB				X	X		
Future goals		X					X
Process for activity / club placement		X				X	
Recruitment/retention of students		X	X	X		X	
LAB site – staffing	X						
Early pick up of students		X					
Other ASPs and organized activities in community		X			X	X	
Transience rates	X	X			X		
Group identity encouraged		X					
Household description, e.g., demographics, resources		X					X

Appendix B:
Neighborhood Demographics by Site

Table B1

2004-2005 School Enrollment, Ethnicity, And Language By Site

Category	Site					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Students enrolled	707	841	802	715	1,749	964
Hispanic Latino	74%	74%	67%	86%	92%	93%
African American	0	25%	32%	6%	3%	4%
Asian	26%	<1%	<1%	3%	4%	<1%
English Learners	73%	61%	49%	56%	79%	61%
English Learners enrolled	516	513	393	400	1,382	580
L1 Spanish	73%	100%	99.50%	97%	97.40%	99.50%
L1 Asian/Pacific	23%	0%	<1%	3%	2.30%	<1%

Table B2

2000 U.S. Census Socio-Economic And Education Attainment Data For Community Surrounding School Site

Soci-economic and Education Attainment	Site						Los Angeles
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Economic							
Homes rented	77%	38%	70%	70%	59%	22%	61%
Families in poverty	42%	36% - 43%	55%	30%	33%	13%	25%
Education level							
< 9 th grade education	49%	17% - 38%	36%	26%	30%	18%	19%
9 th -12 th grade - No diploma	23%	20% - 25%	31%	22%	16%	22%	14%
At least a high school diploma	28%	42% - 60%	33%	50%	54%	60%	67%
Bachelor's degree or higher	4%	4% - 11%	2%	7%	16%	11%	25%

Table B3

January - August 2005 Crime Report By Site For LAPD Division In Which Program Site Is Located

Crime Type and Changes in Crime	Site						Los Angeles
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Violent crimes YTD 2005	796	1744	1744	695	728	728	17761
Change since 2003	-41%	-23%	-23%	-44%	-39%	-39%	-39%
Child/spouse aggravated assaults YTD	60	96	96	28	71	71	1176
Homicides	20	45	45	9	8	8	297
Rapes	19	46	46	29	28	28	506
Gun shots	302	440	440	137	136	136	3328
Change since 2003	-13%	+9%	+9%	-40%	-25%	-25%	-9%
Shooting victims	92	216	216	57	50	50	1291
Change since 2003	-1%	-1%	-1%	-29%	-38%	-38%	-11%

Appendix C:
Special Activities and Excursions

Education

Aquarium of the Pacific Museum
Tours

Banning House Museum Museum
Tours

Burger King Walking Field Trip

Cabrillo Marine Aquarium
Aquarium Tours

California African American
Museum Museum Tour

California Science Center LA's
BEST Celebrate Science Fair
Museum Tour

Canoga Park High School
Agricultural Magnet Program

Cottontail Ranch Field Study on
Nature Science

Edendale Library First Book
Celebrity Speed Read Event

Fire Station #86 How To Become A
Firefighter Workshop

Getty House Educational Tours
Reading Corner

Hollenbeck Police Station Facility
Tour

The Home Depot Kids' Workshop

Huntington Library Museum Tour
Los Angeles City Hall Project
L.E.A.D. Field Trip

Los Angeles Police Academy
Project L.E.A.D. Field Trip

Los Angeles Police Department 911
Dispatch Tour

San Pedro Regional Library History
of Cinco de Mayo Reptile Research

Los Angeles Superior Court House
Project L.E.A.D. Field Trip

Los Angeles Superior Court House
Project L.E.A.D. Field Trip

Los Angeles Zoo Animal
Observations, Science Trips,
"Promote Wildlife Safety"
Program

Museum of Tolerance Project
L.E.A.D. Field Trip

Rose Bowl UCLA "I'm Going
To College" Day

San Juan Capistrano Tour of
Mission

Six Flags Magic Mountain
Read To Succeed Trips

United States Space Camp
Student-Parent Trip for LA's
BEST Celebrate Science Fair
Winners

University of California, Los
Angeles, Adopt-A-Classroom
Night

University of Southern
California USC Fun Days

Watts Library Storytelling with
Barbara Bain

Wilmington Library Kidzlit
Clubs Trips Children's Reading
Club

Recreational

24 Hour Fitness The BEAT
Basketball Clinic

Banning Park Walking Field
Trip

Cabrillo Beach Youth Water
Camp

Castle Park Amusement Park
Day of Fun

Cheviot Hills Recreation
Center Japan Samurai Bears
Baseball Clinic

Circle X Ranch Children's
Lifesaving Foundation
Enrichment Camps

Disneyland Fun Trips

Golf & Stuff Family Fun
Day

The Grove "Sponge Bob
Square Pants" Movie
Screening

The Home Depot Center
Battle of the High School
Bands

IMAX Theater "The
Polar Express" Movie
Screening

Knott's Berry Farm Fun
Trips

Mann Festival Theaters
"The Polar Bear
Express" Movie
Screening MarVista
Bowling Alley Fun Trip

Mulligan's Family Fun
Center Fun Trip

Pharaoh's Los Kingdom
Fun Trip

Pierpoint Landing Rod
& Reel Club Fishing
Trip

Raging Waters Family
Days at Raging Waters

Six Flags Magic
Mountain Fun Trips

Universal City Walk
Walking Field Trip

Visual & Performing Arts

Bob Baker Marionette
Theater Puppet Show

Broadway Parade LA's
BEST Dance
Performance

California Market Place
BEST Friends Fashion
Show Fundraiser - LA's
BEST Folklorico
Performance

California State University, Los Angeles LA's BEST Dance & Drill Team Showcase

Color Me Mine Studio Annual Family Brunch Centerpiece Project

Dia De Los Ninos Celebration & Arts Festival East Los Angeles College

The Freud Theatre at UCLA Debbie Allen Dance Academy Performance

Getty House Arts & Crafts Day Music Mobile Activities

Idyllwild Arts Summer Dance, Music & Arts Camps

The J. Paul Getty Museum Getty Family Festival – LA's BEST Folklorico Performance

Japanese American National Museum Theatrical Performance of "The Pink Dress"

John Anson Ford Theatre Summer Performance Series Cantinflas Film Festival

Kirk Douglas Theater Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y) Performance

La Culebra Park ARTScorpsLA Tree of Life Celebration

Los Angeles Craft & Folk Art Museum Family Art Workshop Contemporary Mask Workshop

Los Angeles County Museum of Art Museum Tours

Song Beach Convention Center Governor's Conference on the State of Women in California- LA's BEST Singers Performance

Los Angeles County Museum of Art Annual Meeting for Target Corporation Grantees – LA's BEST Singers Performance

Magic Johnson Theater Pan African Film & Arts Festival

Museum of Contemporary Art Docented ASAP Field Trips

The Music Center of Los Angeles Mayoral Inaugural Gala – LA's BEST Drum Circle Performance

Nate Holden Theater State of the City Address – LA's BEST Dancers Performance

Pantages Theater Theatrical Performance of "The King & I"

Pharoah's Lost Kingdom Drill Team Competition

California State Capitol, Sacramento Cinco de Mayo Celebration – LA's BEST Folklorico Performance

Six Flags Magic Mountain LA's BEST Folklorico Performance

Theater West ASAP Culminating Event

Wadsworth Theater Debbie Allen Dance Academy Presents "Pepito's Story" Theatrical Performance of "Peter Pan"

Walt Disney Concert Hall Laureates Festival

Westin Bonaventure Hotel 21st Century Community Learning Centers Summer Institute – LA's BEST Singers Performance

Sports

Dodger Stadium LA Dodgers Baseball Games

The Home Depot Center Cycling Championships LA Galaxy Games Major League Soccer Cup Final Scholastic Soccer Cup U.S. Cup Tennis

Staples Center LA Avengers Arena Football Games LA Kings Hockey Game World Cup Soccer Finals X Games

Fitness

Arcadia Park VERB Action Day

Gates Elementary School BEST Fit Community Health Fair

Pomona Fairplex BEST Fit Field Trip

UCLA Wilson Tennis Workshop

USC Sunset Tennis Courts Dance of Tennis Workshop

World on Wheels Health & Fitness Skate Fairs

Community

Birmingham High School Lights On! After School

Bridge Street Park Community Projecto Jardin Garden

Dockweiler State Beach BEST Friends "P.S. I Love You" Event

Dodger Stadium Ameriquest: Portraits of Home Project

Getty House Earth Day Los Angeles City Hall LA's BEST Sweet 16 Celebration

McDonald's Pen Pal Meeting

Sacred Heart & Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Cultural Festival

Santa Monica Pier Ameriquest: Portraits of Hope Project UPS Environmental Day

Sony Pictures Studios Annual Family Brunch

Sun Valley Park Earth Day
Celebration

Wadsworth Theater Community
Jam Against Violence

West Hollywood AIDS Walk Los
Angeles

Will Rogers State Beach Beach
Clean-Up

Holidays

Citibank Holiday Parade

Dorothy Chandler Pavillion LA
County Holiday Celebration – LA’s
BEST Folklorico Performance
(Televised)

El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical
Park Cinco de Mayo Celebration

Getty House Halloween Art Day
Thanksgiving Celebration
President’s Day Celebration Easter
Egg Hunt Independence Day Event
Griffith Park Holiday Light Festival

Juan Cabrillo & Webster
Elementary Schools Children’s
Lifesaving Foundation Holiday
Celebrations

Lincoln Heights Holiday Parade
LA’s BEST Performances

Los Angeles Convention Center
Someone’s In The Kitchen Holiday
Celebration

Mary Knoll Japanese Catholic
Church Holiday Party

Walt Disney Concert Hall Holiday
Concert

On-Site Enrichment

5-A-Day Power Play! Nutrition
Workshop

Action Learning Systems Literacy
Loop

Adventures in Peacemaking
Conflict Resolution

Amateur Athletic Foundation
Seasonal Sports Program

American Alliance of Health,
Physical Education, Recreation
and Dance Physical Activity
Information & Resources

American Cancer Society
Spring into Health program

American Diabetes Association
Technical Assistance &
Reference Materials

Angeles Gate Cultural Center
Drawing, Painting & Mask
Marking

AnimAction, Inc. Animation /
Media Literacy Workshop

Amory Center for the Arts
Explorations in Multi-Media
Art

ARTScorpsLA Environmental
Art

Avenue 50 Studio Indigenous
American Art & Artists

Barnsdall Center for the Arts
Visual, Cultural &
Environmental Art

Center For Food Justice Food
Information Resources

Center Theatre Group of Los
Angeles Playwriting, Acting,
Scenery, and Theatrical
Performance

Children’s Action Network
Kids’ Café Program

Color Me Mine Art & Ceramics
Workshop

Common Grounds-Master
Gardener’s Gardening
Program

Cultural Art Space Latino &
Non-Western History &
Culture via Art

Dairy Council of
California Nutrition &
Physical Activity
Program

Debbie Allen Dance
Academy (DADA) Tap,
Hip Hop, Salsa &
Modern Dance

Developmental Studies
Center KidzLit &
KidzMath Literacy &
Math Activity

Edgemar Center for the
Arts Playwriting,
Acting, Theatre
Performances

FUNDamentals of Music
and Movement
Instrumental & Vocal
Music

Girl Scouts of the San
Fernando Valley “Girls
Are Great” Program

Girls Inc. Operation
SMART Science, Math
And Relevant
Technology

GO2 / LA’s BEST
Singers Three-Part
Classical Choral Music

Henry Mancini Institute
Instrumental Music
Instruction

Hoop Hop Physical &
Motor Fitness
Development

InsideOut Writers
Creative Writing,
Journaling & Poetry
Workshop

Jazz CoolCarts Jazz
History, Rhythms,
Instruments &
Performance

JPL Days Visits by
Scientists & Engineers

John Robert Powers – Acting for Life Acting & Life Skills Program

Junior Achievement Economic Development Workshops

KABC7 Healthy Steps Program

Kaiser Permanente Educational Puppet Show

KidTribe Nutrition & Physical Activity Programs LA Collaborative for Healthy Active Children Nutrition Information & Resources

La Vida Outreach Program Health Maintenance Presentations LA Vida Kids Club Story Time

L.I.N.K.U.P. Linking of Institutions, Neighborhoods, Kids, Universities & Performing Arts

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Nutrition Information & Resources

Mad Science Workshop Exciting Science Activities for Celebrate Science Fair Runners-Up

Michaela Pereira Visits Cookie Decorating Art & Crafts Activities

MIND Institute Computer-Based Math & Piano Activities

Monart School of the Arts Drawing Workshops on Visual Artist Masters

National Academy of Sports And Physical Education Sports for All Programs

NBA / LA Lakers “Read To Achieve” Program

Preventive Medicine Institute – Strang Cancer Prevention Center Healthy Children, Healthy Futures Program

Project G.O.L.D. Goal Oriented Life Decisions

Project L.E.A.D. Legal Enrichment And Decision— Making

Raven Drum Foundation Percussion Workshops for Special Needs Kids

Read Across America Literacy Activity

Reading Is Fundamental (R.I.F.) Literacy Program

Rhythms of Life Luna Stix Eye/Hand Coordination Workshop

Safe Moves Bicycle Safety Course

Soaring Dreams Ameriquest Portraits of Hope

Sound Art Percussion & Vocal Music Workshop

St. Elmo Village Traditions of African & African American Art

State of California – 48th District Schools Involvement Program

Theatre Phoenix Writing and Acting Theatre Workshops

Theater of Will Original Theater Works in Shakespearean Style

UC Cooperative Extension Gardening & Nutrition Programs

UCLA Project Based Learning Student-Driven Multi-Curricular Projects

Words Can Heal Character Education Program

Young Musicians Foundation (YMF) Flute, Violin & Viola Workshops