

Executive Summary

The mission of the LA's BEST After School Enrichment program is to provide a safe, supervised after school education, enrichment and recreation program for elementary school children ages 5 to 12 throughout Los Angeles. Created in 1988 by Mayor Tom Bradley, LA's BEST has grown from its original 10 sites to now serve more than 28,000 students in 180 elementary school sites. In 2006, Business Council Member Verizon partnered with LA's BEST to create "best practice sites," with the objective to increase community participation, and enhance and share best practices of LA's BEST.

The partnership with Verizon allowed LA's BEST to create two Continued Learning Demonstration Sites ("Demonstration Sites") to demonstrate how to go beyond test-driven, segmented and disconnected curriculums and activities, and to make room for questions and exploration about students' interests, work, learning and the world. Each Demonstration Site offers unique opportunities for observation and replication of the essential practices and policies that have made LA's BEST such a successful partnership with the Office of the Mayor and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Hubbard Elementary and Figueroa Elementary were chosen to be the two Demonstration Sites because of their geographical locations in culturally distinct areas of Los Angeles. Hubbard is located in the San Fernando Valley while Figueroa is located in South Los Angeles, areas where gang activity and crime are highest in the city. Additionally, the majority of the students at Hubbard and Figueroa are classified as low income, 97% and 82% respectively. Combined the two school served over 400 children.

The Demonstration Sites examined increases in school attendance during the regular school day and students' disposition or willingness to read as a result of LA's BEST literacy activities at the two sites. The City of Los Angeles is one of the most illiterate of major cities in the county and ranks highest in the nation for the sheer number of low-literacy adults, 59% of the city's population. Verizon has created a literacy program implemented in LA's BEST called Thinkfinity. A special emphasis was placed on measuring student's interest in reading. Students participated in over 20 enrichment activities, including literacy, the core components of LA's BEST (After School Arts Program, BEST Fit, Celebrate Science Program, *KidzLit* and *KidzMath*, sports, field trips, citywide events), the acclaimed Mentoring USA program, and Verizon's *Thinkfinity*.

To measure the effectiveness of the Demonstration Sites, a two-pronged evaluation approach was employed. First, the LA's BEST internal evaluation team conducted ongoing program monitoring and evaluation in the areas of academic enrichment, social development, family and community involvement, safety and program improvement. Second, an external evaluation team from UCLA/CRESST in the completion process of a study that aims to: 1) assess students' benefits from participating in LA's BEST demonstration sites by examining change in their attitudes towards reading and their regular school attendance patterns; and, 2) to examine the effects of information sharing and collaboration has on participating staff members at the demonstration sites. Final analysis and writing of the findings will be complete by January 2009.