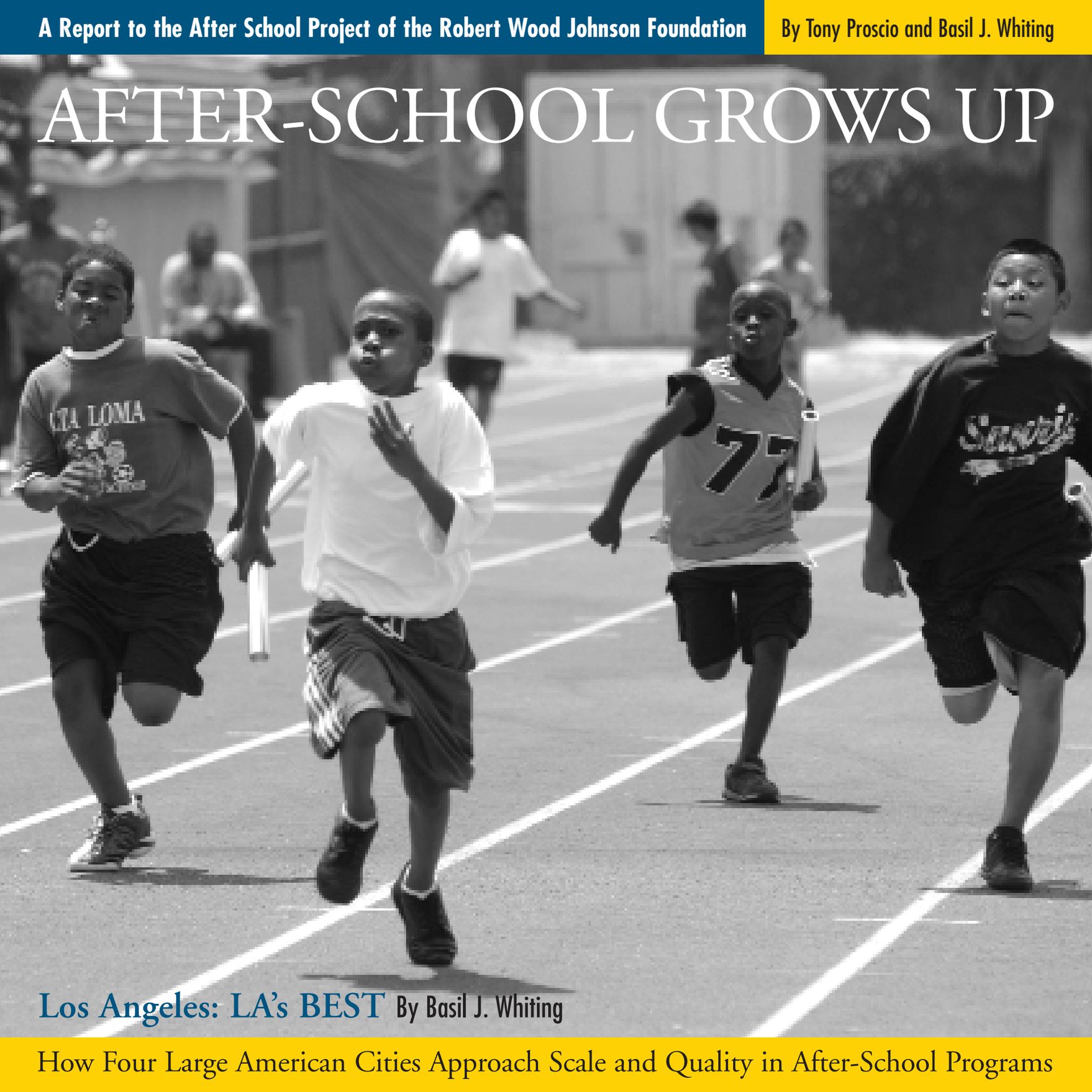


# AFTER-SCHOOL GROWS UP



Los Angeles: LA's BEST By Basil J. Whiting

How Four Large American Cities Approach Scale and Quality in After-School Programs



Photographs courtesy of LA's BEST.

# Los Angeles

## LA's BEST

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BY BASIL J. WHITING

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**I**N EARLY 1988, LOS ANGELES was concerned about a rising tide of juvenile crime, drugs, and gang activity in poor neighborhoods. Not only were adults and businesses being victimized, but so were other, often younger, children. A later research report noted of that era<sup>1</sup> that “overall, an estimated 85 percent of the children interviewed mentioned ‘guns’ or ‘shootings’ as a common feature in their immediate surroundings.” Some of what the children said:

*Too many gang-bangers in our neighborhood and they shoot a lot.... They try to rob you, or kill you over your colors.... They try to beat you up.... Last time they shot a pregnant woman... Sometimes when I'm outside with my friends, we feel that people might come and grab us....*

As a result, the children said,

*We have bars on the windows and bars on the doors.... They keep me inside, they don't let anyone come in.... My mother doesn't let us out if she's not home.... Most of the time, I'm in the house.*

Alarmed at such conditions, then-

Mayor Tom Bradley gave a speech calling for the creation of after-school programs for 100,000 kids in poor neighborhoods. At the time, the city was not devoid of youth-serving activities in the hours from roughly 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. For instance, the Youth Services Division of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) did (and still does) provide adult supervision at playgrounds at every elementary and middle school in the after-school hours. Some of these had (and more now have) a spectrum of well-organized activities, but they are permissive, drop-in programs, with no sign-in and only two youth service workers per playground, regardless of how many kids attend. While the playground programs are free, the few other existing after-school programs in 1988 were limited and costly to parents. The LAUSD operated licensed child care centers adjacent to or on the property of some elementary schools for a sliding-scale fee based on parental income. And various Boys and Girls Clubs and YM/WCAs offered after-school care on a fee-for-service or similar sliding scale.

Mayor Bradley had something else in mind — well-staffed, sign-in after-school programs that would be free, keep children safe and out of trouble, give them something positive to do with their after-school time, enrich their educations, and broaden their exposures to arts, athletics,

and the outdoors. Where to start? Los Angeles was and still is a massive school district, now counting over 800,000 students, over 400 elementary schools, over 70 middle schools, 60 high schools, and several dozen multi-level, magnet, and continuation high schools. Its school population is four-fifths Latino, 10 percent African American, 4 percent Caucasian, and 3 percent Asian, with less than a percent made up of Filipino/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. Seventy percent of all students meet federal poverty guidelines. The transience rate (kids who move into or out of a school during the school year) is 25 percent. In 1988, facing only slightly lower levels of total enrollment, ethnic diversity, and poverty, Bradley determined to begin his initiative in elementary schools whose neighborhoods faced the greatest problems of gangs, crime, drugs, low educational performance, and poor test scores.

Why elementary schools, when gangs were composed mainly of older kids? None of those involved in after-school programs in Los Angeles would say that it was too late to have an impact on the older kids, but instead maintained that such kids were a tougher problem, and there were few good models of what to do for them. It was a better strategic choice, they said, to begin with younger kids for whom successful, or at least promising,

<sup>1</sup> Denise Huang, Barry Gibbons, Kyung Sun Kim, Charlotte Lee, and Eva L. Baker, “A Decade of Results: The Impact of LA’s BEST After-school Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement and Performance,” UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE), Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, June 2000, p. 20. The report cited interviews made in March 1990, and notes that a decade later, in May 2000, “the bleak conditions of families and children

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after-school programming models had been developed, models that might have greater leverage in getting such kids on the right track and keeping them there.

### **Creation and Evolution**

LIKE MANY BIG (AND SMALL) CITY MAYORS, Tom Bradley had no direct control over the School District, which reported to an independently elected board. Bradley wanted closer working relations between the city government and LAUSD, and he thought that one way to do that was to run after-school programs via a city/School District partnership, starting in troubled elementary schools and extending eventually to all city schools. The mayor would commit city funding to start the program and support it during its early years, but he would need the cooperation of LAUSD to host the after-school program and broad civic support to design, promote, and support it.

Bradley appointed a 53-member Education Council of civic leaders and charged it with creating a public/private partnership to support an enriched after-school program and a City/LAUSD partnership to operate it. One of the appointees was Carla Sanger, then a consultant to the California Department of Education on school readiness who had been executive

director of the Los Angeles Child Care and Development Council for almost eight years. Previously, she had been one of several supervisors of day care services for the state of New Jersey and had started a nationally recognized after-school program in Perth Amboy in 1973.

With the LAUSD expressing willingness to cooperate, the council worked into the summer of 1988 and produced a plan for elementary after-school programming that set the values of what became LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow). It would provide a balanced program of educational supplementation and homework help, enrichment activities of all kinds, recreation, and a snack, during the period from 3 to 6 p.m. on school days in school facilities. The mayor promised \$1 million per year in city tax-increment money for the first two years of operation.

There was some thought on the council about using state funds for licensed child care, but the child care and child development agencies did not want the broad after-school mission. Further, the licensed child care system had limited funds, a strong bureaucracy, and staffing requirements with mandatory hiring credentials that the council thought too restrictive and expensive. The council's after-school plan called for an adult/child ratio of 1 to 20, not the 1 to 14 that the child care system required. Further, that plan required

hiring flexibility to utilize a range of local community people as staff: parents, college students, other neighborhood people, as well as some certified teachers.

LA's BEST began operations in the fall of 1988 in ten elementary schools for about 200 children in each school. In October of that year, the Education Council asked Carla Sanger to visit some of the schools and assess progress. Sanger says:

**I visited five schools and did not like what I was seeing. Everything was too tight; there was no laughter and fun; it was like an extension of the school day. It had to be fun, because if it were just more school, then the kids would vote with their feet and not come. I wrote a position paper for the mayor, who called me in, heard me out, and asked how I'd change things. I said we had too much formal curricula, too much rigidity, and not enough staff who were well-suited for after-school programming.**

The Education Council responded by recommending that LA's BEST establish a full-time position of after-school executive director and chose Sanger for the job. Over the next year or so, Sanger transformed the large, 53-member Educational Council, which had done its job, into a 35-person board for what became a nonprofit corporation: the LA's BEST

*What evolved was a complex structure of formal and informal, overlapping relationships...*

administrative core, called the Corporate Office, located in the Office of the Mayor. This central coordinating and management entity applied for and received its 501(c)(3) tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service in 1990 — making it, in effect, a nonprofit organization responsible both formally to its board and informally to the mayor.

The mayor and the School District, however, had agreed on a full partnership, with the district “running” the after-school programs in the schools. What evolved was a complex structure of formal and informal, overlapping relationships in both the mayor’s office and the District that is often confusing to outsiders but reflects a balance of interests and resources between these two independent forces that has stood the test of time.

To structure the School District’s role, Sanger worked to create an LA’s BEST Operations Office within LAUSD and formally accountable both to the school board and the schools administrators. This operations staff runs the after-school programs in the participating schools and is employed by and reports formally to the School District (but is informally responsible to the LA’s BEST board as well). To run the Operations Office, Sanger chose Debe (pronounced Debby) Loxton as Program Coordinator. The LA’s BEST corporate board later changed

Sanger’s title to President & CEO, and she prevailed upon LAUSD to change Loxton’s title to Chief Operating Officer or COO. Sanger says she and Loxton also worked “long and hard” with the LAUSD personnel commission and School Board to create other LAUSD Operations Office positions, which will be described in a later section.

In September 1989, LA’s BEST expanded to 15 schools and grew further over the next few years until it reached about 24 schools in 1993, when Richard Riordan was elected mayor. Its budget had risen to more than \$2.5 million, with the city providing almost \$2 million and private funds the rest. Riordan was a Republican succeeding a Democrat, and thus brought in new and different relationships. Sanger says,

**They thought differently and bigger. He was for after-school but he told me, ‘You only have 24 schools. You have got to go to scale.’ He wanted me to revamp the board. Well! I wasn’t happy about that at all; I loved my board. I’d worked with them a long time. We’d created this and built the ‘branding’ of the LA’s BEST name.**

**I was digging my heels in on this when along came this management consulting firm, Bain and Company. It was looking for a nonprofit poised for expansion to**

**which it could donate \$500,000 in pro-bono consulting services. We won the interview for their services; and they came in, took a good look at us, and basically told me I was wrong. They said I should in fact go to scale and revamp my board.**

Sanger set up a strategic planning committee of herself and LA’s BEST board members. It recommended restructuring the board into two bodies: a governing board for the LA’s BEST corporation and an advisory board of programming experts to work with the LAUSD after-school Operations Office. With Bain’s continuing advice, the restructuring proceeded. Sanger is pleased with the result:

**Riordan gave me a hotshot Republican chair for my governing board who is just great to work with and a great fundraiser. I now have a terrific, businesslike board and this absolutely wonderful staff. The governing board gets us connections and resources, while the advisory board is the steward of our quality.**

Bain and the new governing board also advised Sanger on how to set up for expansion. They pointed out that the public and nonprofit worlds are very different management-wise; business, they said, would never expand without creating the infrastructure to support expansion.

sion. Sanger's experience in the nonprofit world was the opposite:

*You scramble and overwork your present staff to expand the program, then hope to get enough overhead money somehow to grow your staff to support the expansion. You know what? They were right; they taught me a lot. It works much better their way.*

LA'S BEST had grown slowly into the mid-1990s; and with the management structure for expansion in place, Sanger knew that she had to draw the state into funding after-school at some scale and that she had to have allies to do that.

*We had to have our own funding stream. So, we got together with San Diego and Sacramento and other cities with after-school programs and formed a coalition and got legislation introduced that I helped write, to provide state funding for after-school programs separate and distinct from school-age child care. Riordan fought for us, and we succeeded in getting the legislation passed and an initial \$5 million appropriated. We've been back and forth on legislation several times to shape things the way we needed and to grow the appropriations, which are now \$100 million per year, statewide, of which we*

*in LA's BEST get over \$7.5 million in about 9 different grants.*

LA's BEST's budget slowly grew from \$2 million in 1990-91 to just over \$3 million in 1996-97 and 1997-98, then exploded as state and federal after-school funding came on-stream in the later 1990s. In the last six years, the LA's BEST budget has grown from \$4.4 million in 1998-99 to more than \$23 million in the 2003-04 school year, with the program now serving more than 19,000 students in 114 elementary schools. (See bar graph on page 43.)

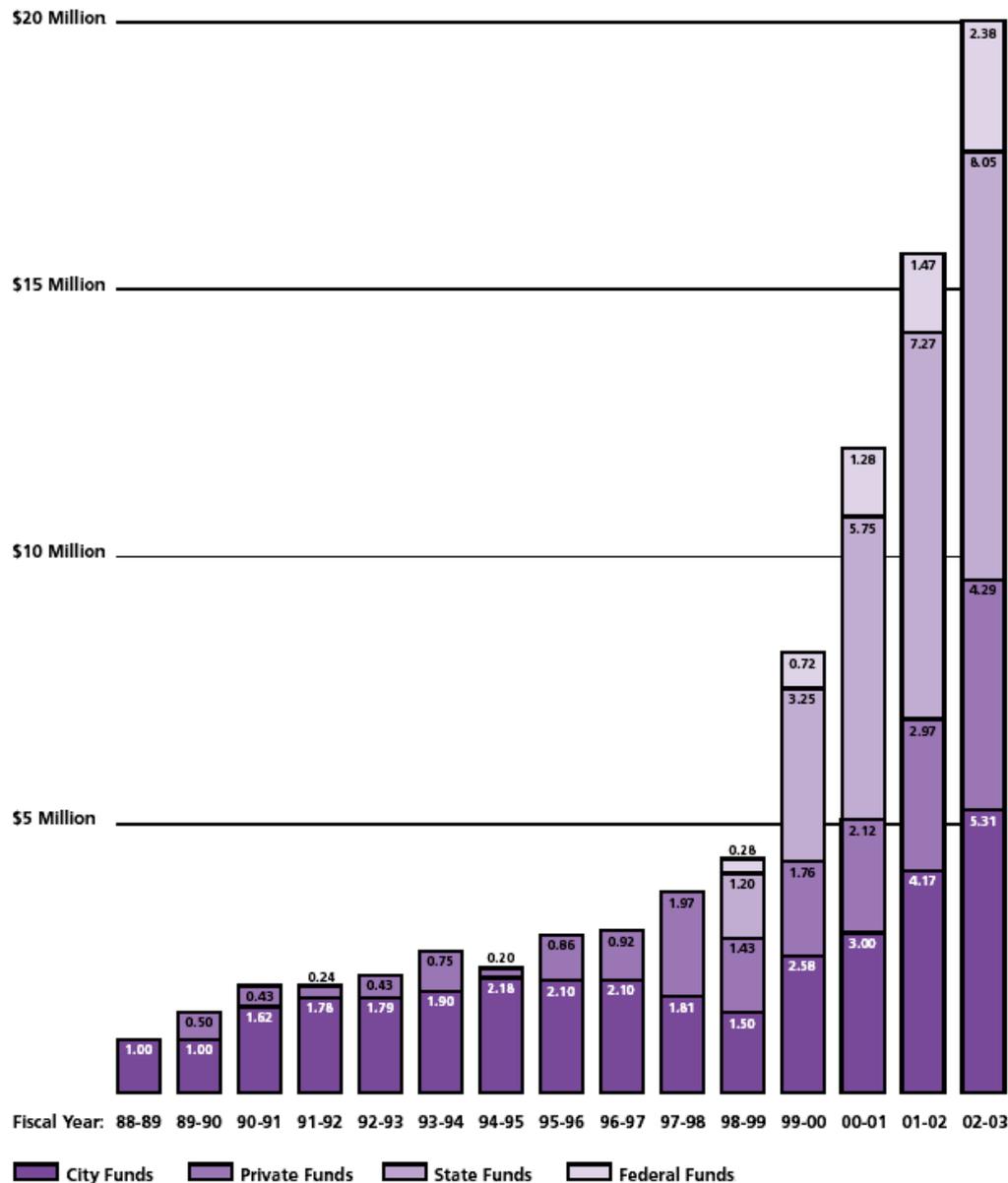
Several years ago, Sanger was called by movie star and later governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was trying to set up programs for older kids, especially a middle-school after-school program he was calling "Arnold's All Stars." They had lunch, and Schwarzenegger questioned her closely on all aspects of LA's BEST and asked for her help. She agreed and has worked with him on various initiatives for after-school since then. Arnold's All Stars program is now in several Los Angeles middle schools and is now the second, and only other, after-school program working out of the Mayor's Office. Schwarzenegger subsequently led the battle for California Proposition 49 to establish a much larger, permanent, constitutionally authorized state funding

stream for after-school services. To the surprise of veteran political observers, the voters overwhelmingly approved it. When (and, some say, if) California returns to fiscal health and certain budgetary trigger points in the proposition are surpassed, as much as \$500 million in state funding will flow to after-school programs throughout the state. For now, as the state struggles through a severe budget crisis, Sanger and other after-school supporters take comfort in the fact that the new governor is an after-school champion and, if cuts come, they will not be made callously.

### **More Than LA's BEST**

AS LA'S BEST GREW in the mid-1990s, Sanger concluded that it needed top-level support and top-level access within the bureaucracy of LAUSD. Roy Romer, the former governor of Colorado, was about to come on board as superintendent of schools, and Sanger went to outgoing Superintendent Ramon Cortines, whom she had worked with closely and successfully in building LA's BEST, and pressed him to create, before he left, a position reporting directly to the superintendent on after-school matters. Cortines agreed, but the day before he left he called Sanger and said, "Carla, I'm sorry; I just couldn't get to it."

## History of Program Funding



So Sanger approached a new, unknown, and decidedly unusual superintendent. She says,

I met with Romer and had all kinds of people call him and I didn't think it was going well. But, you know, he'd heard me and checked this all out and he created an assistant superintendent position — since elevated to associate superintendent — and put into it John Liechty, who was an old inside hand who knew everybody in the system but who had lost out in the musical chairs of reorganization. John probably thought this was some kind of consolation prize bordering on Siberia and hesitated, but finally took it. And he has just become an incredible champion for us, and we're so glad he's there.

John Liechty heads what is called the Beyond the Bell Branch of the LAUSD, reporting directly to the superintendent. (“Beyond the Bell” means anything before and after school as well as other special programs.) Because LA's BEST is so old and so well known, outsiders often consider it to be “the” after-school program of Los Angeles. But from Liechty's perspective, LA's BEST is now but one (albeit a special one) of many programs in his branch. Loxton and the LA's BEST Operations Office formally report to him. Liechty says,

*“We’ve built a model here, a Los Angeles model that is the best kept secret in the after-school world. We are the only school district in the country that I know of that has a superintendent-level position in charge of after-school programs.”*

We’ve built a model here, a Los Angeles model that is the best kept secret in the after-school world. We are the only school district in the country that I know of that has a superintendent-level position in charge of after-school programs. Having an executive position in charge has helped establish a broad array of programs and brought credibility to after-school programs.

The Branch provides all the LAUSD’s elementary and middle schools with some combination of three levels of programming:

The first level is Youth Services, which the Branch runs. The longstanding program, which predates LA’s BEST, is fairly universal. It remains a permissive recreation program in which two trained adults supervise playground activity and some organized sports. It’s a drop-in program serving 50,000 kids daily and a kind of “safety net” that they can always go to.

The second level comprises sign-in programs that have set curricula for three kinds of activities: homework help, academic enrichment, and other enrichment like arts and crafts and recreation, plus a snack or breakfast. These generally have an adult/child ratio of 1 to 20 and fall into before- and after-school categories.

- **Before School:** LAUSD runs a state-funded Before-School Education Safety Program called “Ready, Set, Go!” which operates in 55 elementary schools, providing a safe place for an hour and a half before school, with academic help, light recreation, and breakfast.
- **After School:** LAUSD’s second-level after-school programs mostly run from 2 to 6 p.m., five days a week, for all 180 school days (or in some cases more, if the school operates year-round). Providers that Beyond the Bell contracts with for such after-school programs include LA’s BEST and these additional organizations: A World Fit for Kids!, Arnold’s All Stars, Boys and Girls Club of San Pedro, Bresee Foundation, Building Up Los Angeles, Los Angeles Center for Educational Research, Martin Luther King Legacy, Para Los Niños, STAR, Woodcraft Rangers, and the YWCA.

Adding to the system’s complexity, there are now 240 LA’s BEST and other such after-school programs that receive some degree of public funding from School District sources. But there are numerous other after-school programs operating in district schools that are not funded by district funds and thus not counted among the 240 cited. LA’s BEST’s 114 sites fit in both categories: Seventy receive funding that flows from LAUSD sources to LA’s BEST’s Operations Office and thus are in the 240 cited. The funding of the other 44 LA’s BEST sites is raised by LA’s BEST’s Corporate Office from non-LAUSD sources (though it, too, is eventually provided to the LA’s BEST Operations

Office to support in-school operations).

It is important to note that at least 70 schools have two or more such after-school programs in addition to their youth services playground program and, perhaps, a before-school program as well.

Of these after-school programs, LA’s BEST is unique. First, it is the largest, oldest, and some say best provider. (Liechty says, “It is just outstanding, and I’d put them into every school if I could.”) Second, it is the only after-school program staffed directly by the Beyond the Bell Branch through the LA’s BEST Operations Office, whose personnel work “for” LAUSD and only on LA’s BEST, though paid from a variety of funding sources. And third, it and Arnold’s All Stars are the only two after-school programs headquartered in the Mayor’s Office.

The third level of Beyond the Bell programming comprises a range of auxiliary services, supplemental educational services, and extended learning opportunities.

The budget of the Beyond the Bell Branch has grown from \$50 million when it started to about \$225 million at the end of 2003, reflecting the increase in federal, state, local, and private funding flowing to such programs. This includes about \$85 million from federal, state, county, and LAUSD sources (including \$25 million from LAUSD). The Branch also receives about \$75 million from No

Child Left Behind and another \$65 million for summer schools. The Branch's expenditures include \$17.3 million from a variety of sources for the LA's BEST Operations Office.

### Structure and Staffing

AS NOTED EARLIER, LA's BEST's unusual, complex, somewhat overlapping organizational structure was set early in its existence. It is a partnership between a Corporate Office in the Mayor's Office charged with raising funds for the program, promoting it, and linking it with community constituents; and an Operations Office in the LAUSD charged with hiring and supervising the staff operating the after-school program within school settings. The accompanying organizational chart on page 46, simplified from one in LA's BEST's publications, displays these relationships. The mayor and the School District each have strong voices in the selection of all the key people involved in this structure and in its operation. In practice, this devolves to Sanger and Loxton.

On the left side of the chart is the Corporate Office, housed in the Mayor's Office, led by Sanger as president and CEO. It consists of about 13 people and centers on the functions of fundraising and accounting, public information, and



developing community resources to support LA's BEST. The Corporate Office is formally responsible to the board of directors and advised by an advisory board, as described earlier. It and the board of directors are overseen by the mayor and City Council, who have an informal but powerful voice in their selection. The board is critically important in raising funds and generating community support for LA's BEST, while the advisory board is composed of educational and after-school experts and relates both to the Corporate Office and to the Board of Education and its superintendent of schools.

On the right side of the chart, the LA's BEST Operations Office, housed in the School District and headed by Chief

Operating Officer Loxton, is formally responsible to the associate superintendent for the Beyond the Bell Branch (John Liechty), who in turn reports to Superintendent Roy Romer. In practice, Loxton interacts closely and regularly with Sanger, too. Loxton's operations staff numbers more than 1,600 people, all of whom are employees of the LAUSD on an either full- or part-time basis — and who, as noted earlier, work solely on LA's BEST. The relationships between the LAUSD and the Mayor's Office are such that no COO would be appointed without agreement by both.

- About 38 people work in the Operations Office headquarters, of whom 19 are full time, including Loxton as COO and the directors of education, staff development, operations, and technology, plus a citywide events coordinator and a volunteer coordinator, and much of their immediate supporting staffs.
- Below the directors of education, staff development, and operations is another unusual dual structure at the middle manager level. The 114 after-school sites are organized into 23 clusters of four or five schools in close geographic proximity, with each school's program led by a "site coordinator." Each of these clusters is supported by a mid-management team composed of a "traveling supervisor" and an "activities director." The 23 traveling supervisors report to the director of operations and exercise formal supervisory authority with respect to administrative, budgetary, safety, and other regulatory-compliance matters. Their teammates, the 23 activities consultants, are advised by the director of education and assist the on-site site coordinators and

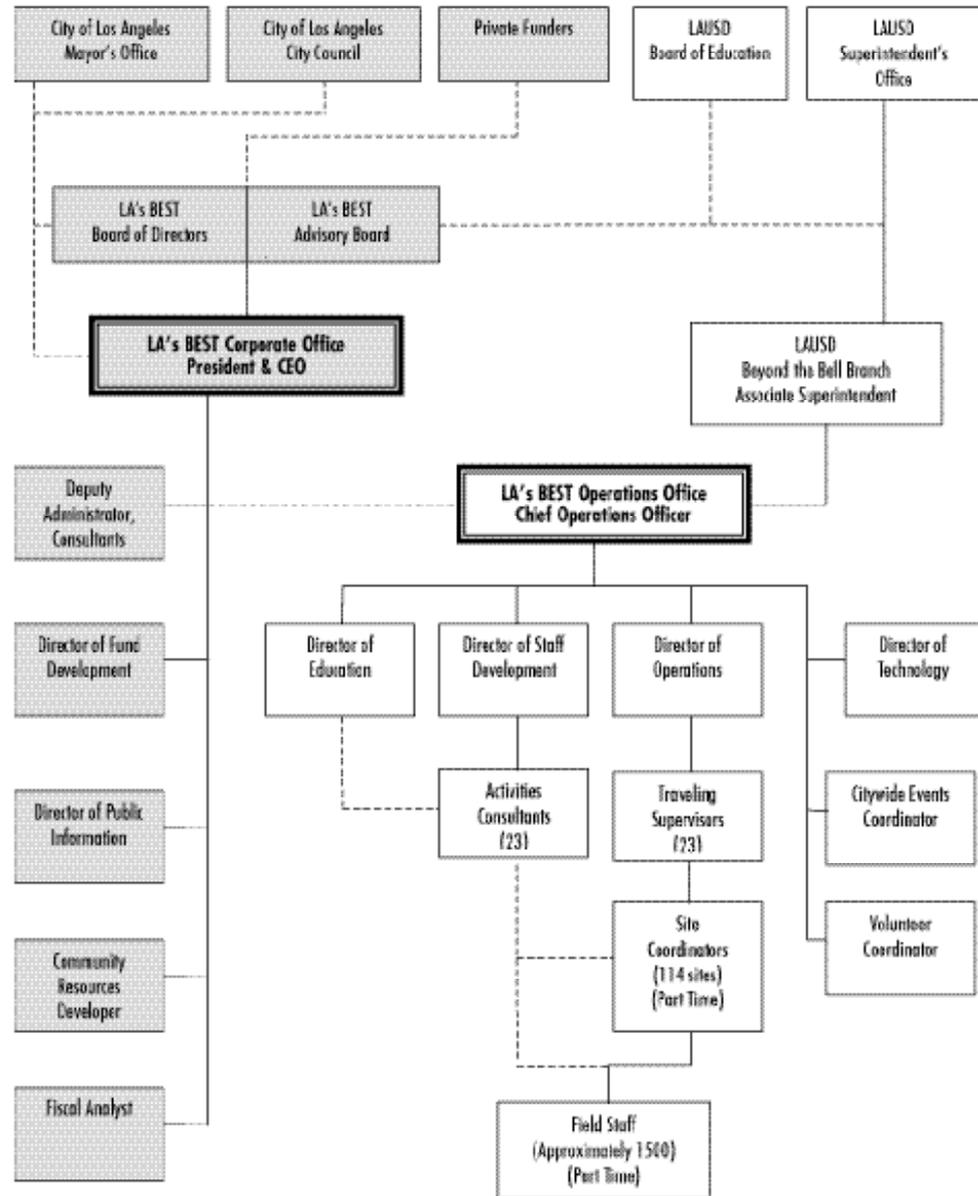
their in-school staff on program design, content, and materials. Loxton says the activities consultants are “the keepers of the flame,” of program content and quality. Many of the traveling supervisors and activities consultants are certified teachers. Both the activities consultants and the traveling supervisors work part-time for L.A.’s BEST, making \$19.42 an hour.

- The 114 after-school program coordinators at each school make \$17.50 an hour and direct LA’s BEST operations at each school. Depending on the size of their program, they may supervise program specialists (often one or two of the school’s certified teachers, who make \$15.77 an hour; a playground supervisor, who is deputy site coordinator and makes \$13.86 an hour; several program workers who work directly with the kids and who make \$11.92 an hour; and one or more program helpers, who are generally high school students and receive a stipend of \$6.75 an hour. All of these school-level personnel work for LA’s BEST’s Operations Office part-time, generally from 2 to 6 p.m. Their efforts may be supplemented by volunteers. (These wages meet the living wage ordinance of the city of Los Angeles.)

Part-time employees of LA’s BEST who are certified teachers and also work full-time “regular” teaching jobs thus hold two jobs with the same employer, LAUSD, with different duties and different rates of pay. They receive two W-2 forms, but, as part-timers, are not eligible for additional benefits for their LA’s BEST work. Sanger says:

This has never been a problem for us. There are plenty of teachers who love this program and are happy to work some extra hours at this pay with the

### LA’s BEST Organizational Structure



Source: “Balance for Success: LA’s BEST After-school Enrichment Program, 2002-2003 Annual Report,” LA’s BEST Mayor’s Office, City of Los Angeles, p. 14.

*“We’re never finished, in the sense there is always more to do to improve and cover more kids better... We need to constantly work at keeping the bureaucratic culture of fear of mistakes at bay.”*

freedom to do what they want to do — which may be very different from what they teach during the regular day. True, every year someone with union connections puts a bill in the mill in Sacramento to require the full, negotiated teacher salaries for teachers working in after-school programs. But there hasn’t been a very big push for it, and we’ve always been able to hold that off.

LA’s BEST’s field staff are more reflective of the ethnicities of the children they work with than is the teaching staff of the regular school day. According to a recent survey, three-quarters of LA’s BEST’s field staff are Latino and 13 percent are African-American. In addition, 76 percent are currently enrolled in college, 16 percent are college graduates, 49 percent are paraprofessionals who also work in the regular LAUSD school day, 9 percent are credentialed teachers, 61 percent are local community residents, 4 percent are parents of an LA’s BEST child, and nearly three-quarters are under the age of 25. Roughly one out of every three LA’s BEST field employees is a man, compared with a national after-school average of one to seven.

A final observation on structure: LA’s BEST’s double-dualities (parallel, interacting structures in the Mayor’s Office and LAUSD, and middle-management

teams of traveling supervisors and activities consultants) look unwieldy and a potential source of miscommunication, unclear responsibility and accountability, and finger-pointing. But according to all observers, it has not worked out that way. One reason is that many of the key people in LA’s BEST have been in place for a reasonably long time; the average tenure of field staff ranges from 3.34 to 5.29 years, and over 12 percent are LA’s BEST parents or former LA’s BEST students. Further, some key personnel — importantly including both Sanger and Loxton — have been in place since the program’s inception 15 years ago.

Roles and responsibilities have thus been worked out and tested over time. Partnership is celebrated. Sanger says, “All this rests on partnerships and relationships; we have great partnerships with the LAUSD and our various civic supporters, and they have to be maintained. It’s all about relationships and relationship tending.” Loxton says, “All of this works because we have such great partnerships. One is the partnership between the Mayor’s Office and the LAUSD. We wouldn’t have what we’ve got if either of us tried to do this alone. The other is between myself and Carla; she is an incredible partner.”

Other reasons are that both sides of the organization have an almost palpable

commitment to after-school programming as an important innovation in education; both have cultures that stress creativity and actively combat tendencies toward bureaucracy; and both see themselves as forces of change within the larger LAUSD system. Sanger says:

*We’re never finished, in the sense there is always more to do to improve and cover more kids better. We’re now trying to assemble a whole new support system of young professionals who would bring their energy to after-school programs. We need to constantly work at keeping the bureaucratic culture of fear of mistakes at bay. We need to keep our culture of crusading for good ideas and values, and following up with efficiency.*

Loxton again echoes her:

*This is not an organizational culture for everyone. It feels chaotic, but everyone takes ownership of what they do and of what we all do. It requires that we all have a lot of trust in each other so that we are “free.” In fact, my biggest challenge is, as we grow, not to lose our intimacy, our philosophy, and our culture. I have to fight every day to keep from being bureaucratized by LAUSD. My goal is to slowly change the culture of the district. We work hard to push*

*... LA's BEST reflects an unusual organizational structure and set of relationships between independent government forces in Los Angeles — the mayoralty and the superintendent of schools — that has endured and functioned well over 15 years...*

things out, not down, to support personal authority and foster creativity. We want our staff not to think they work “for” this organization but that they “contribute” to it. I hope that I challenge how they think. I like disequilibrium and think you can change systems by changing how people look at the system. You just have to keep infusing new energy and ideas and adapting to the kids as they and their interests change — and they change all the time.

Importantly, Loxton's boss, Associate Superintendent of the Beyond the Bell Branch John Liechty, feels the same way:

Regular school systems can be highly bureaucratic and regimented, and I see us as a kind of beachhead within the system, a force for organizational and cultural change. I see myself as a champion of Beyond the Bell programs within the system. At the same time I'm a buffer for these programs against the jealousies of the larger traditional system, where there still are a lot of people who say, “this is not our job,” or who would try to control it and make these programs more like regular school. After-school programs are more than just an extension of the school day.

At bottom, LA's BEST reflects an unusual organizational structure and set of relationships between independent government forces in Los Angeles — the mayoralty and the superintendent of schools — that has endured and functioned well over 15 years and through several changes in the personalities holding those positions. No one could say where “ultimate power” lies in this structure, what would happen if “push came to shove” on some policy or personnel matter. Instead, the fact that “push” hasn't come to “shove” in the 15 years of LA's BEST's existence may be a testament to both the emerging political constituency for after-school programming and the fact that this admittedly odd relationship serves everyone well.

### **Program Content and Quality**

NOT SURPRISINGLY, Sanger and Loxton each stated similar philosophies for LA's BEST programming. Sanger:

We really believe that kids are “hard-wired” to engage with their surroundings and to make relationships with other people. It's in our nature as human beings. The purpose, then, of our after-school program was and is to surround kids for at least that time frame from 3 to 6 p.m. with positive things and peo-

ple to engage with instead of the negative or non-productive things they might find on the streets or watching TV.

Early on, in the first year, we established what we call our “three and a half beats”: First, homework help, which the kids, and especially the parents, wanted. Second, something that was cognitively developmental or enriching, but not just more of the school curriculum — no, we used projects and games and lively activity. And third, something that was the kids' choice — with a lot of those choices being a club or recreational activity. Oh, and of course a snack, which is the “half beat.” We still use the “three and a half beats” today, with a lot of looseness and flexibility and local creativity on what actually gets done each day.

Balance was the watchword then, and it is now. Everyone wants homework help, but you also have to help kids to get better academically and give them some broader exposures and activities, including recreation.

Loxton:

We grow our programs out of the kids' interests. What does a kid want or need? What are they interested in? We try to draw out what kids are interested in when we design activities. So, we use very much a facilitative style, trying to

*“We grow our programs out of the kids’ interests. What does a kid want or need? What are they interested in?”*

engage the kids and make them part of their own activities, rather than supervising them and directing them. We try to motivate the staff and motivate the kids. Carla says we often try something, then download a protocol, rather than the other way around. This style is why the adult/student ratio of 1 to 20 works: We are facilitators and leaders, not supervisors or directors.

In practice, these principles are reflected in a set of “core activities” that includes but is not limited to homework help, drill team and dance, reading and literacy activities, performing and visual arts, seasonal sports, music, science club, math activities, computer activities, arts and crafts, recreational games, conflict resolution, nutrition, and excursions. Each local site staff assembles agendas of such activities to meet the needs and interests of its students. These activities may be supplemented by bringing in local resources like businesspeople or artists.

In addition, there is a roster of citywide events provided by LA’s BEST such as Halloween Kidfest, citywide athletic competitions, a “community jam against violence,” drill and dance team showcases, and family days at “Raging Waters” (a local water park that donates two days each year to 14,000 student and parent attendees from LA’s BEST). Finally, there

are dozens of special activities and excursions arranged by the LA’s BEST citywide events coordinator, such as visits to museums, parks, performing arts performances, professional ballgames, amusement parks, college campuses, fire stations, parades, and so on. LA’s BEST provides buses to transport children and staff to these events and strives to ensure that these opportunities are fairly shared, with each school’s after-school programming having at least one such activity each year. (In addition, local site coordinators can arrange such events on their own and request busing as needed.)

School-level LA’s BEST programs are normally funded to accommodate 10 to 15 percent of the school’s population, with some schools having waiting lists. Students are recruited on a first-come, first-served basis, with the exception of some slots held by LA’s BEST staff for students deemed by teachers, counselors, or principals to be in particular need of LA’s BEST’s services, because of poor academic performance, limited exposure to enriching activities, or family problems that LA’s BEST’s content and staff attention might alleviate. School-site staff generally over-enroll so that absences do not reduce average daily attendance below the requirements of funding sources (hence, LA’s BEST enrolls 19,000 students for 17,000 funded slots). In schools with

full-year, multi-track operations, a traveling program supervisor said, “We strive to have 20 kids for each track (A, B, C, D) and group them by age, with Group 1 being K-1, Group 2 for grades 1-2, Group 3 for grades 3-4, and Group 4 for grades 4-5.”

How this works out on one site is described by Juaquin Martinez, himself a former high school helper for LA’s BEST and now site coordinator at Sylvan Park Elementary School in the San Fernando Valley. This school is an exemplary site and has been designated by LA’S BEST as one of its six “regional learning centers” — part of a statewide network of 15 schools that offer training programs for personnel of other after-school programs.

**Our schedule begins at 2:40 p.m., when our twelve program workers — all college students — arrive. We staff at a 1-to-20 adult/child ratio for our enrollment of 180 students and have six volunteers to help out, including fourth and fifth graders who are in a track that is off for this quarter and who come to help out.**

**At 2:49 p.m. the closing school bell rings and kids check in and have their snack until 3:20, when they start their homework. That runs until 4:20. At 4:20 we start Activity I which could be math, science, computers, literature, motor skills (really physical education),**

arts and crafts; and that runs till 5:05. Activity II runs from 5:10 to 6-ish. We have lots of things they want to do, including various clubs, reading, cooking, weaving, Karaoke. On Fridays we have a special kids' choice day, and they do things they've planned.

We have 60 languages in this school district, mostly Spanish though. We find that LA's BEST helps them learn English. My activities coordinator provides curricula and materials for all these activities, and we can use them as we please. We have lots of flexibility and freedom. Usually I plan each week around a theme, and we run the activities within that theme.

Working relationships between LA's BEST staff and regular school personnel are generally congenial. Some site coordinators report tensions over access to space (teachers can bristle at others' using "their" rooms, especially if materials are missing or the room is messy the next morning). These concerns are more common in new school buildings or in the early months of a new program's operation. They usually shake out over time, according to Sylvan Park's principal, who invites close cooperation and consultation between his and Martinez's staffs, trading notes regularly on student progress and needs.<sup>2</sup> He says, "The teachers like LA's



BEST in part because it gets the homework done, and the teachers feel they can refer kids to it with special needs who will get something positive out of it. And Juaquin does a fine job. I'd just like more of it so we wouldn't have waiting lists."

Maintaining and enhancing program quality with a rapidly growing staff composed largely of college students and community people requires an aggressive staff-development effort. LA's BEST, mainly through its director of staff development, conducted more than 1,000 staff-training workshops over the course of the last school year, covering such subjects as art, classroom management, emergency procedures, evaluation, academic support and homework assistance, computers, drama, dance and drill team, literacy, sports, science, and character education. These enrich the day-to-day

interaction of activities consultants and on-site personnel.

## Income and Expenditures

THE TABLE ON PAGE 51 shows a detailed budget for Fiscal Year 2003-04, which is still in progress as this is written. Cash expenditures are projected to total \$19.2 million from nine state after-school grants, the City of Los Angeles' Community Development Block Grant, the general purpose city budget (mayor's discretionary funds), two federal Department of Justice grants, the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center program, and private contributions. Some of these funds are raised by and flow to the Corporate Office of LA's BEST, with some flowing on to the Operations Office. Others are obtained by LAUSD, or LAUSD and LA's BEST working in tandem, and flow from the School District to LA's BEST corporate or operations offices. However obtained and however they flow, of the total of \$19.2 million required, \$1.9 million is for the LA's BEST Corporate Office and \$17.3 million for the LAUSD Operations Office. Beyond this regular budget, an additional \$1.6 million is for "restricted program enhancements" (funds committed and directed by their donors to specific enhancement purposes like literacy

<sup>2</sup> This principal, Larry Kraft-Orozco, has also arranged a *before*-school program, Beyond the Bell's "Ready, Set, Go." Kraft-Orozco says, "It runs from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m., when breakfast is served. It is a structured, well-supervised program. We needed that because in this working class and poor neighborhood a lot of parents go to work early. I'd come in early and find kids on the sidewalk and hanging on the chain-link fence, waiting for the schoolyard and school building to

## LA's BEST Budget: Fiscal Year 2003-04

Funding Source	# Students (Funded Slots)	# Schools (Sites Supported)	Projected LAUSD Operations Expenditures	Projected LA's BEST Corporate Expenditures	Total Projected Expenditures	Revenues Confirmed	Variance
9 State After-school Grants	8,127	65	\$ 7,372,093	\$ 917,855	\$ 8,473,818	\$ 7,687,680	-786,138
City of Los Angeles Community Development Block Grant	4,400	23	3,838,646	432,000	4,270,646	4,000,000	-270,646
City of Los Angeles General Purposes (Mayor's Discretionary Funds)	500	0	574,110	0	574,110	574,110	0
2 U.S. Department of Justice Grants	2,800	16	2,629,334	136,279	2,765,613	2,765,613	0
Federal 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant	1,135	9	1,143,630	125,217	1,268,847	1,260,545	-8,302
Private Donations (individuals, corporations, foundations)	371	1	1,579,114	279,150	1,858,264	1,301,000	-557,264
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>17,333</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>\$ 17,320,797</b>	<b>\$ 1,890,501</b>	<b>\$ 19,211,298</b>	<b>\$ 17,588,948</b>	<b>-\$ 1,622,350</b>
Restricted Enhancements (for donor- designated purposes, e.g., arts, literacy, etc.)					1,638,795	1,638,795	0
In-Kind Supports (Chiefly lunches, bussing.)					2,673,000	2,673,000	0
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$ 23,523,093</b>	<b>\$ 21,900,743</b>	<b>-\$ 1,622,350</b>
Contingency/Reserve for 2004-05 — Corporate							-200,00
Contingency/Reserve for 2004-05 — LAUSD Opns Off							-1,716,025
Carry-Forward from 2002-03							1,627,527
<b>To Be Raised</b>							<b>-\$ 1,910,848</b>

*Note: This budget does not include LAUSD contributions of school buildings, utilities, parking, and security.*

programs or performing arts) and \$2.7 million reflects the value of in-kind contributions, mainly food and busing. Total resources needed for the year thus add up to \$23.5 million.

The anticipated revenues from the range of indicated sources leave a gap of \$1.6 million due to grant receipts, mostly from government programs, that were lower than the amounts requested.

LA's BEST then adds certain contingency reserves for its Corporate and LAUSD offices and an offset of \$1.6 million carried forward from the previous year, netting a total of \$1.9 million still to be raised. Sanger was optimistic that these gaps could be filled by fundraising in the 2003-04 fiscal year. (In the 2004-05 fiscal year, LA's BEST will also have to absorb a cut of \$1.7 million in its U.S.

Justice Department funds.)

This budget covers LA's BEST operations in 114 schools for 17,333 funded slots. By that reckoning, the total annual cost per funded slot is \$1,357 per year. (Actually, as noted earlier, more than 19,000 young people are served by the program, in part because of over-enrolling to keep average daily attendance at required levels in the funded slots.) That

amount provides service for program hours of 2:30 to 6 p.m. for each of the weighted average<sup>3</sup> of 217 days school is in session. (LA's BEST also covers an extra hour on Tuesdays, when most schools close early for teacher meetings; it does not, however, offer its programs on days when schools are not in session but most parents are working. Sanger acknowledges that this is an unmet need that is not within the scope of LA's BEST.)

The \$1,357 per student slot includes transportation, snacks, and other budgeted in-kind costs, but not the use of the school buildings, parking lots, security, etc., which are provided by LAUSD and estimated at \$23 million per year. Total administrative costs of both LA's BEST Corporate Office and LAUSD are 11.63 percent of the full budget.

## Evaluating the Impact on Students

FROM ITS INCEPTION IN 1988, LA's BEST knew that accountability would be demanded of it, not only in terms of providing a safe place for children to spend after-school hours or of the satisfaction of students and parents with the program, but also in terms of academic motivation and achievement. Accordingly, LA's BEST con-

tracted with the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation (UCLA/CSE) early on to study the effects of the program.

Since 1990, UCLA/CSE has conducted six formal evaluations of the LA's BEST program. In June 2000, the center released the results of its most complete and technical evaluation of the LA's BEST program to date.<sup>4</sup> This report summarized the results of the five previous evaluations as well as new achievement data for 20,000 elementary-school students in 24 schools over a seven-year period — one of the nation's most comprehensive studies of the academic and other impacts of an after-school program in the nation. In sum, the report cited six general findings comparing LA's BEST enrollees with comparable students who were not enrolled:

- Children felt safer after school. Parents felt their children were safer after school.
- Children in LA's BEST liked school more, were more engaged in school, and have higher expectations of themselves and greater motivation and enthusiasm for school.
- Positive relations between adults and children were well established in LA's BEST programs.
- Children in LA's BEST reported higher aspirations regarding finishing school and going to college.
- Students improve academically while involved in LA's BEST programs, and the higher their degree of participation, the greater their improvement.

- The enrichment activities of LA's BEST engender support from the children, teachers, and parents.

The report emphasized that “higher participation was significantly related to positive achievement on standardized tests of mathematics, reading, and language arts, when the influence of gender, ethnicity, income, and language status was controlled.” Higher levels of attendance in LA's BEST was also related to better subsequent school attendance. In addition, LA's BEST students showed higher “redesignation rates” from English language deficiency to competency and lower absenteeism. The evaluators stressed:

The fact that we can detect *any* change on standardized achievement measures in itself is notable, for most educational interventions are unable to show impact on measures not tightly tied to the curriculum, or on follow-up achievement after a particular program is over.

3 Because of crowding, about 200 L.A. schools run year-round with students attending three out of four sessions, A, B, C, and D, with one session “off” at any one time. Thus, the “217 school days” cited above is a weighted average; some schools are open 183 days while others with four tracks may be open as many as 246 days. Students who are “off” for a particular term can nonetheless attend the after-school program.

*“...If the economic environments where these children live do not change, what can be done to continue making a difference in their lives?...LA's BEST program is one answer.”*

## Challenges and the Future

BEYOND THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE of “keeping the bureaucratic culture at bay” and maintaining creativity and energy, those involved with LA's BEST cite several challenges and future goals. Sanger says,

We have good relationships with the school unions at present, and that requires constant massaging. That relationship could change. After-school programming has been on a wave of public attention and support in recent years, but waves peak and decline, and that could happen to us as new ‘good things’ emerge and claim public attention and support.

My goal for LA's BEST five years from now? I'd like to be running in 150 schools out of the 200 or so that are eligible by our eligibility criteria, [which are] mainly that 70 percent of the student body is on subsidized lunches.

Loxton agrees, but notches the numbers up:

We'd eventually like to be in all 200-plus elementary schools that meet our eligibility criteria, and also to deepen our coverage in each school so that we don't have waiting lists.

A politically experienced local business leader who chairs a city commission on children and families identifies the major challenge to and strength of LA's BEST:

It's very well run and Carla does a great job. The only real potential Achilles' heel is money. It needs to expand, both school-wise and coverage within each school; but you know from the news that California is strapped, and that ripples down to the localities. If we ever get to the trigger-points in Proposition 49 — substantial surpluses — that'll help. But we have a lot of financial problems to get over before then, and LA's BEST could always be hurt.

But while LA's BEST is good, it's not so much that it's led a charmed life as it has had and generated the right kind of political support over several different mayors, who gave it cover and support and assumed its goals as their own. There's a big constituency out there for after-school programming, and LA's BEST has become something of a sacred cow that no one wants to touch. Everybody ‘gets it’ about LA's BEST. All major forces agree on supporting it.

The evaluators from UCLA conclude with a broader and more somber theme:

[E]conomically poor families are exactly the families whose children participate in LA's BEST. That the conditions of poverty described in the early evaluation reports have worsened, rather than improved, suggests that the rationale for LA's BEST and its programs are even more important and necessary today than they were...when LA's BEST was founded.

And that leaves us then with the following questions: If the economic environments where these children live do not change, what can be done to continue making a difference in their lives? What can be done to keep these children safe, to keep them engaged in school, to keep them in contact with positive adult role models, to keep parents connected to schools and their children, to keep these children developing and growing in positive ways, to keep their academic achievement moving upward? According to these past evaluations, continuing to expand and develop [the] LA's BEST program is one answer.

# Acknowledgments

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**[www.fascorp.org](http://www.fascorp.org)**

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### *Other Sources in New York City*

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**Chicago, Illinois**

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## **With LA's BEST**

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## **With San Diego's "6 to 6"**

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## **With The After School Project**

**[www.theafterschoolproject.org](http://www.theafterschoolproject.org)**

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# About the After School Project

**T**HE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION created the After School Project in 1998 as a five-year, three-city demonstration aimed at connecting significant numbers of young people in low-income neighborhoods with responsible adults during out-of-school time. To that end, the Project focuses on developing: (1) consistent, dedicated revenues to support after school programs in low-income communities; (2) an array of developmental opportunities for youth, including physical activity and sports, educational, social, and recreational programs; and (3) strong local organizations with the necessary resources, credibility, and political clout to bring focus and visibility to the youth development field.

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