

What We've Learned: A Review of Recent Reports for LA's BEST by UCLA-CRESST

REPORT: *Implementing Project Based Learning at LA's BEST After School Program*

DATE: August 2005

Summary

- Action research study of project-based learning with three groups of students at a "typical" LA's BEST site. Designed to explore potential applicability of project-based learning to additional LA's BEST sites.
- Project-based learning: Experiential, driven by student-interests and choice, based on real-life issues, long-term projects, integrated curriculum, and self-assessment.
- UCLA demonstration/research team, led by Seeds/UES teacher, worked with LA's BEST children two days a week during 2004-2005 school year.
- Data collection: Participant-observation, interviews (staff, children, parents), student self-assessment, and student products.

Major Findings

- Increases in student engagement, working independently, depth and quality of work, and meta-cognition.
- Students showed enthusiasm and pride in their work.
- Students developed skills outlined in California Content Standards.
- LA's BEST staff members gained skills and confidence as educators, reported enacting values of LA's BEST.
- The demonstration/research team experienced challenges implementing project-based learning after school in an urban, public school setting.

Implications

- Common characteristics of after school programs in LAUSD can be challenges to implementing project-based learning (e.g., track changes, limited time available after school, lack of owned space, 20-1 student-staff ratio, differences between project-based learning and children's experiences during the regular school day).
- Implementing project-based learning can require a change in perspective by after school staff accustomed to teacher-directed learning.
- Moving successful initiatives and educators from a very different context to LA's BEST is not a simple matter.
- The ability to sustain a new initiative is dependent on retaining trained staff.

REPORT: *Keeping Kids in School: An LA's BEST Example, a Study Examining the Long-Term Impact of LA's BEST on Students' Dropout Rates*

DATE: December 2005

Summary

- Statistical study of high school persistence of students who participated in LA's BEST during the 1990s.
- Sample: Approximately 6,000 former LA's BEST students and a similar number of demographically matched students who had not participated in LA's BEST.
- Analyses: Bivariate analysis comparing students with one, two, or three years of LA's BEST experience to non-participant students; Cox survival analysis to estimate effects related to intensity of participation, gender, ethnicity, low-income status, and Limited English Proficiency status.

Major Findings

- Students who did not participate in LA's BEST are 14-20% more likely to drop out of high school than are similar peers who participated in LA's BEST.
- The strongest effects were for children who participated in LA's BEST for three or more years.
- The dropout reduction rate related to LA's BEST was greater for children who began the program with low-income status.
- "The more regularly the students attended the program, the higher the reduction of the hazard of dropping out of school" (pp. xiv-xv).

Implications

- Results of LA's BEST participation can endure for years after graduation from the program.
- Dosage matters. Regular LA's BEST attendance over multiple years best predicted long-term outcomes in children's lives.

REPORT: *Exploring the Intellectual, Social and Organizational Capitals at LA's BEST [Social Capital, Year 1]*

DATE: July 2006

Summary

- Exploratory study of non-material forms of capital at LA's BEST sites.
- Forms of capital under investigation . . .
 - Social capital: "The compilation of networks, civic norms, and social trust a community or school offers youth" (p. 5).
 - Intellectual capital: "The capabilities of staff to create an effective learning environment" (p. 3). Intellectual capital is comprised of "competence," "attitude," and intellectual agility" (p. 4).
 - Organizational capital: "The corporate or institutional culture and organizational practices that work toward increasing autonomy, collaboration, and profitability" (p. 5).
- Methods and participants: Classroom and playground observations, interviews and questionnaires (principals, traveling staff, site coordinators, parents, community members, LA's BEST corporate and operations staff members), and focus groups (teachers, site staff, students) at six sites.

Major Findings

- LA's BEST leverages organizational capital to promote social and intellectual capitals at the sites. These forms of capital provide important benefits to children, families, and communities.
- Field staff members "buy-in" to the LA's BEST mission and values.
- Sites and staff members benefit from hiring from the community and promoting from within.
- In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, LA's BEST responds to children's needs for safety, belonging, and esteem, while also providing a context for children to pursue self-actualization.
- Often due to work schedules and language barriers, "parent involvement in the traditional sense was limited" (p. 75).

Implications

- LA's BEST develops relationships that can make a difference in the life of a child.
- "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" (p. 83).
- At many different levels, LA's BEST has formed "a community of practice" that carries out the organization's mission and values.

REPORT: *The After-School Hours: Examining the Relationship between After School Staff-Based Social Capital and Student Engagement in LA's BEST [Social Capital, Year 2]*

DATE: January 2007 (*DRAFT*)

Summary

- Study on “the impact of afterschool relationships on positive student outcomes” (p. iii).
- Methods and sample: Surveys of students (n = 2,270) and staff members (n = 395) at 50 randomly selected LA's BEST sites.
- Variables: Staff perceptions of site-level social capital, student perceptions of relationships with LA's BEST staff, student attitudes toward education, student engagement in LA's BEST and the regular school day.
- Analysis: Descriptive statistics, Hierarchical Linear Modeling, and path analysis (structural equation modeling).

Major Findings

- Staff members provided positive responses to items on collective staff efficacy, communication and teamwork, and staff-student relationships. Student responses also indicated positive staff-student relationships.
- Student perceptions of social capital were significantly related to staff perceptions of staff-student relationships and staff collective efficacy.
- Girls, students who speak Spanish-only at home, and 3rd-graders reported more positive staff-student relationships.
- “Students who perceived more positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were more likely to be engaged in LA's BEST, placed a higher value on education, and in turn, were more highly engaged in the day school” (p. xi).

Implications

- LA's BEST staff members exhibited social capital (That is, they are confident in their co-workers and in their own ability to be successful on the job. They experience positive relationships with co-workers and children.)
- “Most notably, students felt important cared about, supported, and encouraged” (p. 52).
- Positive staff-student relationships are clearly related to positive school-related attitudes and behaviors for children.
- Relationships matter, for academic outcomes as well as social development.