

Creating A Culture of Literacy in Boyle Heights:

**A report to the community on the creation of the
Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative**

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Creating a Culture of Literacy in Boyle Heights

Introduction and Summary

In 2001, the Annenberg Foundation invested \$12.5-million in a high-risk venture that combined education reform and community development in Los Angeles' Boyle Heights neighborhood. In the midst of an extremely turbulent organizational and political environment, the grant created the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative, which would be called the BHLC. The new organization is poised to live beyond the original grant period and to be a model for other education-focused community organizations in Los Angeles and perhaps elsewhere. The story of the BHLC's creation is one of passion and tenacity. Perhaps most of all, it is a story about a community awakening to its educational problems and a community resolving to change its children's futures.¹

When the grant started, the remark was made that, "There are no bookstores in Boyle Heights," and, indeed, there were not. The community's low-income Latino households were not thought a good market for the written word. Despite an illustrious set of writers who grew up in the community, reading and literacy were less well associated with it than *novellas* and *la vida loco*.

Boyle Heights was also an educational reform backwater. Its schools had not participated heavily in the educational reforms of the 1990s. Despite a storied past of community activism—including the student walkouts of the 1960s and 1970s in protest over the quality of education and the virtual beginnings of the Chicano movement in the United States—Boyle Heights continued to tolerate poor educational performance. In 2003, only about four percent of Roosevelt High School students went on to a four-year college, only about two percent more than was the case 40 years before. And, by any standard, the dropout rate was horrible. Although there were many organizations that helped individual students, community leaders were largely disengaged from systemic educational change, and residents faced the more immediate issues of physical safety and economic survival.

The residents of Boyle Heights still face economic and safety concerns. Families still fear gang violence, and gentrification pressures are pushing them to move. *But, literally, education has become the talk of the town.* Parents and community-based organizations have learned that education is the key to success for their children.

¹ Cover Photo Credits: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection , Boyle Heights sign, c. 1980, <http://jpg1.lapl.org/pics06/00002546.jpg>. Inner City Struggle Web site <http://innercitystruggle.org/album> Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission <http://www.proyectopastoral.org>

They have learned the right questions to ask school principals, teachers, and counselors. They have learned that when they are organized, the school district will listen to them. Education has become the talk of the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative, as well.

Rather than an organization focused on home building, physical safety, school reform, and community advocacy, the BHLC has become an organization of home builders, police officers, physicians, teachers, school and college administrators, and community activists, all focused on student achievement and community literacy. In the words of its project director, the BHLC has become the “chamber of commerce of education.”

In many ways, it has taken on a larger, more focused, and more strategic mission than that envisaged when the grant program started. Boyle Heights is a big community with big schools: more than 87,000 residents in 6 square miles, and more than 20,000 students in public schools, with 5,126 in Roosevelt High School alone. Organizing for educational change required the BHLC to connect grass roots organizing to strategic influence both inside the community, and outside with the larger school district, city, and state. And it is doing so at a time when the relationships between the school superintendent, mayor, governor, and other influentials are in flux and highly contested.

It is little wonder, then, that the newly independent BHLC finds itself in waters that are both exciting and perilous. There is excitement about public education in Los Angeles, because the old system is almost universally seen as in crisis, and there is a willingness to explore options that would have been unthinkable 15 years ago. There is a new superintendent. The school district currently has 104 charter schools with more on the drawing board. Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has convinced the legislature to give him substantially greater influence in how the city schools are run, and this may extend to direct operational control of the schools in Boyle Heights. But regardless of what happens with the mayor’s plan, and regardless of what policies the new school superintendent follows, the BHLC has positioned itself to be influential within Boyle Heights and beyond.

Partly because of the influence of the BHLC, similar organizations are being formed in other Los Angeles neighborhoods, and, even in its fledgling state, the Boyle Heights collaborative serves as a model around which other organizations are forming. It participates in a citywide group of community organizations and it is considered a leader in the committee to get the school district to live up to its obligation to provide a college-ready education for all high school students. Simultaneously, the BHLC has joined the national Public Education Network (PEN), which itself is changing its mission from direct public school support to support for change. In PEN’s theory of action, public engagement plus specific school reform goals yields sustained policy attention and increased public responsibility for its schools (Public Education Network, 2004).

If the BHLC and similar organizations are successful, they will represent a fundamentally different means of parent and community voice in large city school systems. These organizations are not elected public officials, in the model of the Chicago reforms of the 1980-90s or New York in the 1960-70s. They are not simply

issue-pressure organizations. They are not just a parent union, and they are not solely parent education organizations. They are a new amalgam of parents and community-based organizations that has expertise in how schools work, authoritative data, and a direct connection to parents. They are organizations in which parents gain knowledge about how schools work, where the levers of power are, and how they are pulled.

While excitement in the near-term future is assured, success is not. The BHLC plot twists provide both glorious vistas of possible futures and gritty reality and frustration. In the words of one of the most active parents, “We remain hopeful.” So, our story is both document and parable.

A Summary of the Report

We tell the story of the BHLC’s development in roughly chronological order, from initial interest by the Annenberg Foundation through the decision to form a permanent organization that would extend beyond the initial grant period. Interspersed within our report are several short personal narratives from those who participated in the project.

The initial **Idea**, to replicate and extend a community development project that had been successful in Baltimore, was transplanted to a much different community in Boyle Heights. The Enterprise Foundation, which had run the project in Baltimore and which would run a parallel project in Atlanta, was not to operate the project in Los Angeles. Instead, what would become the BHLC began as a collection of community-based organizations that had had little experience working together. Breed Street Elementary School became the seat of education reform work. Maria Casillas, who had headed the Annenberg Challenge grant program in Los Angeles, became the executive director of the project.

As with any project, the **Launch** was exciting. Breed Street began a new literacy program built around Writer’s Workshop. The school also started to restructure itself, distributing leadership responsibilities among teachers at each grade level. School test scores continued their upward climb, and at the end of the first year the mood was decidedly celebratory.

Meanwhile, the BHLC was beginning to develop as an organization. The major task was securing the trust and commitment of a collection of community-based organizations, school district personnel, and representatives from colleges, hospitals, and the police department. By the end of the year, the parties were able to move beyond an informal advisory group and establish a Steering Committee structure that would lead it toward permanency.

At the outset, student **Achievement** was not in the forefront of the Steering Committee discussion. Everyone knew that test scores in Boyle Heights were not as high as in other parts of the city, but there was no particular alarm. In the second year of the grant, the entire project became focused on achievement. Data generated by the project showed that only about 16 percent of Roosevelt High School students graduated with the courses that would allow them to go to a California public

university, and only 5 percent actually did so.² The omnibus community development organization envisioned by the grant started to change into an organization of community participants all focused on education.

The achievement data also reinforced the interconnectedness between elementary and secondary school. The best predictor of how well a student did on a high school achievement test was the student's fifth grade reading level. Being designated as English proficient in elementary school also counted heavily toward success in high school and, most importantly, unfettered access to a college preparation curriculum.

Overall, during the period of the grant, achievement in Boyle Heights improved. Most of the elementary schools were on an upward trajectory in the early years of the grant, and by the end of the grant the middle and high schools were making better progress. But achievement was not growing rapidly enough to match the expectations of the federal No Child Left Behind Act requirements. By 2006, all but two of the schools in the community were classified as in need of Program Improvement.

Creating a culture of literacy in Boyle Heights became the mission of the BHLC. The mission is expressed in four components, which are the legacies of the grant. First, ***a permanent organization***: an idea that had been voiced as a goal from the beginning became an actual one. In the fall of 2004, the Steering Committee decided to take concrete steps to form an organization that would last longer than the initial grant. A series of task forces set to work, incorporation papers were drafted, and ultimately an executive director was hired to breathe life into what was to be a freestanding organization. The organization now has a business and development plan, which if successful will provide it the financial support to continue.

The BHLC joined the Public Education Network, and in Los Angeles it has become somewhat of a model for other community-based organizations. The Los Angeles Unified School District is in a state of continuing crisis, and communities around the city are becoming increasingly vocal in their desire for better educational outcomes for their children. All this comes at a time when there is no shortage of institution-altering ideas about how to govern and operate the public schools. The legislature has granted the Los Angeles mayor new powers, and if the legislation passes constitutional challenges in court, he will assume management of three clusters of high schools.

The determination a permanent organization came as Boyle Heights itself was changing. The community had been home to immigrants since the 1880s, when Jews began to settle east of the Los Angeles River, and in successive decades they were followed by Japanese, Italian, Russian, Armenian, and Mexican families. The now overwhelmingly Latino neighborhood is among the city's poorest and most dangerous. It is also facing gentrification. Its near-downtown location and the construction of a rapid transit line have made the neighborhood attractive to developers.

Boyle Heights is a dramatically different setting than that found in Baltimore or Atlanta, the other two Annenberg school and urban-development sites. It was much

² This ratio varies slightly but not significantly from year to year.

less an abandoned neighborhood, much more densely populated, and it had many community-based organizations. What it lacked was the ability for these organizations to work together. In response, project developed a *Literacy Agenda* that allowed people who built housing, tutored students, provided medical care, ran colleges, or provided social services all to come together around the educational needs of the community.

Second, the idea of creating a ***Roosevelt School Family***, comprised of the thirteen elementary and two middle schools that feed students into Roosevelt High School, was part of the project's organizing plan from the outset, and initial gatherings of the school principals produced positive results. However, the local school district (first called Local District H and now called Local District 5) decided to organize itself differently and the development of the school family was stunted for two years. At the end of the grant period, the Roosevelt School Family had again become a working organization, and it is an important part of the ongoing BHLC strategy.

Third, BHLC is ***building parent capacity*** by enabling parents to be partners in learning and advocates for their children's education. Traditionally, Latino parents have differentiated between the role of the school and that of the family, and their relationship with schools has been respectful but distant. To overcome some of the cultural and psychological barriers to parent involvement, the BHLC has undertaken four types of initiatives. Parents became their children's first educators and their partners in learning as both parents and children gain literacy and life skills. Parents also became advocates. They learned how to have discussions with teachers and principals about their children, and they became politically active on educational issues. Particularly, parents became part of the campaign to require high schools in Los Angeles to provide all students the courses that would prepare them for college.

Fourth, the BHLC will incorporate a highly successful program to help students succeed academically, resist negative social influences, and to develop leadership and network skills. Called SOS, for ***Society of Students***, the program is, in the words of one student, a positive gang.

SOS started at Breed, and it is expanding to other schools in the Roosevelt School Family, and to schools in other districts, including Long Beach, California, and Atlanta, Georgia. The program is based on four core principles. First, its goal is to create active rather than passive learners. Second, the program believes that all students are capable of learning and leadership. Third, it believes that all students can and should set high standards for themselves. Fourth, the program relies on students themselves to teach, reinforce and support one another.

SOS students become self-driven and motivated, carrying in themselves a kind of quiet power and a determination to be "AP." While most of the elementary students don't know that AP stands for the Advanced Placement courses the best high school students take, they do know that it means that they are responsible for raising the academic bar for themselves and demonstrating good behavior. Student and teacher testimony and statistical analysis of student scores confirm that SOS is effective in raising student achievement.

The following sections amplify this summary.

The Idea

Based on a successful program in Baltimore, the Annenberg Foundation began investigating the prospects for similar programs in Los Angeles and Atlanta. The Baltimore program brought together an inner city elementary school, the Enterprise Foundation with expertise in housing and community development, and other service providers. The central idea, and the logic of action, was that a coordinated combination of efforts would "...work toward wholesale community transformation" (Proscio, 2004, p. 3).

In 1999, Sylvia Peters, who was then working for the Foundation and who later headed the Atlanta effort in its early years, came to Los Angeles in search of a suitable school. She was attracted to the Breed Street Elementary School, and it was chosen as the education site for the project. The Enterprise Foundation was to play the same role in Boyle Heights as it played in Baltimore, however by mid-fall, with project planning underway, the Enterprise Foundation withdrew from the project.

Maria Casillas, who directed the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), was among the initial participants in the Boyle Heights project. Early in the planning process, she began advising the planning team and shepherded the grant proposal through the Los Angeles Unified School District, ending in a memorandum of agreement between the Foundation and the school district. In 2001, Casillas became executive director of the grant project.

A memorandum of agreement was signed in spring 2001, and program funds began to flow in November of that year. Thus was assembled a group of community partners, each with its own plan. If there was an overall Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative plan, it was not evident, either in the initial proposal or in the memorandum of agreement. What became a collaborative began as a loose collection of organizations, each undertaking a specialized task. The name was arrived at during the planning process, when Breed principal Katty Iriarte suggested that the project should not be named the "Breed Street Collaborative," but it took some time for the collaborative to start acting like its name. Interestingly, nowhere in the proposal was it mentioned that a permanent organization, which extended beyond the grant period, would be formed.

Boyle Heights As A Setting

Boyle Heights has been a distinctive neighborhood of immigrants for nearly a century. In the 1880s it became the city's first suburb, across the Los Angeles River from the old

pueblo. Over the next 70 years it grew into a working-class suburb, its 5.34 square miles providing home to Jewish, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Russian, Armenian, and African-American families. By the

Exhibit 1: Demographics of Boyle Heights 1940-2000							
	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
White	80%	45%	19%	6%	4%	3%	5%
Black	1%	7%	13%	8%	6%	4%	4%
Asian	7%	7%	10%	8%	5%	5%	4%
Latino	12%	41%	58%	78%	85%	88%	87%

Source: *The Power of Place*, p. 96.

late 1930s, Roosevelt High School, always a center of gravity in the community, had 29 different ethnic clubs or associations. Its enrollment declined by 30 percent when Japanese-Americans were forcibly relocated during World War II.³ In recent decades, the community has become more exclusively Mexican American. Older Jewish-owned businesses, including Cantor's famous delicatessen, relocated; the Breed Street *Shul* closed, and the community took on a vibrant Latino identity with a proud history of art, literature, and popular culture. In the sweep of time, Brooklyn Avenue became César Chávez.

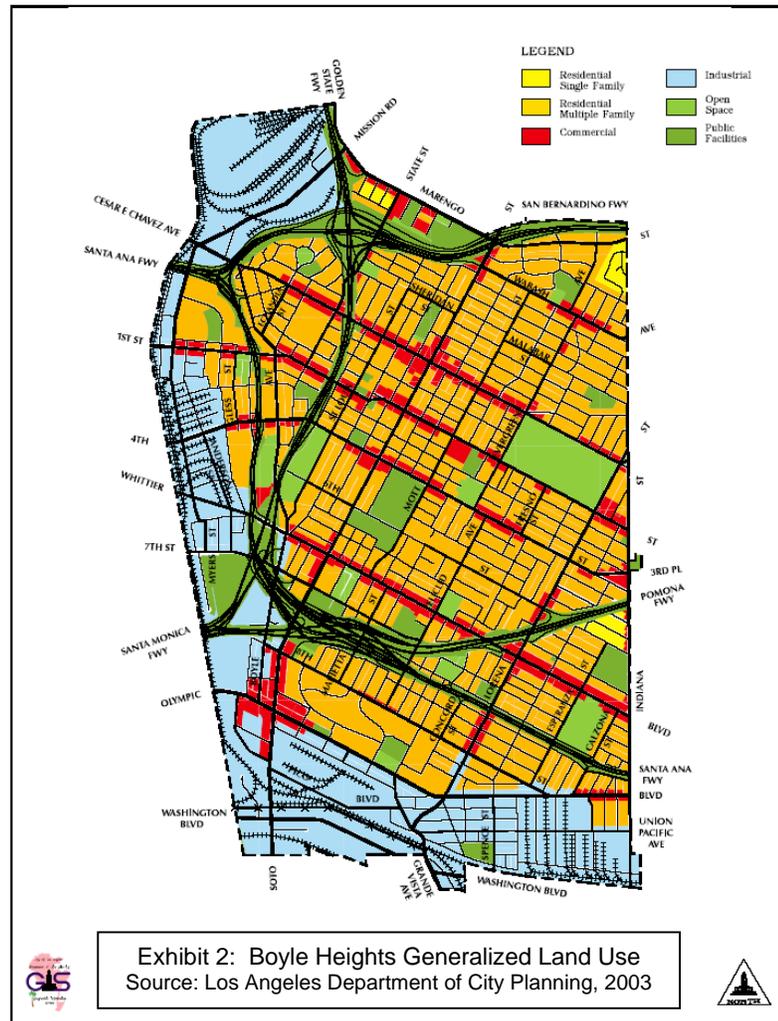
Writing about his experiences in the 1940s, the Nobel Prize winning author Octavio Paz wrote of the city's "vaguely Mexican atmosphere" that never quite unites with the North American world of precision and efficiency. Not so, said scholar George Sánchez, who documented the process of becoming Mexican American. "Most had no difficulty seeing themselves as both Mexican and American. They knew that they had become cultural bridges between the two lands; in fact they had created borderlands in the east-side *barrios* in which cultural revival and re-creation were ever-present" (Sanchez, 1993, p.272).

³ One member of the evaluation team whose family was originally from Boyle Heights was born in the relocation camp at Manzanar, California.

However, the vibrancy of the community did not lead to safety or prosperity. Boyle Heights is home to more than 30 gangs, and it is among the city's poorest, most dangerous, and least well-educated neighborhoods. Among adults aged 25 and above, in

2000, 69.9% had *no* high school diploma or equivalent. Only 15% percent had received a high school diploma or equivalent, and only 3% had attained a four-year college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Out of every 100 students entering as high school freshmen, 35 will graduate, 12 will have taken the necessary college preparatory classes, and

only 7 will enter college (Inner City Struggle, 2005). In the middle and high schools, doing well in school is regarded as “uncool,” and academically motivated students are ridiculed with the insult of *universario* or *universaria* (schoolboy or schoolgirl).⁴



⁴ This denigration of high school students who work hard is by no means isolated to Latino or lower income schools. See Bishop, 2003.

The Launch

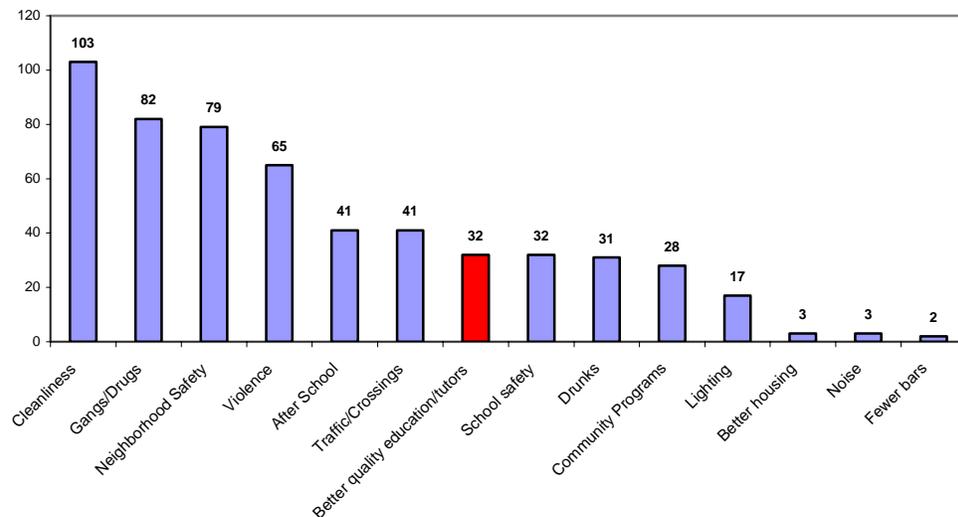
On the first day of school in September 2001, the principal addressed neat lines of (mostly) uniformed students, saying, “Welcome to Breed Street, I’m Miss Iriarte; I’m your principal.”

Breed Street Elementary School had been located in Boyle Heights for more than a century. It had a good reputation and a long list of illustrious alumni. Former superintendent Rubén Zacharias had attended the school and later became its principal. Harold Williams, the emeritus president of the Getty Foundation, attended Breed Street and credits the education he got in Los Angeles public schools as a reason for his interest in school reform: “I came to school as an immigrant, not speaking English, and these schools made it possible for me to rise in America.”

During the fall of 2001, the school and the grant began to create programs aimed at fulfilling their mission. The Breed-based program elements that persisted through the grant were largely in place during this first year: creating capacity for teachers, for students, and for parents. The community partners were also at work, although as we shall see, their roles changed substantially over the following three years.

In November, Breed, The Los Angeles Alliance for Student Achievement (The Alliance), and the Los Angeles Industrial Areas Foundation organization later known as One L.A. staged a “Walk for Success in Boyle Heights.” There were balloons, signs, mariachis, yellow tee shirts, and chants of “*si se puede*,” (yes, we can). Teachers and parents visited more than 200 homes in the neighborhood conducting a survey asking about community problems. As was expected, neighborhood cleanliness, gangs, drugs, and safety ranked ahead of education.

Exhibit 3: Cleanliness, Gangs/Drugs, and Neighborhood Safety are the Major Issues for Breed Community



In response to these concerns, under the leadership of the Los Angeles Industrial Areas Foundation (later known as One LA), the community organized around installing a traffic light and creating a guarded pedestrian walkway across busy

Fourth Street next to the school. In another campaign, more trash bins were placed on the sidewalks, and litter surrounding the school decreased. Community organizing was also successful in keeping the local branch library open during construction and in protecting Hollenbeck Park.

Inside the school, the programmatic elements that were to characterize the grant appeared. For years, veteran teacher Janis Hiura had worked with her students to create higher levels of resiliency and the life habits that would help them persevere in the difficult educational environment that characterized Boyle Heights. Now, with grant support, she was able to make this work a full time job, creating what would become the Society of Students. SOS began under the name “Student Council,” a familiar organization in virtually every school where typically the most popular or top performing students are elected to leadership positions. Hiura’s Student Council was different; anyone could join as long as they agreed to abide by the code of conduct, which soon became known as “being AP.” The elementary school students at Breed may not have understood the intricacies or the import of Advanced Placement in high schools, but they learned that AP meant doing more, helping keep your buddy from “falling down,” and speaking up when need be. In the first year of the grant, the Student Council grew to 60 students, and in later years it would encompass more than half the students at Breed, spread to other schools, and establish itself as a signature activity of the BHLC.

During the first (and subsequent) year, the classroom doors started to open at Breed, and the school’s historic insularity began to yield to collaboration and the creation of public people. This happened in several ways. Learning Walks, which were part of the Writer’s Workshop training, brought teachers into classrooms other than their own. Teaching became at least a partially public act at Breed. The beginnings of community work created an instinct to speak out about problems and issues, and the words “public person” entered the vocabulary of the school. This was consistent with the SOS-student notion of stepping forward. Conversations began to happen that would have been impossible earlier.

Personal Narrative: ADRIANNA OROZCO

Second Grade Teacher Breed Street Elementary.

 *To see outside my own walls...*

I grew up in the South Los Angeles area, in Watts. I went to public schools, community college and then transferred to USC and majored in education. Ever since I was a kid I just had this idea that I was going to be a teacher. I’m the oldest and I was the first to go to college. I think it was somehow just expected of me.

Before the grant we kept to ourselves. As a school and as teachers, everything was inside our own boundaries. Before the grant, all I knew was inside the walls of my own classroom and I didn’t really know what was going on outside.

But the grant has allowed other people, and other organizations, to come in and to be involved with us. The same is true with other teachers, too. It's given me a chance to know what's going on in other classrooms. I think that's a big change.

Since the grant, I see more where I fall in the big picture and I see what my part is. I think that's one of the big things—it's helped me to see the big picture and how I fit in it. To see outside my own walls.

I think the best part of the grant was the whole school all coming together. All the teachers were coming together and we were able to work together really well. We were at that point where we could be critical friends with each other. I think it came through all the collaboration and all the professional development we had.

As far as my own professional development, I think there was more feedback and support from other teachers. I didn't feel alienated, so that if I tried something in Writer's Workshop, and then I got stuck or felt that I needed help, there was someone that I could go talk to. I didn't feel like I was doing all of this by myself.

It also made me be more responsible for my part and forced me to grow more than I would have. And so I think that was the big thing that changed in me and others—that we were holding each other responsible and accountable.

I want to continue to be a classroom teacher, but I think I have changed in the way that I look at my teaching practices, in the way that I analyze or look at what I do on a day-to-day basis and how I plan. So the grant has taught me something that I'm going to continue to do. After the grant, I think a lot of us will continue to do a lot of things that we have been doing throughout.

Meanwhile, the BHLC structure was beginning to develop along a somewhat parallel path. Early on, it became clear that the leadership role in getting the community part of the BHLC going would fall to Casillas. The advisory committee continued to meet monthly, made up of community partners who were receiving grant funds, and a few who were not, and some representatives from the Local District (District H; later District 5).

A Focus on Achievement

Student Achievement Summary:

Student achievement going up, but not as fast as expectations.

Breed leads the Boyle Heights schools in reclassifying students as English Language Proficient.

Two important grant-supported structures for increasing achievement have been taken over by the district and are expected to continue: transition teams, summer bridging.

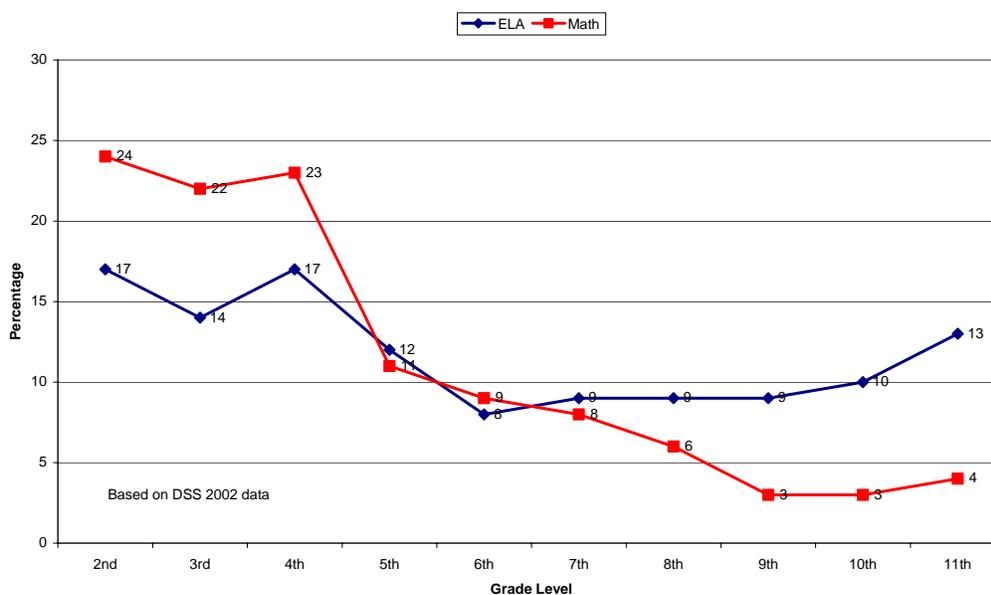
At the beginning of the Annenberg grant, student achievement was a laudatory but somewhat fuzzy idea. Schools in Boyle Heights were thought to be doing about as well as could be expected. There was general knowledge that their test scores were not as high as in other parts of the city, but there were also conspicuous successes—

students from Roosevelt who went to Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley or Pomona College—and generally there was no great civic alarm about academic performance, even though many of the Boyle Heights schools were on the state’s low performing schools list.

Academic achievement was not the focus of attention at initial meetings of the BHLC community and school partners, but by March 2002, Casillas was cautioning the Advisory Committee about high stakes accountability and the introduction of educational standards for all students: “High stakes means that there are consequences for everybody involved in education: the kid, the adults. Standards mean that there are expectations at every level along the pathway.”

Achievement came into sharp focus when the Steering Committee began to receive and understand data generated by the grant, beginning in January 2003. In what is remembered as a galvanizing moment, data analyst John Pirone presented a stark picture of achievement in the Roosevelt School Family.⁵ The dropout rate was terrible, regardless of which technique was used to calculate it. Nearly 900 students out of the 5000 at Roosevelt had completed all their ESL courses but had not yet proved to be English proficient, and 71 percent of these students had attended the Los Angeles public schools since first grade or before, had experienced eight or more years of schooling, and still were not proficient. These were alarming statistics, indeed.

Exhibit 4: Percent of RSF Students Meeting Grade Level Standards



The percentage of students ranked as proficient in math on the California Standards Test *declined* each year despite the fact that the worst performing students were dropping out. By the eleventh grade, only 13 percent of students met grade level standards in English and only 4 percent in math (Exhibit 4 above). Only about 16 percent of Roosevelt High School students graduated from high school with the

⁵ The grant supported Pirone’s salary as Local District data analyst.

requisite courses that would qualify them to attend a 4-year college (Exhibit 5 below). Similar statistics results were being found at low performing high schools throughout the city.

The starkness of Pirone’s presentation galvanized the Steering Committee around student achievement as the primary focus of the BHLC. In a provocative if somewhat inaccurate outburst, IAF organizer Ernesto Cortés said, “My God, the longer these kids stay in school, the dumber they get.” East Los Angeles Community Corporation associate director Loretta Hernandez, who has lived in Boyle Heights since birth, remembers thinking, “How could we let this happen to our children?”

Exhibit 5: College Opportunity Ratio 2004			
District	Region	School	College Opportunity Ratio
LAUSD	South Los Angeles	Crenshaw	100:50:24
		Dorsey	100:48:42
		Jefferson	100:44:23
		Jordan	100:42:28
		Locke	100:24:03
		Manual Arts	100:46:15
LAUSD	East Los Angeles	Franklin	100:38:33
		Lincoln	100:44:13
		Roosevelt	100:35:16
		Wilson	100:44:19
LAUSD	West/Central Los Angeles	Belmont	100:38:10
		Hollywood	100:35:05
		Los Angeles	100:32:10
		Westchester	100:47:16
LAUSD	San Fernando Valley	Canoga Park	100:31:08
		Grant	100:52:09
		Monroe	100:38:16
		Polytechnic	100:54:10
		Sylmar	100:57:13
Beverly Hills		Beverly Hills High (total)	100:86:63
		• Underrepresented students	100:74:44

The College Opportunity Ratio (COR) indicates the ratio of the number of high school students who graduate, and the number who pass the college prep courses required for admission to the University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) systems. For example, a COR of 100:90:50 means that for every 100 9th graders, 4 years later, 90 graduated and 50 passed courses required for admission to CSU and UC.

Source: UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education & Access (IDEA)

In the following months, the BHLC was to organize itself around education. The omnibus community organization envisioned by the grant changed into an organization of community participants all focused on education. All the participants continued to have their own work—housing, tutoring, health care, collegiate education—but all of them were focused on student achievement in elementary and

secondary schools. This new focus energized the collaborative and led to the decision to form a permanent organization.

A Focus on Data

The focus on achievement led to facing the realities of student achievement. It also led to the reshaping of parent organizing around student achievement and to a highly successful political agenda to afford all students the opportunity for a high school curriculum that could lead to college, both of which are discussed later.

As data became more salient, members of the collaborative came to realize the particular problems of English language learners. At about the same time of Pirone's slide show, the evaluation team completed a study of which educational experiences lead to success on the California High School Exit Exam and the CAT6 norm-referenced test. We examined the records of 110 Roosevelt High School tenth graders who had been in the feeder pattern since fourth grade.⁶ Our path analysis (Exhibit 6) showed that the strongest predictor of success in the tenth grade was reading ability in the fifth. This finding was a stunning affirmation of how much high school achievement rested on the shoulders of elementary school success and the importance of early competency in English. Reading scores in grade 5 are powerful indicators of tenth grade achievement in English and Mathematics. In fact, the fifth grade reading scores predict tenth grade English Language Arts (ELA) scores on both the norm referenced California Achievement Test and California High School

⁶ To investigate the apparent antecedents of achievement for students in the Roosevelt School Family, about 80 percent of whom start school as English language learners, we traced students who were 10th graders at RHS in 2003 back to the 4th grade. The Los Angeles Unified School District and Local District H provided student data with identifying information removed on all 10th graders, including their results on the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), CAT6, and the California Standards Test. These data were matched with student data from prior years, reaching back to 1996-1997, when the then current high school juniors would have been in the 4th grade.

The secondary school data contained between 960 and 1301 students for each of the variables. The mean score on the English Language Arts portion of the CAHSEE was 355.75, and on the CAT6 the group was at the 37th percentile based on national norms in English language arts and in the 61st percentile in math.

When the student records—with names removed—were matched to form a cohort that were in the Roosevelt feeder pattern from the 4th grade to the 10th, we found that there were 103 students who were in the 4th grade data set who also took the CAHSEE in the 10th grade.

We first found that both 4th and 5th grade reading scores were highly correlated with success on the CAHSEE and the CAT6. Fourth grade SAT 9 reading scores correlate with 10th grade CAHSEE English language arts at .751, with CAHSEE math at .607, with CAT6 language arts at .621, and with CAT6 math at .663. Similar correlations are found with 5th grade reading and 10th grade results. Early school experience appeared to be a good predictor of later success. (It should be noted that the LAUSD student record system does not contain any 1996-97 student achievement data other than the SAT9 reading scores, so it was not possible to see if there were other indicators, such as grades, that linked the two levels.)

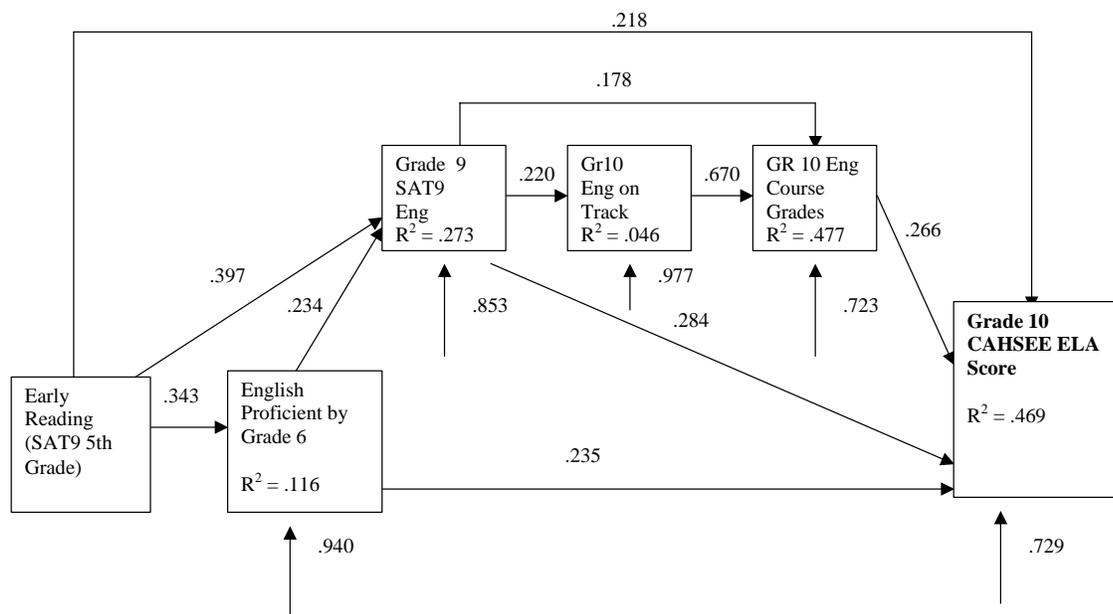
We then noted that, not unsurprisingly, the very strongest indicator of how well a student did in one grade level was how well he or she had done in the previous grade level. Doing well, or poorly, is a pattern.

Many of the demographic variables that are commonly associated with achievement were not present in our sample. Virtually all the students were of the same ethnic group and virtually all were from poor families, so the conventional variations by race and income did not occur. We also found no difference in achievement results by gender.

There was very little difference in test results according to which track the students were placed in at Roosevelt or which elementary school he or she attended. At Roosevelt, only the students in the magnet school (C Track Only) performed significantly better than the rest of the students. There were small and statistically insignificant differences among students from different elementary schools. (This may have been due in part to the relatively small number of students from each elementary school who attended Roosevelt School Family schools from the 4th grade to the 10th.)

Exit Exam (CAHSEE) better than all other variables in the model, including final course grades in tenth grade English.⁷

Exhibit 6: Path Analysis of Factors Leading to High School Success



In addition to fifth grade reading, the path model shows four other variables that were strong predictors of a student's grade 10 CAHSEE score in English and in Math:

1. Whether the student was English proficient by sixth grade.
2. Performance on the SAT9 in English or Math in the ninth grade.
3. Whether the student was taking tenth grade English or Math in the tenth grade.
4. A student's report card grade in tenth grade English or Math.

Achievement data were also raised to high relief because of the sanctions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Beginning in 2003, federal test score requirements had substantial consequences for schools. Rather than being classified according to traditional norm-referenced exams, the testing program began to focus more on competency, criterion-referenced standards-based questions. These exams provided the data by which students were classified into the federally required categories of Far Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced, the federal standard being to raise all students to the proficient level.

⁷ We also constructed path models to predict performance against national norms on the CAT6 in both English language arts and math. In both these models, Early Reading performance and English proficiency by grade 6 strongly influenced performance on the 10th grade test.

California schools faced triple jeopardy in the race toward test-score proficiency. First, the state—unlike many—adopted high standards. In California, *proficient*, means at the relatively high levels of expectations for a grade level.

Second, schools in California are expected to meet the expectations of two progress indicators, which, while based on the same data, have different criteria for success. The California Academic Performance Index (API) judges schools on overall gains in test scores, and it is somewhat weighted toward rewarding schools that are successful in moving students out of the lowest categories. Schools meet their API targets by advancing a certain number of points on the index, based on past performance. The federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) score is based on moving each subgroup of students in the school toward a *proficient* rating, with the percentage of students in each subgroup reaching proficiency rising each year.⁸ It is possible for a school to make satisfactory progress on one index but not the other, and failure on either index carries sanctions. Indeed, this was the case at Breed Street Elementary in school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

Third, California schools, and particularly those in Boyle Heights have a high percentage of English language learners. By definition, someone in the early stages of English Language Development will not score well on a test of English. Language development experts vary in their judgments about how long it should take to gain proficiency, but as a practical matter it is unrealistic to expect that language learners in the lower elementary grades will score well.

Federal and state expectations and the public classification of schools as successful or not successful have been both helpful and hurtful to the process of building better schools in Boyle Heights. By creating public comparative data, federal and state indicators provided the alarm bells that woke the community. At the same time, the classification system and the expectations are in many ways unfair, and the labeling of schools as failing masks successful efforts at improvement.

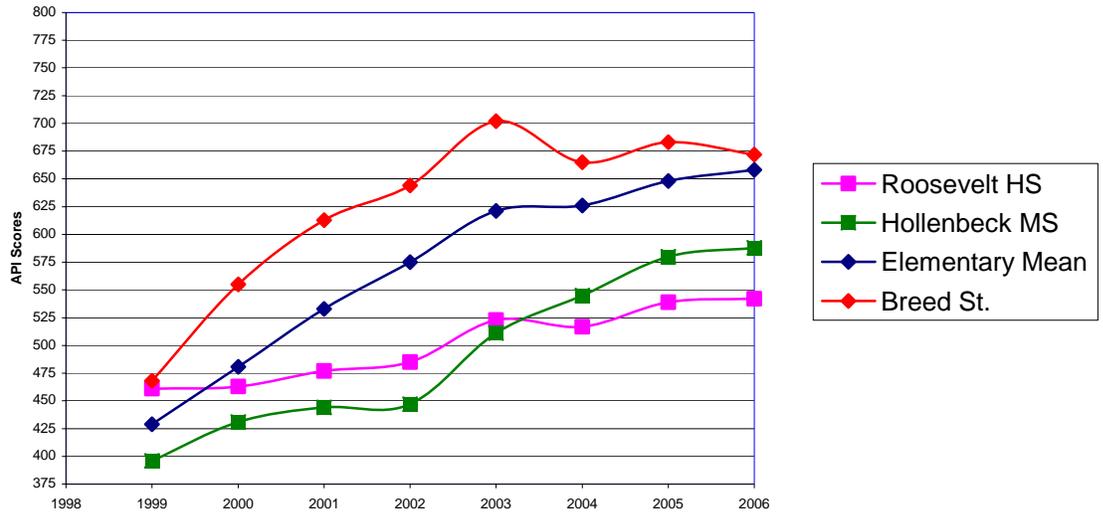
The test-score tip of the iceberg is easy to see, but sometimes difficult to understand. Overall, achievement rose substantially in the years 1999-2006, as the graph in Exhibit 7 shows. The California API shows all schools on an upward trajectory: the elementary schools showing consistent gains and middle schools showing a more recent upward trend.

⁸ The API is the cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. The purpose of the API is to measure the academic performance and growth of schools. It is a numeric index (or scale) that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. API growth targets are set for each school as a whole and for each numerically significant subgroup in the school. The annual growth target for a school is five percent of the difference between a school's API Base and the statewide performance target of 800. For any school with an API below 800, the minimum growth target is at least one point. Any school with an API of 800 or more must maintain an API of at least 800 in order to meet its growth target.

The API calculation method determines the API as the weighted average of student scores across content areas and test results within the school. To calculate the API, individual student scores from each indicator are combined into a single number (the API) to represent the performance of a school.

Under NCLB, each year, schools must also meet four sets of requirements to make AYP. The requirements reflect minimum statewide performance levels and are the same for all schools. The requirements include (1) student participation rate on statewide tests, (2) percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above in English-language arts and mathematics on statewide tests, (3) API Growth, and (4) graduation rate (if high school students are enrolled). To meet federal AYP criteria, a school must have a minimum API of 590 or have at least one point growth in the schoolwide API. Numerically significant subgroups at a school also must meet participation rate and percent proficient requirements.

Exhibit 7: Elementary Mean and Secondary API Trends



This upward trajectory would seem to be entirely positive. The achievement increases reflect an increase of over 7.6 percent a year on the elementary school API scale. The blue line shows the mean scores of all elementary schools in the Roosevelt School Family. Those scores were also up sharply, and the gap between Breed and the other school's performance closed. Roosevelt High School's achievement scores are shown in the magenta line and show the least rapid gain, a characteristic common to high schools in Los Angeles. Hollenbeck Middle School, where most of the former Breed students attend, saw rapid gains in the beginning in 2003, a trend line that virtually parallels the elementary school growth.

Despite this pattern of rising achievement, by 2006-07 almost all the elementary schools in the Roosevelt School Family find themselves labeled as Program Improvement (PI) schools by the federal government. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools fall into PI status if students do not meet annual performance targets, which in 2005-2006 are to have 24.4% of students reach the proficient level in English Language Arts and 26.5% in math.

Exhibit 8 shows the Roosevelt School Family in terms of Program Improvement status. All but two elementary schools are labeled as PI schools, and some have been in that status for five years or more. PI status has serious consequences. Being labeled as a failure dashes morale among the school staff. It creates procedural requirements for the school to reorganize its academic program, and if the school does not climb out of PI status, it is subject to reorganization. Parents of children in PI schools are allowed to move their children to other schools not in Program Improvement status, if space is available, but in practice, this provision of the law is seldom used. Nationwide, fewer than one percent of eligible students transferred to a higher-performing public school in 2005 (Olson, 2005).

Exhibit 8: Roosevelt School Family—Program Improvement Status

School	2006-07 PI Status	1st Year of PI Placement	2006 API	Made 2006 AYP	2005 API	Made 2005 AYP	2004 API
Breed Street	PI 1	2006-07	672 (-11)	NO	683 (+14)	NO	669
Bridge Street	PI 4	1997-98	638 (-1)	NO	639 (+20)	YES	619
Dena	PI 1	2006-07	660 (+26)	NO	634 (-6)	NO	640
Euclid	PI 1	2006-07	667 (+2)	NO	665 (+9)	NO	656
Evergreen	PI 5	1997-98	662 (+19)	NO	603 (+24)	NO	579
First Street	PI 2	2005-06	650 (+10)	NO	640 (+19)	NO	621
Lorena	PI 1	2006-07	662 (-2)	NO	664 (+13)	NO	651
Malabar	PI 3	2004-05	663 (-5)	NO	668 (+57)	NO	611
Second Street	Not in PI	Not in PI	688 (-2)	YES	689 (+4)	YES	685
Sheridan	Not in PI	Not in PI	674 (43)	YES	631 (+9)	NO	622
Soto	PI 1	2006-07	635 (-15)	NO	650 (+12)	NO	638
Sunrise	PI 3	2004-05	650 (+24)	NO	626 (+51)	NO	575
Utah	PI 5	1997-98	676 (+42)	YES	634 (+38)	NO	596
Hollenbeck MS	PI 5	1997-98	588 (+8)	NO	580 (+30)	NO	550
Stevenson MS	PI 3	2004-05	602 (-1)	NO	603 (+33)	NO	570
Roosevelt HS	PI 5	1997-98	542 (+3)	NO	539 (+6)	NO	533

Source: California Department of Education, 2006

The federal PI status label is increasingly troublesome. Many more schools are falling into it, and it will be increasingly difficult for a school to remove itself from the failing school label. For example, Utah Street Elementary School, which has increased its state Academic Performance Index by 70 points in the last two years, remains a Program Improvement school because it must meet federal targets for two years in a row to escape the PI label. Other schools had substantial gains but also could not climb over the threshold. The lack of positive incentives in the No Child Left Behind Act is remarkable.

There are two principle reasons. First, the gradient of expectations increases rapidly. Unlike the state performance targets, which go up at 5 percent a year, the federal NCLB targets a trajectory to have all students in the country performing at a proficient level by 2014. To meet that target, schools will have to increase their performance by more than 10 percent a year every year, for each subgroup of students tested.⁹ Because the subgroups of students include English language learners, schools in Boyle Heights and many other communities in Los Angeles are faced with the difficult task of getting students labeled as English learners (not yet proficient in the language) to gain proficient status on a test given in the language they are learning. Students who have already gained proficiency in English are removed from the English language learner category. Given both the increasing expectations that

⁹ Under federal regulations, every sizable subgroup of students must meet performance targets. This standard was envisioned as a way to prevent schools from hiding poor performance among students of color, African American and Latino students in particular, in the overall school averages.

schools face to avoid Program Improvement status, and the difficulty of getting English language learners to the proficient level in the language they are learning, it is not surprising that the numbers of Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools in program improvement status is increasing rapidly, from 99 schools in 2005 to 183 schools in 2006.

Keeping up with rising achievement expectations will continue to challenge schools in Boyle Heights. Test score accountability intensified greatly during the period of the grant, and the trend is likely to continue. While questions of fairness abound, the visibility of achievement artifacts gives the BHLC issues to rally around.

Creating a Culture of Literacy in Boyle Heights

■ *“We have no bookstores here in Boyle Heights.” -Janet Kiddoo.*

Boyle Heights has been described as a place where there is a community-based organization on every corner. It is easy to tote up the civic presence and the associated iconic figures, and it is easy to point to the neighborhood's history of activism. But, as community organizers from the Industrial Areas Foundation were to find, the community did not have anchoring institutions. As Ernesto Cortés was to say: “We need institutions. We won't work with schools unless there are some other anchoring institutions.”

The BHLC needed to be that anchoring institution. As the data about student achievement and school success became public, it became clear that there existed a single issue that schools, parents, and community-based organizations could rally around. Over the five years of the grant—with substantial number of steps backward and forward—the BHLC would organize itself and create four important legacies:

1. The BHLC as an independent organization with leadership and a plan of action.
2. The Roosevelt School Family as a working collaboration of the high school and the elementary and middle schools that fed into it.
3. Parent education and engagement programs that taught how to be children's First Educators and also how parents can best engage the schools and the political process.
4. A nationally recognized student leadership program that combined academic and social/emotional learning to produce resilient students with high aspirations.

The following sections describe these four legacies and their development.

Legacy 1: Building a Permanent Organization

In the storied but challenging setting of Boyle Heights, the Annenberg Foundation assembled several organizations that had been highly successful in the initial program of this type in Baltimore. In the original design, the project was to be tightly cast in the Baltimore image. The Enterprise Foundation would manage the overall

project, a chosen school would anchor it in education, and a number of service providers would each work in their own area of expertise. The result of working on all fronts simultaneously would be to lift both the school and the community.

But almost immediately the contours of the project began to change to fit the geography and culture of Boyle Heights. Boyle Heights was not much like the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood in Baltimore or the Mechanicsville neighborhood in Atlanta, both of which had been depopulated. In 1990, nearly 30 percent of the homes in Sandtown were vacant (Proscio, 2004, p. 7). These neighborhoods provided a logical relationship between housing development and community renewal using better education as a means to draw people to the neighborhood. Densely populated Boyle Heights faced different problems. Poor conditions in existing housing, the lack of affordable housing for the neighborhood's traditional poor and immigrant population, and the lack of physical safety created the most concerns. By the end of the grant period, the major threat to community housing would be gentrification rather than abandonment.

Five years ago, a home in Boyle Heights could have been purchased for between, \$120,000 and \$160,000. Today, the market commands between the high \$400,000s and the mid-\$600,000s. The site of a Sears warehouse at the southern edge of Boyle Heights is becoming a \$350-million development with condominiums designed to attract residents who would have otherwise moved to the loft development areas in downtown Los Angeles. Obviously, family incomes of existing Boyle Heights residents cannot keep up with the ability to rent or buy under such conditions. Collaborative members report flight to lower cost neighborhoods.

When the grant began, the Enterprise Foundation had no presence in Los Angeles, and it became clear that it could not manage the project. And no community organization had sufficient presence to pull together the necessary participants. The Foundation turned to Casillas, who had run the Annenberg Challenge Project in Los Angeles (LAAMP), and it was decided to locate the project at The Alliance, a spin off of the school reform projects of the 1990s. Within months, it became obvious that the Alliance and the BHLC were incompatible, and the project was moved to Families In Schools (FIS), another LAAMP spin off, and Casillas assumed the presidency of that organization along with heading the BHLC project.

When operations started, in Fall 2001, what was to become the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative was a collection of relative strangers. And some of the grant-funded partner organizations were also new to the community. As noted earlier, even the name was an afterthought. "Breed" rather than Boyle Heights was in the original title, and Iriarte sagely protested in an early meeting, "This shouldn't be all about one school." Early meetings had a getting-to-know-you air, with community partners introducing themselves and their work. There was politeness, but not a lot of trust and virtually no vision of what the community collaborative would be.

In contrast to the Baltimore project, where there was a strong existing anchor organization, the BHLC had to build capacity to do the work. Thus, the grants made to community partners had two purposes. The first was to do work in its area of expertise, such as housing or health services. The second was to build organizational capacity. In this regard, two organizations received larger grants: the

East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC), and One LA, which was associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation. Each grew to have a substantial presence in Los Angeles. ELACC became a substantial presence not only as a builder of affordable housing, but also as an advocate for housing policy: an important topic as the neighborhood began to gentrify at the end of the grant period. One LA was successful in reestablishing a citywide IAF organization.

The Steering Committee

By early 2002, it was obvious that the Board of Advisors and community partners were not set up to carry the BHLC beyond casual associations. While project participants knew from the outset that building a civic infrastructure was an important goal, there was resistance toward the idea of some sort of a policy setting or executive body, and it was only late in the year when its importance became preeminent. In our Annual Report for that year, the evaluation team noted that “There was a growing sense that the participants having started their own projects thirsted for greater definition about the whole project; they were ready to move.”

At the advisory committee's May meeting, Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor from the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools described a possible infrastructure. Within the shell of the BHLC, a small steering committee would meet quarterly and set general direction for the larger Collaborative, not only the Annenberg-funded projects, but the larger group of participants in Boyle Heights. The steering committee would be comprised of people who could help the collaborative gain access to highly placed public officials and civic leaders. In addition to the steering committee, there would be standing committees and ad hoc work groups to carry out specific tasks.

The plan was adopted, and in the fall, the Steering Committee began to function. It was headed by Sr. Jenny Lechtenberg, the founder and director of PUENTE Learning Center, a non-profit education and tutoring organization, and José Huizar, the school board member for the Boyle Heights area¹⁰. There were misgivings even as the new leadership was announced. Casillas was nervous that others would be setting direction for the project she was charged to direct, and the community organizers were concerned about having a school board member chairing an organization that was likely to be critical of the district.

The new structure had a distinct advantage over the old one. However loosely worn, members of the Steering Committee had distinct roles and expectations. It was somewhat harder for someone to drop in and hijack the meeting onto a topic of personal interest, and it was at least possible to begin strategizing.

In truth, though, the Steering Committee did not do all the steering. Both Huizar and Lechtenberg had frequent schedule conflicts. Monica García, who was Huizar's chief of staff at the time and who would later fill his seat on the school board became an active contributor. Casillas continued to set the agendas and chair the meetings most of the time. She was also very much the project's entrepreneur, and she brought new ideas to the BHLC, among them the developing literacy agenda.

¹⁰ The initial subcommittees: Education (Geri Herrera, LAUSD), Housing (Maria Cabildo, ELACC), Health (Crystal Davis, White Memorial Hospital), Parent and Community Involvement (Lucy Morado, One LA and Josefina Avila, Breed Street parent).

Feria del Libro, and Literacy Programs

In addition to having no bookstore, Boyle Heights had few local cultural events that celebrated Latino authors, making a statement about literacy and literature within the community. UCLA sponsored a huge book fair on the West Side each spring, but Latino books and culture were not much in evidence. Casillas and local schools director Geri Herrera decided that Boyle Heights needed a *Feria del Libro* of its own and convinced Local District superintendent Bonnie Rubio. In June 2003, the first *Feria* was held at Roosevelt High School. Although technically not a project of the BHLC, it was heavily staffed by BHLC employees, principally Oralia Garza de Cortés.

Academically, the book fair connected the "Million Word Campaign" for student readers with increasing book awareness among families. About 2,500 people attended the first year, and it immediately gained notice. Wall-sized boards highlighting the books read throughout the year featured artwork and writing samples from books that spanned the grade levels: from Pat Mora's *Tomas and the Library Lady* and Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* to Sandra Cisneros' popular *The House on Mango Street*. Student work was prominently displayed.

Crowds gathered to hear best-selling authors Victor Villaseñor (*Rain of Gold*) and Luis Rodriguez (*Always Running*) and children's authors Amada Irma Perez (*My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuartito*) and Bobbi Salinas (*The Three Pigs: Nacho, Tito and Miguel*). Additionally, the *Feria* featured storytellers, student performances, guest readers, art workshops, and book-based arts and crafts activities for the entire family. Members of the Society of Students at Hollenbeck Middle School volunteered by introducing the authors who came to read their books to the children and their families. SOS members also wore costumes representing well-known characters from children's books including Clifford the Big Red Dog and Curious George, much to the delight of the younger children.

Book vendors were heavily patronized and free books donated by the Mexican Consulate were snapped up as prizes from the day. "The turnout at the *Feria del Libro* shows that Boyle Heights really cares about reading and literacy," said one student. "Reading with family and the community is important for literacy," said another.

The *Feria* continues. It grew to an estimated 9,000 visitors in 2004, and 15,000 the following year. In 2006, the event was moved to downtown Los Angeles at the invitation of mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.¹¹ The *Feria's* symbolism is even larger than the event. It provided an anchor for BHLC's literacy work, and the impetus to get a bookstore to locate in the community.

¹¹ While they appreciated the increased exposure, members of the BHLC Steering Committee expressed reservations about moving the *Feria* out of Boyle Heights, and there may be a concerted effort to bring it back.

Meanwhile, the grant supported a large number of literacy-oriented programs, all of which started at Breed, but some have expanded to other schools in the Roosevelt Family (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: BHLC Programs to Promote Literacy 2001-2006

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	PARTICIPANTS	PERIOD
<i>Read With Me/ Lea Conmigo</i>	Provides access to literature for Breed Street Elementary pre-K and Kinder students by sending home books on a weekly basis. Parents receive training on how to read with their children. 1 st grade students were added in 2005-06.	Initiated at Breed Street Elementary but has expanded to additional RSF elementary school campuses	2002-03 2003-04 2004-05 2005-06
<i>Café con Cuentos</i>	Provides training for parents to become reading partners with their children	Breed Street Elementary parents	2002-03 2003-04
Parents and Books	Weekly after school reading activities for parents and students	Breed Street Elementary parents	2003-04
<i>Padres Lectores</i>	Parents of students in grades K-2 trained to read to students in the classroom; also helped organize Family Literacy Nights	Breed Street Elementary parents	2003-04
Family Writing Project	Parents and their children learn and write both together and individually. An anthology of writing was produced.	Breed Street Elementary 1 st and 2 nd grade parents	2004-05
<i>Feria del Libro</i>	A community book fair originally held at Roosevelt High School, by its third year the Feria drew over 15,000 children and their families. In 2006, the Feria was held in downtown Los Angeles, in front of City Hall; an estimated 20,000 people attended.	Greater Boyle Heights community	2002-03 2003-04 2004-05 2005-06
Family Literacy Nights/ <i>Noche de Cuentos</i>	Parents involved in <i>Café con Cuentos</i> , <i>Padres Lectores</i> , and Parents and Books participate in planning and implementing evening events for families and staff to enjoy stories read aloud.	Breed Street Elementary families	2002-03 2003-04

Summer of 2004

By the summer of 2004, it had become apparent that the project needed to make a firm commitment to its continuation or to allow the BHLC to expire when the original grant ended in 2006. A continuing organization had been a stated goal, but there was still no agreement about what a continuing organization would operate, and particularly whether it would be competitive with existing organizations. There was great fear that the BHLC would capture sources of funds that would otherwise go to existing organizations, almost all of which lived in some financial peril. There were also questions about the mission of a continuing organization.

As we wrote then, “In many ways the success of this project has caused it to grow beyond its original design.” Stocktaking and recommitment were in order. The project had evolved. Boyle Heights was much larger than the Breed attendance area, and the community already had a strong identity that was not focused on the school. Boyle Heights was much more populous than the Atlanta project area, and the web of community associations was much more complex. More importantly, the project evolved from its original mission to “implement child-focused partnerships with inter-related components of school enhancements, family services and community development at Breed and in the Boyle Heights community” (MOU, 2000, p. 2).

But the BHLC became much more exclusively devoted to educational issues. Each of the members of the Steering Committee has a special mission that is often outside of education. Yet when these organizations come together as the BHLC, their focus has been on education and literacy in Boyle Heights. The decision to focus on education was a conscious one. The participants, and particularly the co-chairs of the Steering Committee, felt that the broader mission of becoming an all-encompassing community agency was beyond the capability of BHLC, and that more could be accomplished if the organization focused on education and learning.

The BHLC also evolved without a lead community-based organization that would simply take over after the grant came to an end. The capacity for moving forward lay in creating a permanent organization with a staff and a director.

In August, 2004, Gail Levin from the Annenberg Foundation came to Boyle Heights expressing both support for the project and her desires for the future, “We are looking at the long term—institutionalization.” She also suggested that associating BHLC with the Public Education Network would be a way of associating Boyle Heights nationwide and of providing technical assistance in its formative years.

The Decision to Form a Permanent Organization

The decision to form a permanent organization and not to disband at the end of the Annenberg grant grew from a two-day retreat of community partners and educators held in Palm Springs on September 16-17, 2004. Before the retreat, permanency was more of a prayer than a pathway.

Because the retreat was an important turning point for the organization, one acknowledged by virtually all participants interviewed at the end of the grant, it is worthwhile describing the process in some detail. Consultant Rigoberto Rodriguez, who used a “future search” technique popularized by Robert Weisbord, facilitated the retreat.¹²

The retreat was structured to produce a continuing organization, and to gather support for it. Titled, “Creating a Culture of Educational Achievement in Boyle Heights,” the two-day gathering had as its announced goals affirming and building on what the BHLC had already done, creating a strategic direction, and gathering commitment from key participants. In effect, the conference was more a ratification of a direction than a search for one.

Through the structured exercises, participants told about and in many cases recalled recent history: the centrality of immigrants to the community and the continuing tensions between newcomers and the larger society. From the Zoot Suit attacks of the 1940s, through the Chicano movement of the 1960s and '70s, to the anti-immigrant ballot propositions of the 1990s and the post-9/11 fears, Boyle Heights has been marked as special and different geographically but not as particularly cohesive

¹² A Future Search conference is a structured experience designed by Robert Weisbord and his colleagues. It works on the principle of bringing the whole system together in a non-hierarchical setting to plan an idealized future in the context of local history and a larger perspective on social change. The exercises began with “connecting with each other,” through learning about individual histories, and then moved to constructing personal, global and local timelines, which allowed participants to understand individual connections to the community and to recall the sweep of events that created the Boyle Heights we know today. On the second day the conference began to focus on the future and to seek common commitment. (See: A Future Search Conference, 2004; Rodriguez, 2004.)

(Rodriguez, 2004, p. 26). The grant began without a strong collaborative in place. In community organizing terms, and in the belief system of One LA, relationships should have been established long before the collaborative was created. Given the circumstances, the BHLC had to accomplish both tasks simultaneously.

Looking at the past—both personal and institutional—led to looking at the future and the identification of key themes around which the BHLC would be organized. But first, participants needed to make a key decision about continuing beyond 2006 when the Annenberg grant was to end. In committing to the future, participants verbalized what we believe was the essence of the continuing BHLC: that it would create a social space where community-based organizations and schools could work together and that the focus should be on public education. The group committed to a continuing future for BHLC, agreed to plan for the coming decade, and created an idealized vision of Boyle Heights in 2014.

A view of the future:

There would be bookstores full of people buying and browsing, college bumper stickers on cars, clean walls instead of graffiti, and one lonely aging Homie, emblematic of the decline in gang violence. Parks would be full of people and free of fear, and Mariachi plaza would be a transit hub. There would be smaller schools and more preschools, with lots of engaged learning. A billboard would advertise the 12th annual Feria del Libro.

But even experienced community activists and school leaders did not fully understand how the extension of the Gold Line light rail through Boyle Heights and rapid gentrification would displace residents and change the character of the neighborhood. While there was discussion of the need for new schools to relieve overcrowding, there was little recognition that school construction would proceed rapidly and that some of the most visible opportunities in community development would lie in the physical and organizational design of new schools. No one anticipated that in less than two years an activist mayor would create a political contest for control of the school district.

Based on the themes generated by the conference, four task forces were created: academic achievement, civic engagement, family and community-wide learning, and BHLC infrastructure. This last task force was charged with finding the right structure and leadership for continuing onward. The task forces were an important developmental step. They spread leadership and innovation and brought people into the active consideration of the organization's future.

Even in their initial meetings held at the retreat, the task forces began to identify some of the possibilities for moving forward. Boosting access to a college curriculum—the A-G issue—emerged, as well as the problems of fund raising that would benefit all participants and not be competitive.

The retreat is generally considered to be one of the turning points in the organization's history, spoken of in conversation as the time when things came together. Loretta Hernandez, then associate director of East Los Angeles Community Corporation remembered, "I thought that was the first time in my experience with the Collaborative where people were really making a commitment to the success of our children." For her, the continuing organization was based on a sense of urgency about the academic achievement.

Monica García, a participant in the conference and now a school board member, recalled that the BHLC had come through a long period of deciding what it was going to be about. "I think that the success story is that the organization lasted long enough so that the trials were actually growing points, where we were able to adjust and come up with a better model." She continued, "The plus is that usually efforts like this would have already fallen apart, but you had people who were committed at the table."



BOYLEHEIGHTS
LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Exhibit 10: BHLC Logo

García's recollection illustrates the importance of relationship building as the foundation for a continuing BHLC. Even though concrete steps were taken at the Palm Spring retreat to form a

continuing organization, participants had been edging toward the decision for a long time. Even though a specific decision was made, the levels of commitment toward it varied enormously. Conversation at the retreat was punctuated with "buts" and cautionary statements. People came late, left early, answered cell phones, doodled, and acted disengaged. Some came with only vague ideas about the organization's past or how it worked. Yet, enough good will had been generated that people continued.

Task Forces

One of the concrete outcomes of the retreat was to form task forces to carry out the project's work. The *Infrastructure Task Force* set about moving the BHLC toward independence with its own board and governance structure. Application for 501(c) 3 status was drafted and submitted to the state, and a new corporate structure came into being in 2006. By the end of the year, the Internal Revenue Service had approved its charitable organization tax status. Meanwhile, the task force set about looking for staff that would guide the new organization into being. Chris Arzate, who has since left, was hired to connect the BHLC and its community partners, and Vickie Ramos was charged with the responsibility of working with parent organizations and coordinating with the developing achievement academies. A new logo (Exhibit 10) was developed showing families as a symbolic bridge.

They also searched for an executive director. The first person chosen proved not to be a good match with the needs of the position, and it was not until spring 2006 that Elizabeth Zamora came aboard to manage the newly independent organization. By

fall 2006, she had created a business plan and a development strategy. A board of directors was named.¹³

The *Civic Engagement Task Force* became very active. In 2005, as described above, the BHLC partnered with the Communities for Educational Equity (CEE) coalition to lobby the LAUSD Board of Education to pass a resolution making the full complement of college-prep courses (known as A-G) mandatory requirements for graduation. The resolution passed and requires that A-G classes should be available to all students who request them in the 2006-07 school year. These classes will become mandatory for graduation by 2012. The BHLC is a powerful presence on the school district committee charged with the measure's implementation, and the executive director and other members of the CEE meet monthly with the district to assess implementation efforts.

The *Academic Achievement Task Force* concentrated on parent programs and its work led to the Achievement Academies that were held in 2005 and 2006. We describe these later.

New leadership emerged along with the new organizational structure. Community partners and staff began to build the capacity for the BHLC to operate without the direct oversight of Casillas, whose name was virtually synonymous with the organization. By May of 2005, the community partners were driving the agenda forward.

Maria Elena Yepes, director of the Learning Assistance Center and compliance officer at East LA Community College, was taking charge of Family Learning Services. She created an alliance between existing organizations and the college—concurrent enrollment with high school, non-credit courses for adults that might help them with necessary skills and also allow them to get a certification of sixth Grade completion from the Mexican ministry of education. Luis Sánchez and Inner City Struggle became a major force in the collaborative, and Maria Cabildo, Executive Director at ELACC, helped guide the organization through acquisition of non-profit corporate status. She was also extremely articulate about the changes occurring in Boyle Heights as property values rose in L.A. and the neighborhood became ripe for developers.

The A-G Campaign

The headline in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 15, 2005 read “College Prep Idea Approved in L.A.: School board votes to require students, with some exceptions, to take classes needed to enter state universities. Some teachers object” (Hayasaki, 2005). The 6-1 school board vote approved an academic reform plan, the A-G resolution, which will require high school students in LAUSD to complete a set of college prep courses. Beginning with the class of 2012, all high school students will be required to complete the 15 courses needed for admission to the University of California or California State University systems. These courses, known as the “A-G

¹³ The board members are: Gayle Miller, retired President Anne Klein II; José Huizar, Councilmember Los Angeles City Council District 14; Yolie Flores Aguilar, Executive Director Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council; Maria Casillas, President Families in Schools; Maria Cabildo, Executive Director East LA Community Corporation; Dr. Evangelina R. Stockwell, retired Assistant Superintendent Office of Intergroup Relations in the Los Angeles Unified School District; Rubén Martínez, Founder *Librería Martínez*; Luis Sánchez, Executive Director Inner City Struggle; David Abel, Chairman New Schools Better Neighborhoods

requirements” consist of four years of English, three years of math, two years of history, science and foreign language, and a year of visual and performing arts and advanced electives. Students will be required to complete these courses in order to graduate except for some special education students, some English learners and those who enroll in a career preparation program approved under state standards. Students in the class of 2008 will also be required to take these courses unless they choose to opt out.

Members of the Communities For Educational Equity (CEE), a grass-roots organization including the BHLC and some of its partner organizations, first brought this idea to then Board of Education president José Huizar and former schools superintendent Roy Romer in 2004. The proposal was developed in response to student and parent complaints that many students from crowded and underperforming high schools were being tracked into "dead end" courses because more rigorous classes were full. In the case of some year round high schools, like Roosevelt High School, these college prep courses were sometimes not available during certain academic tracks.

The resulting “A-G Campaign” mobilized hundreds of students and parents to push for support and collected signatures from 15,000 Los Angeles residents who signed petitions in favor of the motion (Inner City Struggle, 2006). Said Luis Sánchez, executive director of Inner City Struggle and one of the organizers of the A-G Campaign, “This moves a very old conversation about high expectations for all students into real policy. The argument has always been, ‘I’m for access, but I don’t want to make it a requirement.’ That doesn’t work. This is really a civil rights resolution” (Kaplan, 2005).

The passage of the A-G resolution gave added momentum to the efforts to boost literacy awareness and the development of a college-going culture in Boyle Heights. The institution of this reform also now ensured that students throughout the school district would have unimpeded access to the necessary college prep courses.

Legacy 2: The Roosevelt School Family

At the beginning of the grant, schools in Boyle Heights were organized by *school family* or feeder pattern. Under superintendent Bonnie Rubio, the Local District adopted the family-of-schools model introduced during the LAAMP years. Early in the grant operation, Casillas and school family director Geri Herrera planned to expand the project from Breed to the entire Roosevelt School Family (RSF), 15 schools and approximately 20,000 students. The two shared an excellent working relationship, and Herrera assembled a new staff to help with family-of-schools development.

Two practices, which would be sustained, began during the summer of 2000. Teachers from elementary and middle schools began to meet in order to plan a seamless transition between fifth and sixth grades. It had long been realized that students “got lost” moving from the warm environment of elementary school to a much larger middle school with secondary school schedules and a faculty trained to teach subjects rather than nurture students. By in large, teachers from the different levels had not met. Elementary teachers had little knowledge of what would be expected of their students, and middle school teachers had little appreciation of the

academic hurdles that students needed to overcome in elementary school in order to be ready for secondary education. All they saw was that students came to them unprepared.

As an outgrowth of the transition efforts, teachers at Breed and Hollenbeck created a “summer bridging” program intended to give those students considered particularly vulnerable an introduction to secondary school. Taught at Hollenbeck, students attended for four weeks in the summer and studied a mix of academic and school survival skills.

By January 2003, we were to write that RSF was becoming better organized around achievement. Transition teams had been formed between elementary and secondary levels. Elementary and secondary teachers were starting to leave what one teacher called “our hobbit holes” to discuss curriculum and learning issues across the gulf of elementary and secondary schools. A summer bridging program for students thought to be in particular danger of failure was started for entering sixth graders. Elementary principals from the school family attended two retreats, and the monthly principals’ meeting became an occasion to discuss transition efforts. In the spring of 2003, staff was being assembled and budget relationships were being developed so that work begun with grant funds could spread and could be supported by school district monies. Writing coaches were being organized around the Writer’s Workshop model, and the transition and summer bridging work was being integrated into the mix.

Breed principal Katty Iriarte noted, “The school family is starting to work together in what seems to be a unique way when compared to other school families within the district. The retreat went well. It was good to hear from the high school—it was the first time they had attended. We shared successes and points where we are stuck. ELD issues are a huge concern. They mixed us for all meals and that offered the opportunity to interact with everyone. That was our favorite part. The days were a bit long, but all’s in a day’s work.”

Despite the positive results, the school family was dismantled. LAUSD superintendent Roy Romer did not favor organization by school family, and new Local District superintendent Rowena Lagrosa was not in a position to resist. In June 2003, the RSF was abolished as an administrative structure, all the Local District high schools reported to a single administrator, and the elementary schools were divided among administrators. One principal said that they had been forbidden to even use the term Roosevelt School Family. Several of the principals continued to meet informally, but the school family as an organizing mechanism became dormant until its revival in 2005.

The school family continues to be an important structure to the logic of BHLC’s development. First, the schools in the Roosevelt High School Family fairly well matched the geographic and cultural neighborhood known as Boyle Heights. Thus, connections with neighborhood organizations and efforts to organize parents around education could be naturally synchronized with the operation of schooling.

Second, academic success for elementary and secondary students requires smooth transitions between elementary and secondary schools with free flows of information

and expectations. Transition teams and summer bridging programs were built at Breed with this in mind, and they were to engender both more extensive professional relationships between elementary and secondary teachers and better alignment of academic programs across levels. However, it immediately became clear that transition programs for a single elementary school were inadequate and in some ways counterproductive. Creating an enclave of students from one elementary school at the middle school sheltered those students a bit, but it caused resentment and an inequitable situation when compared to students from other schools. The plan was to create bridging and transition services that would gradually expand across the feeder pattern. Most importantly, however, these services would lead to a web of caring and information that was to be built as students moved from the more naturally nurturing elementary schools to the more structured secondary schools.

Third, the family administrative structure made access to the school system relatively easy, because there was one administrator as the contact person for the Collaborative, and that person also had line authority over the schools. Thus, from the standpoint of the BHLC plan, the family-based administrative structure within the Local District made good sense.

The Family Lives

In 2005, the Roosevelt School Family was recreated as an operating entity. All the RSF principals attended a Steering Committee meeting in January, and they began to raise questions about student achievement that were remarkably similar to the ones that had been raised three years earlier: “How do we know how well we did?” “Could we get data on students and back the data into the elementary schools to create a feedback loop?” “Could we send our teachers to the ELD Institute?” “Why can’t the elementary schools send data to the middle schools telling them of students that needed intervention?”

There was even a hint of righteous insubordination. Victoria Castro, principal of Hollenbeck Middle School described how she had changed the procedures for placement of English language learners. Rather than follow the more rigid guidelines from the district, she and her teachers assessed incoming students and asked for placement recommendations from fifth grade teachers. As a result, an increased number of students were placed in more challenging classes. “These kids speak English,” she said, “They are struggling readers and writers, and they don’t need to be treated as new arrivals.” Her comments drew a sharp rebuff from a district language specialist who said that the principals could only use the official district test (the Diagnostic Placement Inventory or DPI) in order to place students. Castro replied that she would follow district policy, but instructed her staff to place students using the multiple criteria she had developed, in other words, her own way.

Even though the principals were hearing discomfoting news about the progress of their students, they liked being back together and at the end of the meeting offered comments such as: “Happy that we can meet as a family; I am happy we’re a family again; The family is a smaller and more manageable group; We need success examples and a network among us.”

By February, the principals were again meeting together focusing particularly on English language learners and noting that, “policy sometimes contradicts good

instruction.” They shared positive reviews of the district ELD Institute, and negative thoughts about the *Into English* (Hampton Brown) curriculum, which they thought was not well aligned to the California Standards Test. They reported that the old practice of having a data card follow students as they transferred from elementary to middle school was being revived. Castro had suggested this in an earlier meeting.

By the end of the year, principals were again holding retreats. A leadership team met in Oxnard and the principals were fully engaged in planning for the future. The RSF school principals continue to meet under the leadership of the BHLC.

Legacy 3: Building Parent Capacity and Influence

Parents across the Roosevelt School Family are provided with tools, strategies, and networks to help them be strong advocates for their children and to work together to mobilize around critical educational issues. BHLC targets the difficult transition periods students face as they enter kindergarten, middle school and high school, as well as the critical education policy issues that greatly affect their children. -BHLC Web site 2006

A key goal of the BHLC is to build parent capacity by enabling parents to be partners in learning with their children and advocates for their children’s education both at home and within the community. The BHLC also works to help Latino parents overcome some of the cultural and psychological barriers to involvement in education (see Tinker, 2002). In a broader context, the BHLC also seeks to engage parents in helping to create a culture of achievement and literacy in Boyle Heights.

BHLC Parent Engagement Initiatives

To accomplish these goals, the BHLC implemented a variety of parent engagement initiatives during the grant period. These initiatives can be grouped into four general categories, although it should be noted that some programs address more than one category:

- Parents as First Educators
- Parents as Learning/Literacy Partners
- Parents as Advocates
- Parents Developing Life Skills

Some of these initiatives have also become “legacy programs”—programs that were initiated as a result of the BHLC grant and are continuing on beyond the five-year grant timeframe.

In implementing these programs, the BHLC sought to find ways to encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education and to help them do so in a meaningful and effective way. In the case of the BHLC initiatives, parent engagement was defined and operationalized in a number of ways, including initiating learning activities at home such as reading, helping with and monitoring homework, setting and communicating high expectations for their children, and

advocacy (both for their own children's education and for others in the Boyle Heights community). The following section concentrates on what we regard as the three most successful BHLC parent engagement initiatives.

Parents as First Educators. The programs targeted at preschool age children helped set the stage for longer-term parental involvement as well as helping prepare young children for the transition to Kindergarten. While several programs were initially implemented, the *Home to Kinder* program has become a legacy program. There is strong evidence that the students who participated in the program were able to enter the English Language Development program at higher levels than those who did not (see Director's Report, January 2005, p. 46). The parent component of the program educated parents on methods to promote literacy in the home and on how to teach and reinforce key kindergarten concepts. Parents were also encouraged to build relationships with each other and with their child's teachers.

Parents as Learning/Literacy Partners. The *Achievement Academies*, in particular, helped parents to overcome any insecurities about getting more involved and, in fact, to help them understand that this is their right as parents. The program also emphasized how to have productive conversations with teachers and administrators.

At one meeting, a Breed Street mother shared her preconception that "education and going to school are something for the kids to experience on their own." She thought that a parent's role was to send them to school and little more. She said that she didn't realize that she could or should get involved, nor the importance of it. Another parent shared that she has learned from the school that she doesn't *molesta* (bother) people when she asks questions of school staff. Teachers who were present at the meeting reinforced this notion by telling the group that, "It is a pleasure to hear from parents, so please don't think you are a bother." At another meeting, community organizer Joaquín Sánchez told the parents that they should be *methiches* (meddlesome parents): "I give you permission to be *methiches*," he said.

The Achievement Academies also helped parents to communicate with their children about school. At one session, parents were given a "homework assignment" to have conversations with their children about what they learned in school. In response to completing the exercise, parents commented that they had never had conversations like that with their children before. The parents expressed that they were really glad that they were asked to do this homework assignment, as they are learning more about what their children are doing in school, and overall just learning more about their children.

Personal Narrative: GABINO ALVARADO

Parent Educator

That meeting changed my life...

I came to this country on December 25, 1983, and started the second semester of Roosevelt High School. I did my high school in two and a half years, and those were the ugliest years of my life. I was an ESL student, and it was hard... So that's why I want to change things and why I started having an interest in working with parents and trying to help the community a little bit.

I started working at Breed Street school seventeen years ago. I used to work on the playground, and that's how I got to know some of the parents. Parents used to be comfortable with me, and they used to come and tell me their stories. .

But I'm a very shy person. When the principal invited me to go to an IAF meeting in Dallas, I had never traveled out of East Los Angeles. But then in Dallas I saw the room full of people, and I felt this energy coming from them, because everybody was there to learn something and to do something in their communities and their schools.

After going to the meeting in Dallas I said, "Well, I could do something about it, but I don't know how to start it." The BHLC Director suggested, "Why don't you do something like they did in Texas, like parent academies?" And I thought, "Well, yeah, that could be an idea." So that's when I came up with the PEACE (Parent Education and Community Enrichment) Program. And at the first meeting, I asked the parents about their needs, because I remember all the parent meetings the district used to have where no one asked the parents what they needed. So I said, if I do something, I will ask the parents what they want to learn in order to help their kids.

So that's how everything started. I think if it weren't for the grant I wouldn't have done this. I would just be stuck in whatever I was doing on the playground, and that's it. And trying to help the parents by providing them with material things, but not knowledge. Because I used to give them money, or buy them a loaf of bread or shoes for the little kids. If it weren't for the grant I wouldn't know that there are places parents can go to get help for themselves.

At the first meeting we held at Breed, the auditorium was filled. I was stunned. I didn't know there were going to be that many.

But it was hard for me to stand up in front of others. And the first time, my hands were sweating. But after that, I thought, "I'm doing something positive for our community." So every time I give a meeting that's the way I see it. If one of the parents, at least one, takes the advice it makes me feel good.

And everything happened because I was given the opportunity to go to Dallas. That meeting changed my life. If it weren't for Dallas I wouldn't be here. I would just be on the playground.¹⁴

¹⁴ Alvarado is currently working as a parent community facilitator for Local District 4 and works with 96 public schools.

The ***Transition to Middle School Curriculum for Parents*** of fifth graders conveyed many of the same concepts as the Achievement Academies. We noted that BHLC parent educator Gabino Alvarado, the facilitator, often referenced and reinforced the ideas and vocabulary used in the Achievement Academies as well as topics covered in the PEACE workshops. This signaled a continuity and consistency of message on the part of those implementing the BHLC's various parent engagement initiatives.

Alvarado also addressed the cultural barriers to parent involvement, telling the parents:

As Latinos, parents tend to give too much power and authority to teachers to handle educational issues with their children, and parents tend to believe that the extent of their role as parents is getting their children to school. That thinking needs to stop. Everyone needs to support each other and the teachers. Even if they are not your children you still need to support them. I have lots of children here at Breed Street and give them support and guidance in any way I can. You need to do the same for other people's children.

To help parents better understand the language reclassification and ESL placement process, parents of fourth and fifth grade students were also invited to a meeting with one of the bilingual coordinators from the middle school. The coordinator explained the various placement policies and urged parents to help their children get reclassified as quickly as possible. "Because," the coordinator cautioned parents, "if students 'get stuck' in ESL, then by the time they get to high school, none of their classes will count toward college admissions requirements."

Meetings such as this not only gave parents critical information, but they helped to establish a positive relationship with middle school staff. After one of the meetings with the coordinator, parents expressed that they felt more empowered and that they were glad to have someone like the coordinator looking out for them and their children.

Both the Achievement Academies and the Parent Transition program fill a critical need on the part of parents for concrete, specific information about the educational process, and both are legacy programs of the BHLC. Both programs serve to address parents' well-founded anxiety about the English language learner reclassification process and to give them information about the courses and resources their children will need to access opportunities for college. The programs also offer parents specific methods and strategies for supporting their children's educational process. However, what distinguishes the BHLC initiatives from other parent engagement programs is their emphasis on relationship building and in facilitating conversations between parents as well as with program facilitators. When parents engage each other about the issues affecting their children's education and futures, they have the potential to become powerful allies in the pursuit of improved educational access and outcomes.

Parents as Advocates. Clearly a thread running throughout the BHLC's parent engagement initiatives has been that of advocacy. Programs such as the Achievement Academies and the Transition to Middle School not only offer critical information and skills, but also make parents aware of the disturbing statistics in their

communities. Parents are told how *high* the drop out rate is for students in their community and how *low* the college going rate. When parents express their dismay, they are challenged to use their voices on behalf of their children. As Alvarado told parents, “We need to know what the laws are and get ourselves together and keep our kids in school...we need not just to get informed but to keep others informed, stick together and advocate for our kids and for each others’ kids and for each other.”

Over the past five years, the BHLC has successfully developed innovative models for parent engagement that are helping parents to become a powerful force for educational justice in the Boyle Heights community. The A-G Campaign as discussed above is an important example of parent civic involvement and advocacy.

Education researchers conclude that this type of civic involvement is not only important for children but is also critical for the future of public education and to civil society:

The lack of social and political capital can seriously restrict families’ capacity to support their children’s learning and make sure they get a high-quality education. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When [organizations] work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the school and advocates for public education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 63).

While there is no simple or sure way to build continuing parent involvement, the series of techniques developed by the BHLC provide an avenue that links the very immediate and tangible task of parents being the first educators of their children with the more public task of advocating for change in public schooling. As such, it stands a good example of building civic capacity, and it extends and intensifies parent work done in earlier reforms in Los Angeles.

Personal Narrative: JOSEFINA AVILA
Parent, Boyle Heights

It was an honor for me when the parents came to me...how they looked to me for leadership...

The best thing that could have happened to my son and me was his involvement with the Society of Students (SOS). As a parent of a student at Breed Street I had volunteered for many years in the classroom. I remember only greeting the other parents but never really getting to know them personally.

But through my son’s involvement in SOS and by my being asked to become a member of the leadership team of the Annenberg grant, I began to communicate with other parents. We began to have conversations about our children, the school, and the concerns we had about them leaving Breed Street and going off to Hollenbeck Middle School. It was an honor for me when the parents came to me and expressed their personal feelings, and how they looked to me for leadership.

When it came time for our children to attend sixth grade at Hollenbeck, a group of us parents decided to go and meet with the Hollenbeck principal. At this meeting we introduced ourselves as a group of parents who had concerns but who also wanted to volunteer our services to the school.

Throughout the sixth grade year, our entire group participated in one way or another at the middle school. I became a go-to person between teachers and parents. I would call parents to listen to their concerns and translate for them or the teachers.

Our group was also asked to come back to Breed Street to talk to the fifth grade parents. We told them we shared the same concerns about our kids—the transition to middle school and all the social and emotional changes.

Through the grant I have had a number of opportunities to help plan programs for parents and families such as Family Literacy Night and the *Feria del Libro*. I also participated as a member of the Literacy Committee. I think my involvement in these activities helped me to become qualified for my current position as the library aide at Breed Street School. Getting this position has allowed me, for the first time, to provide health benefits for my son and myself.

I grew up in Boyle Heights and live there still. Many of my neighbors look to me for help—with paperwork or accessing resources. I look forward to continuing to participate in all of these things that are improving our schools and community.

Legacy 4: The Society of Students

Over the course of her 30+ years of teaching, and especially during a three-year stint of teaching at the local public middle school, SOS founder Janis Hiura watched many of her former Breed Street students enter middle school and succumb to social pressures from negative peer groups. As one student told her, “I couldn’t fight it any more.” By “negative peer groups,” Hiura is not only talking about “gang bangers,” but also about a prevailing apathy toward academics at the middle and high schools. This motivated Hiura to find a way to help her students develop the necessary skills and fortitude to resist these negative social forces. Her goal is for students to arrive at the middle school and, together, create a social and academic “safety zone” of the type that is usually only found in the gifted or honors classes.

The resulting program, SOS, is designed to help students succeed academically, to resist negative social influences, and to develop leadership and networking skills. SOS also instills in students the habits of mind and heart needed to be successful advocates for their education and their community. Peer-to-peer interaction and students holding each other accountable are also important elements of the program. Hiura regards SOS as “recreating the gang” as a positive rather than negative force.

The SOS program formally began in 2000-01 in Hiura’s fifth grade classroom and included approximately 30 fifth grade students. As a partner in the BHLC, Breed Street was allocated funding to allow Hiura to leave the classroom to direct the SOS program full-time. In this capacity, Hiura began working to expand the program to all grade levels at Breed Street and to spread the program to other local elementary and middle schools.

Since its beginnings, the SOS program has grown to encompass nearly 300 active participants in grades one through five, out of a total student body of approximately 700, and has begun to expand to other neighborhood schools. Hiura and a team of teachers also developed a formal SOS curriculum and held an inaugural SOS training institute in August 2006.

The SOS hallmark is its “signature vocabulary.” Students and teachers use this common language—a form of shorthand—to refer to specific skills and behaviors. First and foremost is the term “A.P.” While this term usually refers to the college level, Advanced Placement classes offered during high school, in this case it references a certain set of positive behaviors and attitudes. “Being A.P.” or having an “A.P. mentality” means that students always try their best in school, are responsible, demonstrate good behavior inside and outside of the classroom, and help other people. This common language also serves to help embed SOS principles into the culture of the school.

Society of Students: Program Description

When asked to describe the SOS program, without exception students referred to the “group” and also to helping other students. They talked about learning to be “better people,” to thinking about the future and to reaching their goals. One student referenced the skills she had learned by participating in the SOS program, “If you're having a bad, hard time, the skills that we learn come to use and they also come to use in everyday life.” Most students also mentioned that members of SOS did various things to help the community.

Core Principles

SOS is based on four core principles:

1. To create a culture of empowerment for students, resulting in a community of active rather than passive learners.
2. The belief that *all* students can be leaders, and that leadership is unique to each individual student.
3. The belief that *all* students can and should set high standards for themselves; and
4. Reliance on students to teach, reinforce and support each other as members of SOS, and as they make their way through school and the community.

Empowerment. At the heart of SOS is the concept of student empowerment. In fact, rather than being called a “program,” SOS should more properly be characterized as a “culture” in which student empowerment is central. While students are expected to set high standards for themselves and to adhere to a particular code of conduct, SOS is not about imposing conformity or being perfect all of the time. Students are encouraged to “speak from your heart,” to use their authentic voices, and to “dare to be different.”

Empowering students has important implications for how teachers function in the classroom. Some teachers are mistakenly attracted to SOS because they see it as a way to “control the class.” Indeed, SOS does greatly enhance classroom management, however, this is a result of the teacher stepping back rather than exerting more control.

In SOS, the teacher gradually diminishes her role as leader and begins to step back, allowing the students to step forward and lead. They impact other students because they have internalized the fundamental mindset. They are self-driven and intrinsically motivated because they feel empowered (SOS Curriculum, Early Draft, 2005, unpaginated).

Leadership. SOS believes that all students can be leaders, and as such, redefines the concept of student leaders. The program recognizes that there are different types of leadership and that each student’s leadership style will be unique but equally valued. A shy student may discover that he or she has what SOS calls “quiet power” and is a leader by example rather than by words, or works diligently “behind the scenes.” Students who have been bullies in the past learn to turn their negative leadership into positive leadership. Rather than the more traditional dictionary definition of leadership, Hiura believes that fundamentally, leadership is primarily about being a strong problem solver.

Effort. Students in SOS are expected to set high standards for themselves in all aspects of their lives. However, they are not expected to be perfect students or even straight A students. SOS embraces a culture of excellence based on effort. Students are told to “finish strong,” to be resilient and to persevere: “Being AP is about each person being their best self. It’s not about being perfect all of the time, but rather putting forth their best effort and holding themselves to higher standards” (SOS Curriculum, Final Draft, 2006, p.5).

Peer-to-peer. “Students helping other students” is one of the guiding principles of the SOS program. While some students become formal “trainer of trainers,” all of the students in the program are expected to reach out to other students and to help them improve their academic skills and to feel part of the school community. Students learn to hold each other accountable for their behavior and to model effective communication, listening, problem solving and facilitation skills.

As trainer of trainers, these elementary and middle school students conduct sessions for adults as well as other students, teaching them SOS principals and skills. Hiura explains, “If a kid can turn around and teach SOS, then he really gets it.” Moreover, having students train each other gives an authenticity to the program and increases student buy-in.

SOS also teaches students to rely on each other as resources. Hiura believes that students need to learn how to create their own safe haven at school by developing a network of peers, or “go-to buddies.” She wants kids to say to other kids, “Stand with me—you’re not alone.” This is especially necessary once they enter middle school. SOS emphasizes “equity” expressed as inclusion and acceptance.

A Common Language

The language and vocabulary of SOS is an important aspect of the program. Learning the SOS language is key to understanding its concepts and to embedding SOS into the culture of classroom and home:

Words and phrases that are representative of the SOS ideology are crucial to this culture. The dynamic language captures the essence and soul of SOS...It is a reinforcement of an ideology, not a jargon (SOS Curriculum, Early Draft, 2005, unpaginated).

While to the uninitiated this vocabulary may seem cumbersome, after observing it in use its importance becomes clear. As students explore the meaning behind these terms through various exercises and routines, they begin to internalize their meaning. This vocabulary gives students in the program a common, succinct and straightforward language to help cue behavior, hold each other accountable, and to communicate their goals. The students themselves like it, too. When asked if having their “own special language” in SOS was helpful, one student replied: “I think yes, because it also helps little kids understand by not using big words; and they’re interesting words, so they help you understand.” Said another student:

Our first language is Spanish, our second is English and our third is our SOS language. It is popping up and speaking up, using powerful words and expressing our own ideas.

Exhibit 11: Society of Students Lexicon	
A.P.	Advanced Placement; AP students always raise the academic and social bar, always try their best in school, are responsible, demonstrate good behavior inside and outside of the classroom, and help other people
Big “O”	Oblivious; not paying attention to others or to what is going on around you, be aware and understand the situation
CCC	Completing social and academic tasks Completely, Carefully, and Correctly
Dare to be Different	Students learn to value integrity by expressing their opinions despite peer pressure; learning that they do not have to conform to be accepted, finding and valuing their own voice
Downtown voice	Students encourage others to project their voices when they are speaking too softly by calling out this phrase. Refers to being heard all the way across the bridge in Downtown L.A. (see also “Power Please”)
Equity	Learning to appreciate differences, to be inclusive and to bring others into the fold. (The “E” in RICE)
Eyeball	Getting people’s attention by scanning the audience and establishing eye-contact.
Finish Strong	Be resilient and persevere
Five-Step Problem Solving	Students are taught this process that includes: 1-Understand the situation; 2- Gather data (using “go-to” resources); 3-Develop a plan (have plans A-Z); 4-Carry out the plan (“Do it”); and 5-Check Back
Go-To Buddy	A person who comes along side of someone to help them out; also called an “AP Buddy”
Go-To resources	People, places and things a student learns to access in order to help solve problems
Impulse Control	Challenges students to monitor and control their behavior; the “I” in RICE

KISS	Keep It Short and Simple
Magnetize	Students learn to magnetize others (attract them to the group or the community by forming a positive “school-boy, school-girl” gang) by being friendly, polite, and “go-to” people
New Blood	Giving someone who has not yet spoken a turn; learning how and when to step forward or back and that leadership does not mean dominating the conversation; supporting and encouraging other to speak (equity)
Popcorn	Used to develop public speaking skills; rather than raising their hands, students “pop up” when they wish to speak, sharpen their critical thinking and listening skills, incorporate body language, value everyone’s input, and encourage all to participate
Power Greeting	Students learn how to greet people in a variety of situations in unique ways (understand the situation) by incorporating public speaking skills (eye contact, intonation, strong opening) and a firm hand shake; a confidence builder
Power Please	Students encourage others to project when they are speaking too softly by calling out this phrase, using their “downtown voice”
Quiet Power	Someone who leads by example but not necessarily by words; different than being shy
RICE	Respect, Responsibility Impulse Control, Integrity Consideration, Compassion Equity, Energy
Schmooze	Students learn to use conversation to make others comfortable. They also learn to ask quality questions, to be good listeners and to make connections to what another person has said. Also part of developing “go-to” resources
Speak from your heart	Encourages students to use their authentic voice
Step Forward/Step Out	Knowing when to exert leadership, and when to “get out of the way” and let others take over; part of learning situational leadership
Sweep the Room	Getting people’s attention by scanning the audience and establishing eye contact. See also “eyeball”
Trainer of Trainers	SOS members who train other students
Two-Faced	Behaving well in the classroom, but not outside of the classroom (school yard, at home, etc.); used to develop integrity
Understand the Situation	Last step of Five Step Problem Solving; phrase used to cue students to stop and assess exactly what is happening.
Walk the Walk	When your actions match your words
What If	Phrase used to imagine or create different scenarios or to rewind a situation
“YOU ARE THE WOMAN!” “YOU ARE THE MAN!”	Affirmation used by the group when a peer or any child/adult has a good idea, or exhibits effective leadership. Initiated by an individuals calling out, “Point to him/her” and everyone points to the person and calls out collectively, “You are the man/woman!”

Source: SOS Curriculum 2006

Program Goals

According to Hiura, the primary goal of the SOS program is to “develop students to become self-driven leaders who know how to attain goals, build resources, advocate for their own learning and become leaders in their own communities.” The model operates on the belief that each individual can participate and make a positive difference by developing a leadership “skill set” including communication, resource building, facilitation, anger management, conflict resolution, public speaking and problem solving. Hiura believes that the curriculum is effective with all types of students: the gifted child; the quiet, invisible child; those who are low performing and/or who have low self-esteem, and even children who are in special education classes.

Hiura wants SOS students to become self-motivated and self-sufficient. Stated goals for students are that by the eighth grade, each child will be:

- One who knows how to handle himself/herself in any situation
- One who sees himself/herself as a success
- One who has choices in his/her life
- One who has social consciousness and sees the worth of others
- One who believes in public service and continues to build democracy
- An effective communicator, able to articulate and engage others in conversation
- A resource builder, one who can seek out resources and has a list of “go-to” people
- A facilitator, one who knows when to step forward and when to step back
- An analytical individual who can engage in a five-step problem solving method

Personal Narrative: ALEX IBARRA

SOS Student

■ *We have actually “recultured” Breed Street Elementary...*

One of the purposes of SOS is to change people’s perspective of Boyle Heights. It is a positive gang trying to demolish the negative gangs in our society.

It is about raising expectations for students so when we reach college we will not be unfamiliar with the high expectations set in universities. It is about giving everyone an equal opportunity to succeed in life.

Personally, SOS has helped in unleashing my potential and to achieve the maximum. For example, I showed courage and stepped forward at our Community Leadership Day when I spoke in front of the entire community. I have also learned how to teach the SOS customs to those who are unfamiliar with this unique program.

We have actually “recultured” Breed Street Elementary. Our goal is for the Society of Students to impact the world.

Outcomes and Impact

Perceived Impact-Students

Interviews were conducted with seven students (four girls and three boys) who were still active SOS members while attending Hollenbeck Middle School. These students had all originally joined the SOS program while they were attending Breed Street Elementary.

The students were asked if they felt that the SOS program had helped them and if so, to give some examples. Their answers ranged from saying that the program has helped them to take school and their schoolwork more seriously, to its helping them to become more confident and to learn to deal with peer pressure. A couple of the students mentioned that they had previously been very shy and that being in SOS had helped to bring them out. As one student explained:

It has helped me and how it has helped me is that before I used to be shy but now I like to talk more in front of people and I'm not shy to share my ideas with other people. I like to reach out and tell my views to other people so they, too, can tell their ideas and not be shy.

Another student referenced an experience with peer pressure and how being in SOS had helped him to deal with it:

It's helped me in how to face peer pressure and how to get out of situations when students make fun of me since I'm in the SOS. They tell me, 'Oh you're in SOS, you're a schoolboy.'

With regard to schoolwork, some students said that SOS helped them to care more about their work and to understand the importance of completing their school assignments. One student said that prior to being a member of SOS he would do his homework, but he wouldn't ask for help if he didn't know how to do something: “So, I just did what I could but I didn't ask for help,” he explained.

For the most part, the students also felt that being in SOS had helped them to make the transition from elementary school to middle school. For some it was the specific preparation that the SOS program offered, as described by one of the students: “Because here at Breed towards the end of the year we started practicing these special trainings where we would learn about the problems over at the middle school and what we can do to stay away from those problems or prevent them; so that helped.”

One student described how what she learned in the SOS at Breed helped to pull her back from the peer pressure experienced at Hollenbeck. When asked how the middle school differed from elementary school, she replied:

It's different because the minute you enter you have to fit in. If you don't fit in... Well, then you get laughed at and I think people lose their self esteem and they don't believe in themselves. So over there [Hollenbeck] it's like you have to be cool and you have to dress certain ways and you have to make sure that you have cool friends because if you don't you feel put down.

The issue of peer pressure came up frequently in interviews with students, even when students were not explicitly asked about it. Most seemed to feel that while they don't like it, they have a pretty good handle on it and credit the SOS program with giving them the skills and focus to deal with it. As one student put it when asked about dealing with peer pressure, "But I mean I don't pay attention to them; I know that I'm going to have a better future than them."

At the conclusion of the 2004-05 school year, several fifth grade SOS members reflected on the value of SOS at their fifth grade culmination ceremony. "I remember when I used to be a bully," said one student. "When I was punished, I did not change but I would take revenge." He continued by describing how some of the other SOS members really inspired him to join:

When I got into SOS it was like a dream come true. I proved that I really belonged. In the past I followed the wrong people. Now I emulate different styles to be a better leader... Before SOS, I did not have dreams or goals. Now I have goals in my life and I think about the future.

Finally, one of the students in the original cohort of SOS students, now a high school student, observed that even if kids have dropped out of the SOS program at the middle or high school level, SOS is "still inside them."

Perceived Impact-Teachers

In addition to Hiura's work with students outside of the classroom, a number of the teachers at Breed Street Elementary have embraced the SOS program/philosophy and have incorporated it into their teaching. Even those who do not formally utilize SOS have noted the difference that it makes for some of their students. Teachers observe that SOS students are more motivated, have higher self-esteem, are more confident and are able to work cooperatively with their peers.

Of particular note is the impact that SOS has had on some of the more reserved students. Said one teacher, "SOS builds self esteem definitely, especially those kids that are quiet...I mean, they just blossom." Another concurred, commenting:

I see that the students are a lot more confident in themselves. They're able to speak up and say what they need to in a very positive way. They're not intimidated to go up to people that they have just met and to converse with them.

Although SOS was not designed specifically to be a classroom management tool, teachers report that it does make the classroom run more smoothly. A first grade teacher noted that:

SOS does wonders for the classroom...Just having the badge, knowing that now they're SOS gives them more of a sense of responsibility for themselves...

One teacher observed that SOS helped a range of her students:

It's just not the brighter student that's in SOS. I have several students that are more on the quiet side...But they hold their own as far as speaking, as far as doing their work. In their quiet way, they show leadership. When I do cooperative groups, it's really interesting to see which ones are the leaders and they're usually my SOS members...It really opened my eyes...I've noticed that whenever I do cooperative learning groups, the SOS members always step up. So, I try to put one SOS member in each group.

Beyond the classroom, Breed teachers also saw the impact of SOS on the culture of the school. As one teacher described it:

You walked into this school and from the principal on out, it was just a feel. You could feel it walking in here. There was just this mindset, this culture, this ambiance. It was everywhere. I mean AP, honor, the whole idea of just being nice to each other, just greeting. It seemed like such a novel idea but you know, it created such a mood. And I think now there's a lot of teachers that really have bought into it...They discovered it within themselves.

Some teachers also commented on the impact of SOS on their teaching and development as professionals. Stated one, "Many of the SOS philosophies are/have been crucial in my growth as a teacher and my dynamics with the students." "Oh, man!" said another, "Honestly, I feel that my life has been affected by SOS. Not only my personal life, but my own creative way I see things, the way I attack problems."

Increased Achievement

As detailed earlier in this report, in March 2005, the evaluation team looked at academic achievement measures among 100 students enrolled in the third, fourth, and fifth grades at Breed Street Elementary School. In addition to determining which student assessment measures were most likely to predict a student's English Language Arts score on the California Standards, the study also looked at whether there was a significant difference in academic achievement between students in the SOS program and those who were not. The number of SOS students in the sample was 55—just over slightly half the sample—which was consistent with the ratio of SOS to non-SOS students in the general school population during the 2004-05 school year.¹⁵

A t-test for independent groups was run using all of the achievement measures, and the t-test showed positive significant differences between SOS and non-SOS

¹⁵ The 2005 BHLC Annual Report states that 305 Breed Street Elementary students in grades 1-5 were members of SOS. This represents 51% of the total 1st -5th enrollment of 600 students.

students on 12 of the 16 achievement measures. Most importantly, the study showed SOS students performed better than their non-SOS peers on the California State Standards tests for math and English language arts. SOS students also did better on report card grades both in subject areas and in homework completion and effort. See Exhibit 12 below.

Exhibit 12: SOS members' achievement compared with Non-SOS							
Variable	SOS Mean	Non SOS Mean	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper
CST04 ELA Score	319.62	291.62	3.154	96.383	.002	-45.61	-10.38
CST04 Math Score	357.75	318.36	3.196	98	.002	-63.84	-14.94
Math Assessment Spring 04	64.61	50.72	3.227	82	.002	-22.45	-5.33
Open Court Reading Comp.	5.855	5.000	2.071	98	.041	-1.673	-3.583E-02
Open Court Spelling	5.964	4.244	4.776	98	.000	-2.433	-1.005
Open Court Vocabulary	5.345	4.111	2.755	98	.007	-2.123	-.345
Open Court Writing Conventions	2.473	2.178	2.238	97.753	.027	-5.56	-3.343E-020
Report Card 04 Reading	2.82	2.29	3.998	96.239	.000	-.79	-.27
Report Card 04 Writing	2.65	2.29	3.263	97.996	.002	-.59	-.14
Report Card 04 Math	2.73	2.40	3.179	98	.002	-.53	-.12
Report Card 04 Use of Time	3.09	2.58	3.454	98	.001	-.81	-.22
Report Card 04 Homework	3.27	2.78	3.358	98	.001	-.79	-.20

In terms of the composition of the sample, there was no major difference between the two groups in gifted identification (5% of non SOS versus 8% of SOS members). However, it should be noted that when looking at the sample by language classification, there were significantly more students Reclassified as Fully English Proficient (RFEP) students in the SOS group than in the non SOS group—22% versus 9% (see Exhibit 13). Since RFEP students often perform higher academically than other English proficient groups (English Only, Initially Fluent) this may be a limitation of the study. However, it should be noted that there was also a greater percentage of students in the early stages of English language development (ELD 2s and 3s) in SOS than in the comparison group.

Exhibit 13: Language Classification SOS compared with Non SOS				
Language Classification	SOS	% of SOS Sample	Non SOS	% of Non SOS Sample
ELD1	0	0	1	2.2
ELD2	5	9.1	2	4.4
ELD3	10	18.2	8	17.8
ELD4	12	21.8	13	28.9
ELD5	4	7.3	9	20.0
RFEP	12	21.8	4	8.9
IFEP	6	10.9	3	6.7
EO	6	10.9	5	11.1
Total	55	100.0	45	100.0

SOS Beyond Breed

As discussed above, one of the goals of the SOS program (and of the BHLC) is to expand the program to other schools in the Local District. The current strategy is to embed the SOS program into as many of the Roosevelt School Family elementary schools as possible so that a sizeable cohort of SOS members will converge on the middle schools when they enter the sixth grade. In addition, SOS programs are currently being developed for the two middle schools that feed into Roosevelt High School.

In the summer of 2005, a team of teachers from Breed Street and First Street schools met to draft a formal SOS curriculum.¹⁶ The curriculum was “field tested” by teachers at Breed, First and Utah elementary schools during the 2005-06 school year. In August 2006, the first SOS training institute was held, and 44 teachers, counselors and administrators from 15 schools attended. Janis Hiura is spending the 2006-07 school year working with a variety of local schools to help them implement the SOS program under the auspices of the BHLC.

¹⁶ The SOS curriculum also includes a newly developed Parent and Community Engagement component. Each lesson includes suggestions and tips for bringing the SOS culture home and into the broader community.

Representatives from Atlanta's public schools have also expressed interest in implementing SOS district wide. Representatives from the Atlanta Community Learning Collaborative (ACLC), a companion initiative of the BHLC also funded by the Annenberg Foundation, have made three site visits to Breed and are moving ahead with plans to bring SOS to Atlanta Schools in 2007.

First Street and Utah Street elementary schools are the furthest along in implementing SOS locally. First Street is in its fourth year of the program and includes students in grades three through five. Utah Elementary is in its second year of implementation in grades three through six. However, since the SOS Summer Institute, Hiura has been meeting with and scheduling trainings with an additional nine schools in the Roosevelt School Family, including the two middle schools.

The BHLC as a Model Organization

We haven't reached the goal of successful schools yet in Boyle Heights. We haven't done that yet. But we've mobilized ourselves: we've left a network in place that can do the job and more. -Maria Casillas.

In recent months, the BHLC has been talked about as a *model* for community-based organizations in Los Angeles, and there are several other such organizations that look to it for guidance.

The new organization faces two tasks that complicate its beginning. Rationalizing the organization itself and finding funds to allow it to continue is a huge task and the source of more than a little anxiety. The hand-to-mouth existence the BHLC faces contrasts markedly with the luxury it had in the past. Even while it scrambles to support its future, there is strong pressure in Los Angeles to replicate the basic structure and function of the collaborative.

Other communities, including Belmont and South Central, are creating organizations to engage parents and advocate for improvements in the school district. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa views these organizations as allies in his campaign to influence the direction of the district, and potentially they are a response to a governance system that has proven to be dysfunctional. Rather than institute a layer of governance at the school or neighborhood level, it is possible that Los Angeles may develop a series of strong advocacy organizations that are not beholden to any of the existing interest groups. This form of organizing is in marked contrast to Chicago's elected school councils, or the idea of breaking up LAUSD into much smaller school districts, each with its own elected governing board.

The possibilities of robust community organizations is exciting and very much a derivative of the LAAMP project. We understand that Families in Schools is to take on the leadership in advising and founding other collaboratives on the BHLC model, but even if that is the case, there will be strong time demands on the new executive director and her staff.

Perhaps the strongest legacy of this grant is an affirmation of the fact that communities are a good investment. Certainly there are elements of the grant that did not work as well as anyone would have liked. But the big picture accomplishment was to form an organization with substantial potential, and to link it with others in the Public Education Network. It is most interesting that PEN and the BHLC are headed in the same direction: PEN departing from its traditional booster-organization role to a strong advocacy organization built around some of the same elements as BHLC— data, training, advocacy and the like. Both organizations are an affirmation of the need and the desirability of investing in communities that surround public schools rather than investing in market-based organizations. This is not particularly a statement about markets; interesting ideas are emerging from the charter schools movement, but they are not well linked to underlying social structures of schools, and they have not developed a governance infrastructure that increases civic capacity.

But a model of what? The BHLC is an unusual organization, and it *needs* to defy aspects of conventional wisdom in order to function well and avoid typical organizational failure characteristics.

The BHLC differs from the educational intermediaries that were active in past Los Angeles reforms. LEARN and LAAMP focused on elite politics and organizational change. A powerful coalition of business, community, and labor interests pressured the school board, and the top administration. LEARN worked well at getting policies adopted, but it stumbled badly at implementation, because the same school district that had been pressured into accepting the LEARN plan in the first place was charged with the responsibility of implementing it. LEARN excelled at the politics of legislation, getting a plan approved. It was a failure at the politics of institutionalization, getting its plan translated into action by the school district it was trying to change. LAAMP extended, and also financed, LEARN's work in Los Angeles Unified and brought with it increased attention to student achievement, to parent organizing, and especially the idea of school families, which the BHLC extends.

The BHLC operates on a much smaller scale than LEARN, and it is creating an organization that can work simultaneously at the level of educational policy and the level of implementation. BHLC staff has developed expertise in parent education and are developing good, grounded knowledge about what works in English language development. The network of Roosevelt School Family principals and school staff provides the BHLC executive director with insight into school operations that sometimes cannot be voiced within the district itself.

The BHLC is also different from earlier neighborhood organizations, such as UNO, which was part of the Industrial Areas Foundation organizing activity in the late 1980s. UNO worked successfully as an advocacy organization but was not primarily engaged in education reform. When UNO and the other IAF-spawned organizations became program operators, they lost much of their independence and grassroots zeal. The IAF understood this weakness, and during the grant period, it embarked on a program that returned to its organizing roots and focused on education using the Alliance Schools model imported from Texas.

But although the IAF considered itself to be “the organizing arm” of the Boyle Heights organization, the BHLC has evolved with somewhat different community organizing principles. The IAF core principle of “relationships before program” proved too slow and indefinite to hold people’s participation. Boyle Heights residents were more likely to come together around a particular issue and then use the experience of having come together on one issue to continue their relationships when applied to another. Parents were most likely to come together around understanding their own children’s learning. The Achievement Academy model, and its approach to engaging parents, which was begun by IAF organizer Joaquín Sanchez, has become part of the BHLC organizing framework for parents of English language learners run by Vickie Ramos.

Also, the BHLC differs from the longstanding education fund organizations, such as the Los Angeles Partnership for Educational Progress (LAEP), which connected successfully with individual teachers but had little policy presence. Its good ideas generally did not spread, and the organization’s teacher-centered artful pedagogies became subterranean or “below the radar” changes. The scale of changes needed at the Los Angeles Unified School District was greater than the LAEP-style organization could influence. It could seed ideas, encourage the innovative but not change the whole district. By the time the BHLC started, the idea that the whole district, indeed the whole institution of public education, needed to change was well accepted. Indeed, the Public Education Network, itself, recognizes the need for more activist local education funds.

As a consequence, the BHLC had to be built around both an insider role helping schools and an outsider role of advocating, pushing, and sometimes embarrassing schools and the district. In a sense, the BHLC represents a maturation of the parent involvement strategy begun in LAAMP, which stopped short of parents as advocates. Simultaneously, the BHLC has become active in direct student assistance, through bridging and transition programs, and pressure to implement the A-G, college-ready high school requirements. In the near-term future, advocacy will extend to English language development policy, including how students are taught and how they are reclassified as English proficient.

To take on the inside-outside roles, the BHLC has to exhibit some of the characteristics of a conventional bureaucracy, using the word in the descriptive sense, not as a pejorative. It has a leader, a staff, and a board of directors. Among its staff, it has a relatively conventional division of labor; people have jobs with defined duties and responsibilities. It has a business plan and a specific list of goals and objectives, which it is beginning to articulate in flyers and presentations:

- Providing for Children’s Success
- Building Parent Capacity
- Fostering Civic Engagement
- Creating Shared Accountability

The BHLC’s conventional structure makes it potentially strong at program delivery, which is important both for the revenue it brings to the collaborative and for the direct connection to the schools it provides. As the leaders of another educational reform

organization said recently: “The fee-for-service work that we do helps us maintain our credibility and our contacts within the school district. They know that we know how their schools work because we have been there alongside them. This direct service work provides us the ability to keep the organization together when grant funds fall off.”¹⁷

At the same time, the BHLC is a network-style organization. The small BHLC staff at the center of the network is enabled to do its work by the surrounding network of community-based organizations. Conversely, the presence of the network enables participants in it to function better. As Maria Cabildo of ELACC noted, “We have been successful with the [community] survey work that we’re doing because the BHLC has been building relationships with these schools for the past five years. How would we ever have been able to get into a school, tell a principal that we want to come in and survey your parents...I think that we would not have been able to get into a school. There’s no way.”

The requirements of running a network organization add an additional layer of complexity to the BHLC. Where program delivery organizations are recognized for their efficiency and the quality of their products, network organizations rise or fall on the strength of their relationships with outsiders. The BHLC is first and foremost a people-intensive operation. In large part, the leadership task in a network organization is to keep the network functioning. In practice, this means fostering continuing participation, “keeping people at the table,” in common parlance. Network organizations do this, in part, by enabling members of the network to better do their own work, and in part because joining the network allows participants to focus on something they care deeply about, but which is not the core mission of their own organization. Focusing the BHLC on education, as opposed to omnibus community development, has helped this process.

During the initial grant period, the BHLC has helped the network grow by making grants to community partners. Among the most effective of these investments has been that in Inner City Struggle. A relatively small grant has brought a highly active partner into the support of the BHLC. A larger, capacity-building grant to the East Los Angeles Community Corporation has increased that organization’s presence as both an affordable housing developer and as a community partner to the BHLC. Its staff increased from 5 to 25 and its budget from \$300,000 to \$1.7-million. Its executive director, Maria Cabildo notes, “When I first became involved in the BHLC, I would never imagine that someone would lend me \$12 million to build a project, and now they do it—and they fight over who is going to do the next loan.”

Because of its experience, ELACC finds itself able to influence decisions on projects that are beyond its ability to undertake by itself. Bringing development expertise into political decisions about the community means, “You can’t do smoke and mirrors about development because we actually know what development looks like, and we can look at your [the developer’s] performance and tell if you are just trying to pull the wool over our eyes.” It also gained the expertise to help the BHLC in its official formation by drawing up the incorporation papers.

¹⁷ Conversation with Jolley Christman, Research for Action, Philadelphia, September 2006.

The BHLC is also a policy advocacy organization, but, unlike almost all other such organizations, it operates both at the top of the political system and at the bottom. Typically, policy organizations are either highly elite and analytical or deeply grounded and grass roots. Elite policy organizations gain influence because they provide decision makers with data and information, and often they act as intellectual clearinghouses for a political point of view or set of known and established interests. At some point, however, this type of organization becomes more attached to a set of reform ideas it advocates and less connected with the daily reality of educating. Grass roots organizations gain influence because they know a particular community very well and they articulate issues community members care about. But often, they are under-equipped or naïve about larger-scale policy politics, and they fall into danger of being co-opted by the school district they are seeking to change by the small accommodations that the district is willing to provide.

Personal Narrative: MARIA CABILDO

Executive Director, East Los Angeles Community Corporation

I think we really have a force in the community now that hopefully will enable us to influence future development to be more responsive to the needs of the community.

When I first became involved in BHLC, I had done some work in Boyle Heights. And then, of course, I had grown up in the area. But I hadn't been based in Boyle Heights very much, so I was a little tentative about being a Boyle Heights spokesperson. I'd only been at my job for a year. I'd been a real estate developer developing housing for people with mental illness, but I was doing stuff all over Los Angeles County. So it was sometimes hard to interact with the homeowners, because if you didn't actually live in Boyle Heights, then you had no right to speak up about what should happen in Boyle Heights.

But since then, I've gotten over that! I feel very comfortable saying, "This plan for Boyle Heights is wrong and this is why it's wrong." I was also very new to being a manager. I mean my background was in real estate and these skills really helped to grow the organization, but I wasn't necessarily a very good manager. I think that I've become a better manager during the life of the BHLC project, and I think being part of the BHLC has helped me realize that this work is really *relational*. I've been able to build a lot of good relationships in the community that I think benefit the kids in the schools.

Our organization has changed a lot, too. When we started collaborating with the BHLC, in 2000, we had a staff of five and a budget of around \$300,000. Now we have a staff of 24 and a very sturdy budget of about \$1.7 million. Our staff has grown and the programs have changed. With the help of the BHLC, we really developed our home buyer education and financial literacy program.

And in terms of the real estate side, we've developed a lot of depth. We've developed all this capacity to do these really complex projects. But Boyle Heights is becoming too expensive. So we're looking at using the skill set that we have as real estate developers and having it benefit other communities such as Watts and Pacoima by helping them develop home ownership projects. So we're earning

money as developers which helps pay our organizers' overhead and also subsidizes our community wellness programs and our after school program.

Our community organizing side has also changed. In the past three years we've shifted away from a focus on homeowners, to more of a focus on the people who are more like typical public school parents—renters who are most likely living in sub-standard housing.

And now there are a number of organizations in Boyle Heights that are really committed to engaging community residents, and specifically renters and low-income families, in the civic life of the community. Especially now that Boyle Heights is facing such rapid gentrification and there is over \$2 billion in public redevelopment monies coming into the community. We are all working *together* to develop the leadership capacity of renters and low-income families in order to help balance the priorities that have traditionally been set by the Homeowners' Associations or the Chambers of Commerce. And while I don't think that we're being heard to the same extent as Chambers of Commerce or the Homeowners' Association *yet*— we're going to get there very soon. I think we really have a force in the community now that hopefully will be able to influence future development to be more responsive to the needs of the community.

By following an insider/outsider strategy, the BHLC may be able to successfully connect both the policy and the grass root levels. As Luis Sánchez notes:

I would have never thought that an outsider/insider strategy was possible...But in the last five years I've learned that there're a lot of allies within the district and in elected offices that want as much change as you. But at the same time, the bureaucracy has its own limitations...But if there is a movement and there's a push from community members, CBOs, teachers, that allows them a space to join you in that fight, to feed you information. I've learned that by being only an outsider you win some things, but then you also create a lot of remorse. You might win the policy, but they're going to do everything in their power to make sure it doesn't get implemented. So, you'll be able to claim the victory, but you won't be able to claim any outcome that came out of it.

If successful, the new organization will have created a new form of civic engagement in Los Angeles. For the first time, parents and community partners have formed a useful collaboration that benefits the participants as well as creating political power. These organizations increase grass roots voice and ultimately the civic capacity of the city.

There is a Bookstore In Boyle Heights

We have choices. Parents have choices. Do you want your children to be in front of the line or in the back of the line? Because if you read to them and they continue to learn and they want to be someone that writes their goals, they're going to be in the front of the line. --Rubén Martínez (KCET, 2004)

The best casebook example of the synergy that comes from insider-outsider collaboration can be found in the story of a bookstore. When the *Feria del Libro* began in 2002, Janet Kiddoo captured the lack of attention to literacy by saying, “We have no bookstore here in Boyle Heights.” There are now plans for one, thanks to an interpersonal web created by BHLC activities.

Rubén Martínez, whose *Liberia Martínez* in Santa Ana grew from a stack of books in his barbershop, was among the booksellers attracted to the *Feria*. His passion for reading and for better futures for children from Spanish-speaking families was well known, and he has become an icon among Spanish language authors. He was also discovered by the MacArthur Foundation, which awarded him one of its “genius” grants in 2005. The idea of a bookstore in Boyle Heights was attractive, but finding a location for one proved difficult.

However, development along the Gold Line subway corridor has provided opportunities. Through Maria Cabildo’s efforts, ELACC is in the process of buying an old, once handsome, hotel that faces Mariachi Plaza, where musicians congregate, play, and hire themselves out for parties and events. The musicians used to live in the hotel but are being forced out by rising rents. The joke, she said, was that the Mariachis would have to commute in from Fontana to pick up gigs at the plaza. Saving the hotel for the musicians was the initial motivation. But the first floor of the building is also potentially prime commercial real estate, particularly after the subway opens in late 2009. Martínez, who has joined the BHLC board of directors, has been offered the space.

At the same time, city councilman José Huizar, another BHLC board member, learned that the Metropolitan Transit Authority owned a commercial site in the new subway station, and he, too, has approached Martínez.

The bookseller plans to use half of whichever space eventuates for a bookstore and the other half as a demonstration kitchen. In addition to books, he has a passion for food, and he knows that many children in the community are responsible for food preparation because their parents are working two jobs and are not always at home in the late afternoons. The kitchen will teach teenagers how to cook nutritional meals for themselves and their younger brothers and sisters. Martínez has asked the BHLC to help broker a sponsorship deal for the kitchen with Kraft Foods.

There will be a bookstore in Boyle Heights, and its opening will be due in large part to the civic capacity generated by the BHLC.

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