

**The Afterschool Hours: Examining the Relationship between  
Afterschool Staff-Based Social Capital and  
Student Engagement in LA's BEST**

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**THE AFTERSCHOOL HOURS: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
AFTERSCHOOL STAFF-BASED SOCIAL CAPITAL AND  
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LA'S BEST**

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**Abstract**

The relationship between afterschool staff and students is very important for encouraging and promoting longevity in school. The primary goal of this study was to examine the connection between perceptions of staff-student relationships and the educational values, future aspirations, and engagement of LA's BEST students. To this end, we developed a set of research questions which would help us examine the association between strong staff-student relationships—characterized by mutual trust, bonding, and support—and student variables such as academic engagement and future aspirations. To address these evaluation questions, staff and student surveys were piloted and developed by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) and widely administered to both afterschool staff and students. Descriptive statistics were computed for the survey data; HLM analyses and structural equation models were fitted to examine the variables. Afterschool programs have become much more than childcare providers for working parents or safe havens within violent communities. They have blossomed into powerful learning centers for students with lasting and far-reaching effects. These programs possess an asset that gives them the ability and opportunity to influence students to develop a belief system that will ultimately impact their academic and social futures—that asset is social capital.

**Executive Summary**

Afterschool programs offer an important avenue for enhancing educational opportunities. Federal, state, and local educational authorities increasingly see them as environments to improve attitudes toward school, achievement, and academic

performance (Fashola, 2002; Hollister, 2003). This is particularly true among low-performing, underserved or at-risk students who can benefit greatly from additional academic help and social support (Afterschool Alliance, 2003; Munoz, 2002). One key element contributing to the academic success of students are strong relationships with staff members. This relationship is consistently reported in the afterschool literature as a key determinant of students' educational longevity and success in future academics (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997). The reported benefits of strong staff-student relationships include increased motivation, higher academic competence, positive engagement, and increased school value (Rhodes, 2004). Afterschool programs offer a unique context within which positive relationships can be established. Compared with the day school, afterschool environments allow for more informal relationships, provide abundant opportunities to form these relationships, and have less curricular demands (Rhodes, 2004). Furthermore, afterschool programs provide students with access to an expanded network of adults and mentors in the community, thus creating an institutional link within a more informal context.

With an established history of fostering resilience and success for at-risk children since 1988, LA's BEST is an ideal venue in which to examine the impact of afterschool relationships on positive student outcomes. Because LA's BEST staff and students often work together to navigate through the difficulties that students encounter in their academic lives (and often personal lives), this established relationship allows the afterschool staff to create meaningful expectations that students strive to achieve. In 2005, the CRESST evaluation team conducted an exploratory study on the social, intellectual, and organizational capital of LA's BEST. The findings of this pilot study suggested that LA's BEST provides a broad range of social capital to their students. Specifically, it was found that LA's BEST works to establish strong relationships among staff and between staff and students in order to create a climate of collaboration and support. Given the reported benefits of strong staff-student relationships for student engagement and subsequent longevity in school, the current study examined the connection between access to social capital and key student variables that influence student engagement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary goal of this study was to examine the connection between perceptions of staff-student relationships and the educational values, future aspirations, and engagement of LA's BEST students. This study intended to examine the association

between strong staff-student relationships—characterized by mutual trust, bonding, and support—and student variables such as academic engagement and future aspirations. Specifically, analyses sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are LA’s BEST staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy, teamwork, and communication, and the quality of their relationships with students?
2. What are student perceptions of their relationships with LA’s BEST staff? To what extent do they value education and have high aspirations for their futures? What are their reported levels of student engagement in LA’s BEST and the day school?
3. How are staff-student relationships, teamwork and communication, and collective staff efficacy at the site level, related to student perceptions of their relationships with staff?
4. What is the association between student perceptions of their relationship with staff, their value of education, future aspirations, and engagement in the afterschool program and day school?

### **Methodology and Procedures**

To address the current evaluation questions, staff and student surveys were piloted and developed by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) and widely administered to both afterschool staff and students. Descriptive statistics were computed for the survey data; HLM analyses and structural equation models were fitted to examine the variables.

**Sample.** A total of 53 LA’s BEST afterschool sites participated in the current social capital study; three of which were recruited as pilot sites. The key participants in this study were LA’s BEST students in Grade 3, 4, and 5 ( $n = 2,270$ ) and staff ( $n = 395$ ). Staff included program staff (or instructors) and site coordinators. For the purposes of this report, all staff participants are referred to collectively as “staff” only.

**Data analysis.** Aligned with the specified evaluation questions, three primary types of analyses were performed (a) descriptive analysis, (b) Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), and (c) latent path analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Evaluation questions #1 and #2 were addressed descriptively. Evaluation question #3 examined if site level measures, staff perceptions of staff-student relationships, collective staff efficacy and teamwork, and communication were related to student level perceptions of staff-student relationships. In order to account for both student level and site level variation, HLM was employed using HLM6.0 software. The outcome variable in the student level equation (Level 1) for each model was student perceptions of the student-staff relationships. At the site level (Level 2), mean site scores on staff perceptions of staff-student relationships, collective staff efficacy and teamwork, and communication were modeled against the intercept of student perceptions of staff-student relationships.

To address evaluation question #4, latent path analyses were used to examine the relationship between student perceptions of staff-student relationships and outcome variables such as day school student engagement and future aspirations. A model was theorized in which student perceptions of staff-student relationships would influence day school student engagement indirectly through the mediation of variables such as LA's BEST student engagement and the students' value of education. Indirect effects of staff-student relationships on future aspirations were also tested through the mediating variables. SEM using the EQS software was employed to test whether or not the proposed latent path analysis design fit the data well.

## **Results**

First, the instruments were examined for reliability. In general, both the staff and student scales exhibited strong internal consistency. Seven of the eight scales had reliability coefficients (Chronbach's alpha) of greater than 0.80. The reliability coefficient for the student future aspirations scale was 0.75. Considering that this scale was comprised of just six items, the alpha for this scale was more than acceptable.

### **Staff Survey**

The staff survey addressed their perspectives on the indicators of staff social capital, defined as staff-student relationships, collective staff efficacy, and communication and teamwork. The quality of staff-student relationships was operationalized as the presence of trust, bonding, and support. Staff survey responses are based primarily on 5- and 6-point Likert scales.

**Collective staff efficacy.** Determining staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy is an important step in understanding the influence of staff-student relationships. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) postulate two key elements in the development of collective staff efficacy: analysis of teaching task and assessment of group competence. Staff provided positive opinions about assessment of group competence. Staff generally agreed with positively worded statements and disagreed with negatively worded statements. For example, 88% of LA's BEST staff agreed with the statement that "every child can learn," while 79% disagreed with the statement that they "do not have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning." Although responses tended to be more moderate for analysis of the teaching task, still a greater percentage of staff provided positive rather than negative opinions about analysis of the teaching task. Furthermore, over 75% of staff disagreed that learning is a problem because "students are worried about their safety." These results indicate that staff members have positive views of collective staff efficacy. Not only did they primarily perceive staff as competent in teaching and encouraging students, they reported feeling capable of managing the inherent challenges that emerge in both the school and community.

**Communication and teamwork.** Communication and teamwork play an important role in the development of collective staff efficacy. Over half of all staff reported that they effectively collaborate and communicate with one another on a daily basis. Most also strongly agreed that they work together to share ideas, solve problems, and assist each other. Although the level of communication between staff and the day school varied from infrequently to regularly, over half of the staff members still reported that the communication they do have with teachers and principals is effective.

**Staff-student relationships.** Trust is an important psychological element that strengthens relationships, which in turn helps students develop the values and attitudes necessary to persist in their education. Over half of LA's BEST staff reported that LA's BEST students both trust and respect them "a lot." In addition, more than 75% of the staff indicated that they respect their students. Meanwhile, almost 75% indicated their students were more than "somewhat" reliable and trustworthy. Staff also demonstrated the high expectations that they have for their students. Nearly all staff reported that they discussed the importance of education with students and encouraged them to try hard in school at least "several times a week." Further, almost all staff reported making students feel important at least several times a week and most staff reported that they anticipated LA's BEST students would graduate from high school and go on to college.

## **Student Survey**

The student survey addressed the perspectives of students on the social capital predictors of staff-student relationships, as well as the mediator and outcome variables. Indicators of staff-student relationships were defined as trust, bonding, and support. The mediator variables were LA's BEST student engagement, value of education, and future aspirations. Furthermore, the outcome variable was day school student engagement. Student surveys were based on 4-point Likert scales, where 4 meant "no" or "never" and 1 represented "yes" or "all the time."

**Staff-student relationships.** As a measure of the quality of the relationship between students and staff, students were asked to report on important relationship characteristics. The majority of students reported being comfortable with and trusting LA's BEST staff. Students were less likely however to respond "yes" when asked if the staff believe what the students say. The majority of students were also positive with issues surrounding support. Over 50% of students responded "yes" that staff care about them, provide help when needed, and inform them that they can accomplish anything if they work hard. Likewise, most students indicated that they feel comfortable asking staff for help when they do not understand something. The majority of students responded with at least "sometimes" in regards to feeling important and emotionally supported by LA's BEST staff.

**LA's BEST student engagement.** Student engagement in the afterschool hours is likely to influence engagement during the day school. The majority of students responded positively to measures of engagement in LA's BEST; over 50% reported that they remain focused, regularly ask questions when they do not understand something, and like doing school work as a result of participating in LA's BEST. Likewise, the majority of students reported that they follow the rules and regularly avoid getting into trouble while at LA's BEST. While only a small proportion of students reported regular feelings of boredom while at LA's BEST; about two-thirds of students reported working hard, learning a lot, and consequently feeling good about the experience.

**Value of education.** Afterschool staff can provide positive experiences that will help students to place a high value on education and consequently increase their engagement. Students responded very positively to statements related to the concept of education. For instance, almost all students responded "yes" when asked if they felt it was important to get good grades, that they should have a good education, and that doing well in school would affect their future success. Students were also very positive

when asked about the importance of school and their beliefs about their efforts. Although responses were slightly more moderate, nearly 50% of students indicated feeling good about and enjoying both school work and LA's BEST.

**Future aspirations.** The overwhelming majority of LA's BEST students surveyed had positive aspirations for the future. For example, almost all of the students reported that they felt capable of getting good grades with hard work, believe it is important to finish high school, and plan to go to college. In addition, over 75% of the students indicated they feel optimistic about their futures and believe they will be successful in life.

**Day school student engagement.** Research indicates that a strong correlation exists between student engagement and retention in school (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). Most students responded positively to statements about school engagement. That is, over 50% reported working hard on school work, remaining focused and seeking assistance when they do not understand something. Students also responded positively regarding their behavior at school; the majority reported that they follow school rules although just one-third reported that they never get into trouble. In addition, more than 50% of students indicated that “yes” they feel motivated to work hard and feel good because of their efforts in school.

### **Hierarchical Linear Modeling**

The Hierarchical Linear Modeling statistic method was employed to examine the relationship between the social capital predictors measured by the staff surveys (i.e., staff-student relationships, collective staff efficacy, and communication and teamwork) and student perceptions of social capital (i.e., staff-student relationship) as measured by the student surveys. The HLM analysis allowed us to see which predictors were associated with the outcomes. Factors examined in this analysis included staff perceptions of staff-student relationships, collective staff efficacy, and teamwork and communication. Each of these factors was tested separately in three models as a possible predictor of student perceptions of staff-student relationships. The demographic variables of gender, grade level, and languages spoken were also included in each model to control for individual student differences. A total of 2,270 students and 395 staff from 50 school sites were included in the HLM analysis.

The HLM analyses showed similar results amongst two of the three models. At the site level, staff perceptions of social capital were significantly related to student

perceptions of social capital. Thus, if all other conditions were equal: LA's BEST sites with a higher mean score for staff social capital also had a higher mean score for student social capital. Likewise, staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy were positively associated with student social capital while controlling for the demographic variables. The relationship between staff perceptions of teamwork and communication and student social capital was not significant. Consequently, this factor did not influence student perceptions of their relationship with staff. At the individual level, demographic variables were associated with the relationship between staff and student perceptions of social capital. For example, participant reports indicated that girls perceive their relationships with staff more positively than boys. Students who reported speaking Spanish-only at home perceive their relationships more positively than those who spoke both Spanish and English at home, and third graders perceive their relationships more positively than fifth graders.

### **Path Analysis**

Path analysis was employed to understand the relationships between student perceptions of staff-student relationships and the mediator and outcome variables. The path analysis allowed us to test a theoretical model in which student perception of staff-student relationships would influence day school student engagement indirectly through the mediation of variables such as LA's BEST student engagement and value of education. Indirect effects of social capital (i.e., student perceptions of student-staff relationships) on future aspirations were also tested through the mediating variables.

**Structural equation modeling.** First, the theoretical model was tested to determine whether the proposed path analysis fit the data. Analyses using Structural Equation Modeling found that the fit of the model was very good. The comparative fit index (CFI) of the model was 0.95 and the root mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha was 0.84, indicating that the model had strong reliability.

**Standardized path coefficients.** Next, analyses were conducted to determine the strength of the relationships within the model. First, standardized path coefficients (Beta weights) were calculated to determine the relationship between the variables in each path. Second, the direct and indirect effects were calculated by multiplying the beta weights. Finally, the direct and total indirect effects were combined to determine the variation in the outcomes associated with student perceptions of staff-student relationships.

The path analysis showed strong positive relationships between student perceptions of staff-student relationships and student engagement. Calculations including predictor, mediation, and outcome variables indicated three strong indirect effects. First, analyses indicated that students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were more likely to be positively engaged in LA's BEST and, in turn, were more engaged in the day school ( $0.74*0.82=0.61$ ). Second, students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were more likely to be engaged in LA's BEST, placed a higher value on education, and, in turn, were more highly engaged in the day school ( $0.74*0.34*0.41=0.10$ ). Third, students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were also associated with placing higher value on education and were more engaged in the day school ( $0.23*0.41=0.10$ ).

Calculations of the direct effect of student perceptions of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement showed a negative effect. That is, students who perceived a strong relationship with the LA's BEST staff, but who reported lower engagement levels in LA's BEST than the average student, were also more likely to have lower engagement levels during the day school ( $-0.30$ ). It should be noted, however, that the total effect of student perceptions of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement was positive ( $-0.297+0.804=0.51$ ).

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Evidence from the current study suggests that LA's BEST students have access to efficacious instructors who not only perceive themselves as competent, but also perceive the teaching task as within their capabilities. Subsequently, staff members who were caring and encouraging fostered values of education, and their students appreciated school more and found it more relevant to their own lives, and ultimately were more engaged. Afterschool instructors' encouragement of students in this way was not only associated with greater engagement in the afterschool program but in the day school as well. The current study also suggests that students who feel supported and encouraged by staff are also more likely to place a higher value on education and have higher aspirations for their futures. Because LA's BEST staff perceived themselves as having the ability to make a difference in the lives of their students, staff maintained high academic expectations and encouraged them to succeed. Not only did students have access to staff who served as academic guides, but the relationship was further enhanced by the diversity of the interactions (i.e., support regarding friends and family, etc.). The establishment of this bond directly influenced engagement in the afterschool

program, and served as a powerful predictor of engagement in the day school. The distinctive context of an afterschool program in which staff may serve as academic mentors and supportive adults, offers benefits that bridge the gap between afterschool time and the day school.

For students coming from a disadvantaged environment, the power of this relationship is particularly important. Not only do staff have the potential of assisting with personal issues, but they also possess the power to encourage and instill a value for learning, the importance of education, and the expectation for academic success. Young students, in particular, who are exposed to these lessons, may begin to believe in their own efforts and develop the hope and expectation of succeeding. This belief system potentially serves as the protective factor needed to buffer against adverse contextual and social factors. This impact is particularly important with populations at risk for dropping out.

As such, professional development workshops should equip afterschool staff with the necessary tools to promote their relationship with students, increase the knowledge of their power and the importance of their influence. Moreover, afterschool staff should intentionally make the program fun, interesting and meaningful (i.e., related to students' personal lives) so that students willingly engage in the program and benefit fully from the experience. This active student engagement in the afterschool program may lead to an enhanced value of education and the learning process, high expectations for themselves, and ultimately the choice to remain in school. Afterschool programs have become much more than childcare providers for working parents or safe havens within violent communities. They have blossomed into powerful learning centers for students with lasting and far-reaching effects.

## Introduction

Afterschool programs offer an important avenue for enhancing educational opportunities. Federal, state, and local educational authorities increasingly see them as environments to improve attitudes toward school, achievement, and academic performance (Fashola, 2002; Hollister, 2003). This is particularly true among low-performing, underserved or at-risk students who can benefit greatly from additional academic help and social support (Afterschool Alliance, 2003; Munoz, 2002). One key element contributing to the academic success of students is a strong relationship with staff members. This relationship is consistently reported in the afterschool literature as a key determinant of students' educational longevity and future academic success (Gambone & Arbretton, 1997). The reported benefits of strong staff-student relationships include increased motivation, higher academic competence, positive engagement, and increased school value (Rhodes, 2004).

Afterschool programs offer a unique context within which positive relationships can be established. Compared with the day school, afterschool environments allow for more informal relationships, provide abundant opportunities to form these relationships, and have less curricular demands (Rhodes, 2004). Furthermore, afterschool programs provide students with access to an expanded network of adults and mentors in the community, thus creating an institutional link within a more informal context. They also provide the facilities needed to support and engage marginalized students (Rhodes, 2004).

In recent years, the social context of effective teaching and learning has received increasing prominence in educational research (Chung, 2000; Collaborative Communications Group, 2003; Hetherington et al, 1989; Larson et al, 2004). Several provisional features of social settings that contribute to positive youth development have been identified, including support for efficacy, opportunities for skill-building, and supportive relationships (Larson, Eccles, & Gootman, 2004). Although the potential benefits of a strong staff-student relationship have been recognized, few studies have been undertaken to investigate the specific ways in which this unique context may promote positive academic outcomes for those students who are often disengaged from the day school. This study intends to fill this research gap by examining social capital within LA's BEST. Specifically, the investigation sought to understand the association between strong staff - student relationships—characterized by mutual trust, bonding,

and support—and student variables such as academic engagement and future aspirations. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are LA's BEST staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy, teamwork, and communication, and the quality of their relationships with students?
2. What are student perceptions of their relationships with LA's BEST staff? To what extent do they value education and have high aspirations for their futures? What are their reported levels of student engagement in LA's BEST and the day school?
3. How are the key staff variables, at the site level, related to student perceptions of their relationships with staff?
4. What is the association between student perceptions of their relationship with staff, their value of education, future aspirations, and engagement in the afterschool program and day school?

### **Literature Review**

Student alienation from school and their ultimate decision to drop out is the culmination of a long process of academic disengagement and related familial, school, and individual student factors (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). Recent studies have reported that students view school as boring or a mere grade game, in which the goal is to get by with as little effort as possible (Pope, 2001). This problem appears to be most intense among low-income minority students; drop-out rates among this population are the most severe (Day & Jamieson, 2003). It is well-documented that these students increasingly become alienated from school and find it irrelevant to their everyday lives (Anyon, 1997). Among the most common reasons cited by students for dropping out, are poor grades, disinterest in school, and not getting along with teachers (Catterall, 1998).

Improving student perception and connection to school may increase student engagement and lead to enhanced academic attitudes, performance, and longevity in school. Furrer and Skinner (2003) explained, "the quality of teacher-student relationships, as well as feelings of belonging, inclusion, acceptance, importance, and interpersonal support, have been linked to important academic outcomes, including

self-efficacy, expectations for success, achievement values, positive affect, effort, engagement, interest in school, task goal orientation, and school marks” (p.149). Similarly, Croninger and Lee (2001) found that the relationship established between teachers and students reduced the probability of dropping out by nearly half. This effect is even more pronounced for those coming from disadvantaged homes and who are unable to find this form of support in their other relationships (Furstenberg and Hughes, 1995).

The concept of social capital also helps to explain the mechanisms by which staff-student relationships and student engagement function to improve student outcomes within the afterschool environment and how this capital is leveraged to promote positive outcomes. The Public Policy Council (2003) stated, “In the knowledge-based economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not capital equipment or technology that differentiates organizations; it is their work force and the processes by which that workforce is established, leveraged, and maintained.” In this light, social capital pertains to the relationships between people. Within an educational context, social capital is seen as a resource generated through relationships to help students to attain their goals (Bourdieu, 1986; Erickson, 1996; Flap, 2002; Lin, 1999, 2001). It is accessed by students through feelings of relatedness (Furrer and Skinner, 2003), and is defined as the compilation of networks, civic norms, and social trust that a community or school offers youth. Its key factors include social relationships, formal and informal social networks, group membership, trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement (Hosen & Solovey-Hosen, 2003).

Several conditions must be met in order to optimally leverage social capital and thus induce student engagement. For instance, staff must perceive their efforts as influential in order to create an environment that fosters social relationships and to provide optimal access to the benefits of social capital. In other words, the impact that afterschool staff have on student outcomes is augmented by the presence of collective staff efficacy (i.e., the positive assessment of staff competence and a positive analysis of the teaching task). Staff perceptions of efficacy are positively associated with their persistence in the face of difficulty and how they view their impact on students’ achievement. These beliefs and subsequent staff behaviors further enhance the positive benefits of strong staff-student relationships (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000).

The following sections describe these variables in further detail, including Collective Staff Efficacy, Communication and Teamwork, Relationships with Students, Value of Education, Student Engagement, and Future Aspirations.

## **Collective Staff Efficacy**

Collective staff efficacy builds upon Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, or the premise that behavioral changes operate through self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is a perception of one's own capability in executing specific tasks, and it is an excellent predictor of individual behaviors. Over the past twenty years, researchers have established a strong link between staff efficacy and teacher behaviors that encourage student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986, Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Extending teacher efficacy to the school level, collective staff efficacy refers to staff perception of the group's ability to have a positive effect on student development. It is a group level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of all group members in a school.

Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) postulate two key elements in the development of collective staff efficacy: analysis of teaching task and assessment of group competence.

**Analysis of teaching task.** Staff members analyze what they perceive as successful teaching, what barriers need to be overcome, and what resources are available to them to be successful. This analysis occurs at both the individual and the school site level. At the school site level, these inferences include the ability and motivation of students, the physical facilities at the school sites, and the kinds of resources to which they have access.

**Assessment of group competence.** At the same time, staff members also analyze the teaching tasks and their perception of collective staff competency within the school site. These inferences include those regarding staff members' instructional skills, training, and the degree of alignment with the program's mission and visions.

## **Communication & Teamwork**

In order to best understand the development of collective staff efficacy, it is important to note the role of communication and teamwork among staff. At the collective level, efficacy beliefs are social perceptions, but it also depends on the knowledge, vicarious learning, self-reflection, and self-regulation of the individual members. For example, in the formation of collective staff efficacy, staff members do not rely on their own experiences as the only source of information, they also listen to stories about the success and failures of their colleagues. As such, similar to personal efficacy, vicarious experiences, and modeling can serve as effective ways to promote collective staff efficacy (Huber, 1996). In addition, social persuasion through activities such as workshops, professional development opportunities, and feedback can also

increase collective staff efficacy. These activities help to build team spirit and group cohesiveness. Huber (1996) found that the more cohesive the group is, the more likely that collective staff efficacy will be enhanced. Therefore, frequent and regular communication among staff members, opportunities for cooperation in curriculum planning, and the common practice of sharing information and working as a team are all important elements in building collective staff efficacy.

### **Relationships with Students**

In addition to the development of relationships among staff, there are general attributes that are important in building relationships with students, including bonding, trust, and support. These characteristics contribute to the reciprocal connection that is shared by staff and students.

**Bonding.** The alienation or disconnectedness of students from school contributes to academic problems and social adjustments (Crosnoe, 2002; McLeod, 1995). Studies have shown that student and teacher bonding can counterbalance these problems and serve as a means of social integration (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Coleman, 1987). As previously noted, afterschool environments are especially well-positioned to foster strong staff-student bonds. As compared with the day school, afterschool environments allow for more informal relationships, provide abundant opportunities to form these relationships, and have less curricular demands (Rhodes, 2004). Furthermore, afterschool programs provide students with access to an expanded network of adults and mentors in the community, thus creating an institutional link within a more informal context. Because afterschool staff may be more familiar with the students' culture, they are better positioned to offer meaningful guidance that contributes to staff-student bonds.

**Trust.** Trust is another important element that strengthens relationships. The presence of trust impacts relationship expectations, thus creating social norms. Social norms are shared understandings, expectations, as well as informal rules and conventions for behavior. The combination of positive academic influences and the perception of a caring, trusting school environment create a positive social norm for students and serves as a key protective factor against academic failure (Productivity Commission, 2003). Through trusting relationships, staff members may help students develop the values and attitudes needed to persevere in their school work, and promote educational resilience by encouraging students to master new experiences, believe in their own efficacy, and take responsibility for their own learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997).

**Support.** Positive teacher support and caring are related to increased student participation in learning and on-task behavior (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997), decreased amounts of disruptive behaviors (Ryan & Patrick, 2001), and a lower probability of dropping out (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Observational studies have revealed that students were more likely to drop out of school when they felt they did not have positive or supportive relationships with their teachers (Farrell, 1990). On the other hand, in classrooms where teachers created respectful and socially supportive environments, pressed students for understanding, and supported autonomy, students were more strategic about learning and had higher engagement and positive affect (Stipek, 2002).

### **Value of Education**

A student's value of education includes both intrinsic and extrinsic components. Wigfield and Eccles (1992) described educational values in terms of one's perceptions of the academic task. First, each task has an attainment value, or the extent to which a task confirms or disconfirms central aspects of one's self-schema. For example, doing well in school may be important for students whose self-identity is strongly connected to perceiving themselves as good students. Secondly, there is an intrinsic interest value defined as the enjoyment students experience when completing a task. Thirdly, the extrinsic utility value refers to the usefulness of the task for the student's future goals. Finally, there is a cost component in which the student examines the amount of effort needed to accomplish the task as well as the anticipated emotional states (i.e., test anxiety and fear of failure). These components of task value operate together to determine the achievement value of the task for the student. Afterschool staff can promote students' value of education by connecting educational tasks with students' interest; creating opportunities for them to exercise some choice and control over their learning; emphasizing effort over ability; and providing ample opportunities for students to experience success. These positive experiences will help students to place a high value on education and engage in both LA's BEST and school curriculum and activities.

### **Student Engagement**

The concept of student engagement has been receiving increasing attention since research indicated that student learning and retention in school are strongly correlated with engagement (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Marks, 2000). It has been suggested that student engagement may be viewed behaviorally, via a student's participation level, and affectively, as through a student's feelings of belonging in and value of school

(Finn, 1993). Finn proposed a cyclical model of student engagement in which school participation, as mediated by instructional quality, leads to successful performance as mediated by instructional quality and student abilities, thereby leading to identification with school and subsequently influencing student participation.

One successful example for increasing student engagement and achievement in under-performing schools is the First Things First Model (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2003). This reform model focuses on: building teaching capabilities by decreasing the student/adult ratio and increasing the continuity of care; instilling high academic standards and enriching diverse learning tasks; and enhancing collective responsibility among staff and opportunities for instruction. The study found that this type of teacher support increased student engagement in school.

### **Future Aspirations**

An aspiration is defined as a goal that individuals set for themselves based on past experiences and familiarity with the task. Research has found that students who achieved prior success and have more confidence in completing the task successfully, will set higher aspirations for themselves in the future (Covington, 1992). In addition, students are also influenced by group goals and performance and will adjust their level of aspiration to group norms (Weiner, 1994). Therefore, afterschool staff can help students to achieve success and confidence in educational tasks by providing an afterschool social norm that values education, providing constructive feedback and recommendations to students, giving students opportunities to experience success in tasks, and helping them to build their self-efficacy by emphasizing the importance of effort and persistence towards success.

### **LA's BEST**

LA's BEST provides a context and the opportunity to explore the formation of these important and beneficial bonds between staff and students. With an established history of fostering resilience and success for at-risk children since 1988, LA's BEST is an ideal venue in which to examine the impact of afterschool relationships on positive student outcomes. LA's BEST is a comprehensive afterschool program designed for children in kindergarten through fifth grade; individual sites are housed at selected Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) elementary schools. These sites are chosen based on certain criteria, such as low academic performance and their location in low-income, high-crime neighborhoods. LA's BEST seeks to provide a safe haven for at-risk students in neighborhoods where gang violence, drugs, and other types of anti-social

behaviors are common. It provides students with a comprehensive, supervised afterschool program that includes homework help, enrichment, recreational activities, nutrition, personal skills, and self-esteem development. Further, the education and enrichment offerings provided by the program include categories such as cognitive and academic, recreational, performing arts, and community and cultural.

Because LA's BEST staff and students often work together to navigate through the difficulties that students encounter in their academic lives (and often personal lives), this established relationship allows the afterschool staff to create meaningful expectations that students strive to achieve.

### **The Current Study**

In 2005, the CRESST evaluation team conducted an exploratory study on the social, intellectual, and organizational capital of LA's BEST. The findings of this pilot study suggested that LA's BEST provides a broad range of social capital to their students. Specifically, it was found that LA's BEST works to establish strong relationships among staff and between staff and students in order to create a climate of collaboration and support. Given the reported benefits of strong staff-student relationships for students' engagement and subsequent longevity in school, the current study examined the connection between access to social capital and key student variables that influence school engagement.

For the purposes of the current study, social capital is defined as staff teamwork and communication, established collective staff efficacy and strong staff-student relationships that promote student values of education, academic expectations, and engagement. Specifically, it was hypothesized that having access to social capital via an effective and efficacious staff and the presence of strong staff-student relationships (characterized by mutual trust, bonding, and support) would thereby promote a) greater LA's BEST student engagement, b) increased value of education, c) more positive future aspirations, and thus d) greater day school student engagement.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model including social capital predictors, mediating variables, and immediate outcomes.

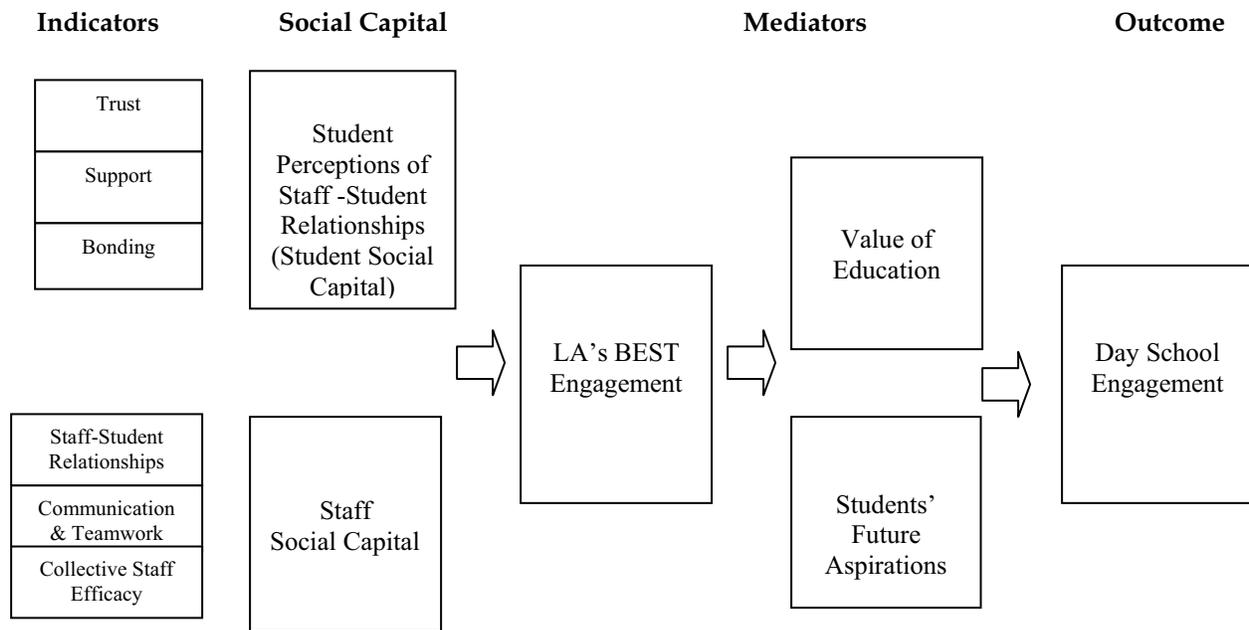


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the relationship between ASP staff-based social capital and student engagement

As illustrated above, the construct of social capital (defined by staff-student relationships, staff teamwork and communication, and collective staff efficacy) served as the predictor variable. Staff-student relationship quality was operationalized as perceptions of trust, support, and bonding by both staff and students. Staff collaboration was defined as their perceptions of communication and teamwork among themselves. Collective staff efficacy was defined as staff perceptions of their group ability to have a positive effect on students. The mediating variables measured in the current study were defined as students' LA's BEST engagement (a construct targeting students' emotions, work habits, prosocial behaviors, and effort), students' value of education, and student aspirations. The outcome in the current study was students' day school engagement.

It is hypothesized that afterschool staff members who collaborate effectively, exhibit high levels of collective staff efficacy, and maintain trusting, supportive relationships with students will have students who demonstrate engagement in the afterschool program, value school, have high expectations for their academic futures, and, in turn, actively engage in the day school. The methodology used for this study is discussed in the next section.

## Methodology and Procedures

The primary goal of this study was to examine the influence of social capital on LA's BEST students' educational values, future aspirations, and engagement.

### Study Design

To address the current evaluation questions, this study employed quantitative research methodologies. In order to obtain information from a large sample of respondents, surveys were developed and widely administered to both afterschool staff and students from a random sample of 50 sites. Descriptive statistics were computed for the survey data. HLM analyses were conducted to examine the effect of collective staff efficacy, staff perception of staff-student relationships, and teamwork and communication on student perceptions of staff-student relationships. Structural equation models were fitted to examine the structural paths of the latent variables.

### Participants

A total of 53 LA's BEST afterschool sites participated in the current social capital study, three of which were recruited as pilot sites. The key participants in this study were LA's BEST students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 ( $n = 2,270$ ) and staff ( $n = 395$ ). Staff included program staff and site coordinators. For the purposes of this report, staff participants are referred to collectively as "staff" only. As indicated above, out of a possible total of 515 staff participants, 395 or 77% completed surveys. Similarly, out of a possible total of 2939 student participants (including only those students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 whose parents turned in consent forms), 2270 or 77% completed surveys. Table 1 shows the specific numbers of respondents participating in the study.

Table 1  
Study Participants

Participant	Survey
Program Staff	350
Students (Total)	2,270
Grade 3 Students	761
Grade 4 students	867
Grade 5 students	642
Site Coordinators	45

## **Consent Forms and Recruitment**

The evaluation team obtained permission from principals to survey students at the 53 LA's BEST sites. In order to confirm student willingness to participate in the survey and to obtain the parent permission for their children to participate, the evaluation team used informed student assent and parent permission forms (approved on December 16, 2005 by the University of California, Los Angeles Human Subjects Protection Committee). The LA's BEST operations office helped to coordinate the distribution and collection of school participation consent (signed by principals), parent permission and student assent forms. Staff and leadership consent forms were distributed and collected by CRESST researchers.

## **Instruments**

Staff and student surveys were developed by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).

**Staff and student surveys.** The student survey included items on social capital (i.e., perceptions of staff-student relationships), value of education, future aspirations, as well as day school and LA's BEST student engagement. The staff survey included items targeting staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy, communication and teamwork, as well as the quality of staff-student relationships. The student survey included items focusing on staff-student relationships, value of education, future aspirations, day school student engagement, and LA's BEST student engagement. Appendix 1 provides a list of all staff and student survey questions. In general, both the staff and student scales exhibited strong internal consistency. Seven of the eight scales had reliability coefficients (Chronbach's alpha) of greater than 0.80. The reliability coefficient for the student future aspirations scale was 0.75. Considering that this scale was comprised of just six items, this was also an acceptable outcome.

## **Procedures**

Fifty LA's BEST sites were randomly drawn from the pool of 147 existing LA's BEST sites. These sites were invited to participate in the survey and all the principals consented to their participation. Three additional sites were selected to pilot the survey instruments based on proximity to the University of California, Los Angeles. Students and staff were surveyed once during the period of study. The piloting of the instrument took place at the 3 selected sites during February 2006. Establishing a data collection procedure that ensured students from different academic tracks were well represented, the data collection phase took place from March 29<sup>th</sup> to June 27<sup>th</sup> 2006.

## Data Analysis

Aligned with the specified evaluation questions, three primary types of analyses were performed: (a) descriptive analysis, (b) Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), and (c) latent path analysis using structural equation modeling.

As indicated above, these questions included the following:

1. What are LA's BEST staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy, teamwork and communication, and the quality of their relationships with students?
2. What are student perceptions of their relationships with LA's BEST staff? To what extent do they value education and have high aspirations for their futures? What are their reported levels of engagement in LA's BEST and the day school?
3. How are staff-student relationships, teamwork and communication, and collective staff efficacy at the site level, related to student perceptions of their relationships with staff?
4. What is the association between student perceptions of their relationship with staff, their value of education, future aspirations, and engagement in the afterschool program and day school?

Evaluation questions #1 and #2 were addressed descriptively. Survey questions were grouped to represent the specific construct as specified in the theoretical model of the study.

Evaluation question #3 examined whether *site level* measures of social capital (staff perceptions of staff-student relationships), collective staff efficacy and teamwork and communication were related to *student level* perceptions of social capital (student perceptions of staff-student relationships). In order to properly account for both student level and site level variation, HLM was employed using HLM6.0 software. Since there were 50 sites and multi-collinearity was present among the three site variables, a separate model was tested for each site level variable. The outcome variable in the student level equation (Level 1) for each model was student social capital. To control for background, demographic difference variables representing gender, grade level, and languages spoken by the student, were also included in each model. At the site level (Level 2) mean site scores on staff perceptions of social capital, collective staff efficacy

and teamwork and communication were modeled against the intercept of student social capital (student perceptions of staff-student relationships).

To address evaluation question #4, latent path analyses were used to examine the relationships between student perceptions of social capital and outcome variables such as day school student engagement and future aspirations. Latent path analysis allows for several equations to be solved simultaneously. A model was theorized in which social capital would influence day school student engagement indirectly through the mediation of variables such as LA's BEST student engagement and students' value of education. Indirect effects of social capital on future aspirations were also tested through the mediating variables. The full model diagram is presented in Appendix 2.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using the EQS software was employed to test whether or not the proposed latent path analysis design fit the data well. Standardized Beta weights were also produced to identify the strength of the relationships along the various model paths.

The next several sections report the results for this study separated into three portions, (a) staff descriptive results, (b) student descriptive results, and (c) inferential statistics.

### **Staff Descriptive Results**

The following section presents the results from the staff survey. First, in order to place afterschool staff experience within the context of the LA's BEST program structure, a brief description of the program organization is discussed. Next, a description of staff experience is presented, followed by (a) collective staff efficacy (perceptions of group competence and task analysis), (b) teamwork and communication among staff, and (c) staff perception of their relationships with students.

#### **Staff Experience**

As previously noted, staff participants included site coordinators and program staff. With respect to staff experience, it is important to briefly note the division of labor. The site coordinator is responsible for coordinating and implementing the LA's BEST program and supervising the daily activities of the program and staff. Program staff members are primarily responsible for organizing and conducting enrichment activities for students.

Among the 50 sites, staff members varied in the number of years of experience they had with LA's BEST. On average, site coordinators held their current positions for

2.5 years while program staff also averaged 2.5 years. Site coordinators reported extended experience with LA's BEST because the majority of them had worked as program staff prior to becoming coordinators.

### **Collective Staff Efficacy**

Staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy were important factors in the theoretical model. Determining collective staff efficacy was a necessary step in understanding the influence of staff-student relationships. There were 21 survey items used to create the total collective staff efficacy scale. This factor has a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.85 which indicates that these items were internally consistent. The descriptive results for these data were separated into two main categories based on the work of Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000): assessment of group competence and analysis of teaching task.

**Assessment of group competence.** Questions relating to group competence were asked on a scale of 1 to 6 with a score of 1 representing "strong disagreement" and a score of 6 representing "strong agreement." Results are shown in Figure 2. LA's BEST staff were more likely to respond with a high score ('5' or '6') indicating agreement as opposed to a low score ('1' or '2') indicating disagreement, when questions were worded positively. For example, 88% of LA's BEST staff agreed with the statement that "every child can learn" while just 1% disagreed with that statement. Additionally, the majority of staff responded with a high score indicating that they "agree" that if a child is not benefiting from the traditional strategy, the staff can find an alternative way to teach the child (86%) and that they are able to get through to difficult students (64%). Items reflecting a reverse scale were added to further confirm the sentiments from the staff. These reverse items supported the earlier findings. The staff responded with low scores indicating disagreement with statements about giving up on students and staff lacking the skills to produce meaningful learning (86% and 79%, respectively). Similarly, the majority of staff "disagreed" with statements about the presence of poor teaching methods (72%), student disciplinary problems (70%), and difficulty reaching all students (71%). In all, participant responses reflected positive perceptions of group competence.

## Collective Efficacy: Assessment of Group Competence

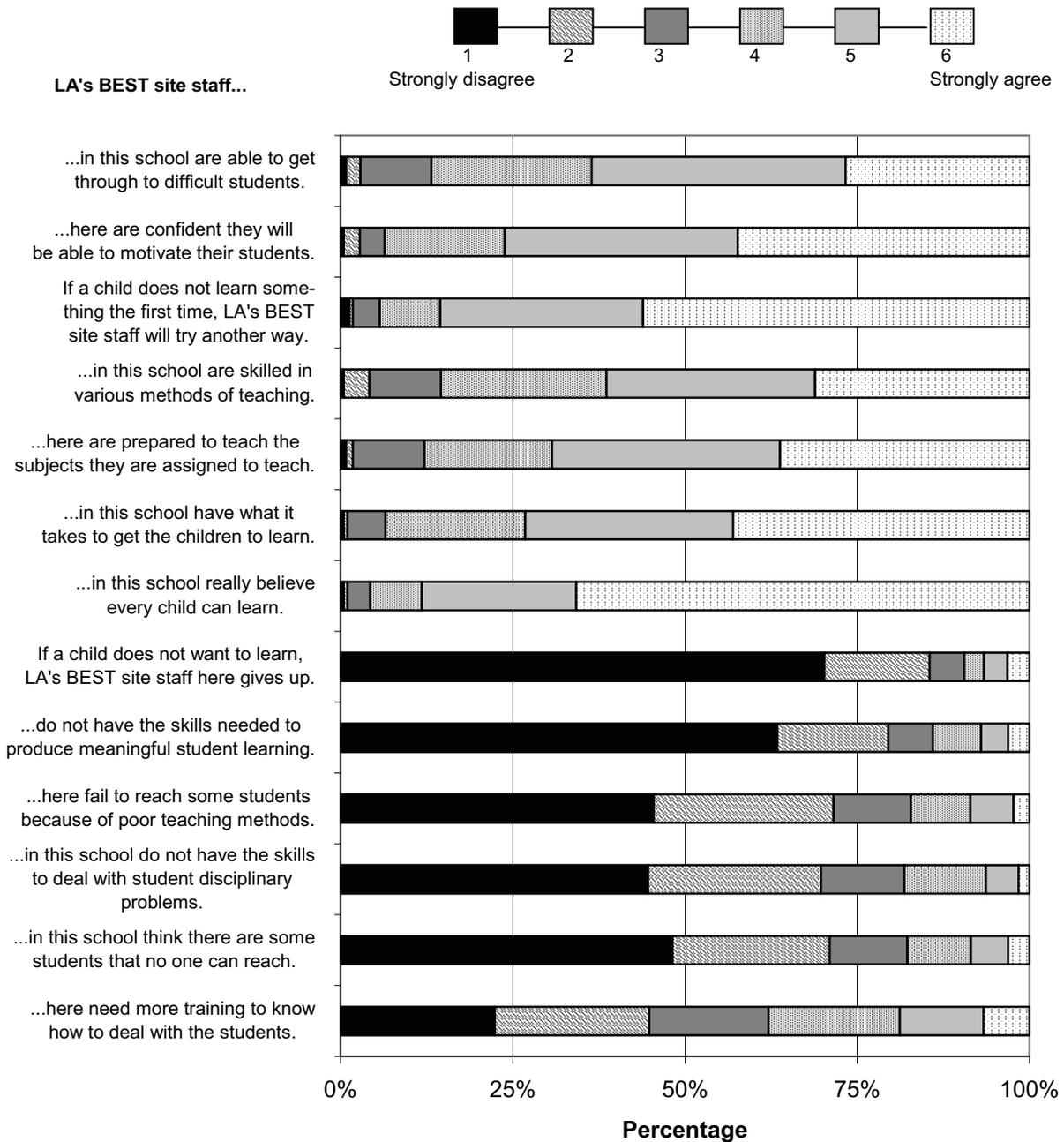


Figure 2. Collective efficacy: Group competence

**Analysis of teaching task.** Literature indicates that staff perception of competence is likely connected to their assessment of teaching task difficulty. That is, staff feel capable of educating students when they feel that they possess or have access to what is necessary to be successful (i.e., ability to overcome barriers and limitations, availability

of resources). As previously noted, staff members analyze what they perceive as successful teaching, what barriers need to be overcome, and what resources are available to them to be successful. At the school site level, these inferences include the ability and motivation of students, the physical facilities at the school sites, and the kinds of resources to which they have access. Although responses tended to be moderate, staff were generally more likely to agree (response of '5' or '6) than disagree (response of '1' or '2') with positive statements about task analysis (See items in Figure 3). For example, over one-third of staff agreed or strongly agreed on all four items including, "The quality of school facilities here really facilitates the teaching and learning process," while less than one-fifth of the staff disagreed or strongly disagreed.

As shown with the reverse items in Figure 3, general positive feelings about collective staff efficacy were further evidenced by the percentage of staff who either strongly disagreed or disagreed with items such as "students here just aren't motivated to learn," (67%). Nearly one-half of the staff strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement about drug and alcohol abuse in the community making learning difficult for students. Furthermore, the majority of staff (62%) strongly disagreed that learning was negatively influenced by worrying about safety. When asked about whether there was a lack of instructional materials, a greater percentage of staff disagreed (43.4%) than agreed (27.6%) with the statement.

## Collective Efficacy: Analysis of Teaching Task

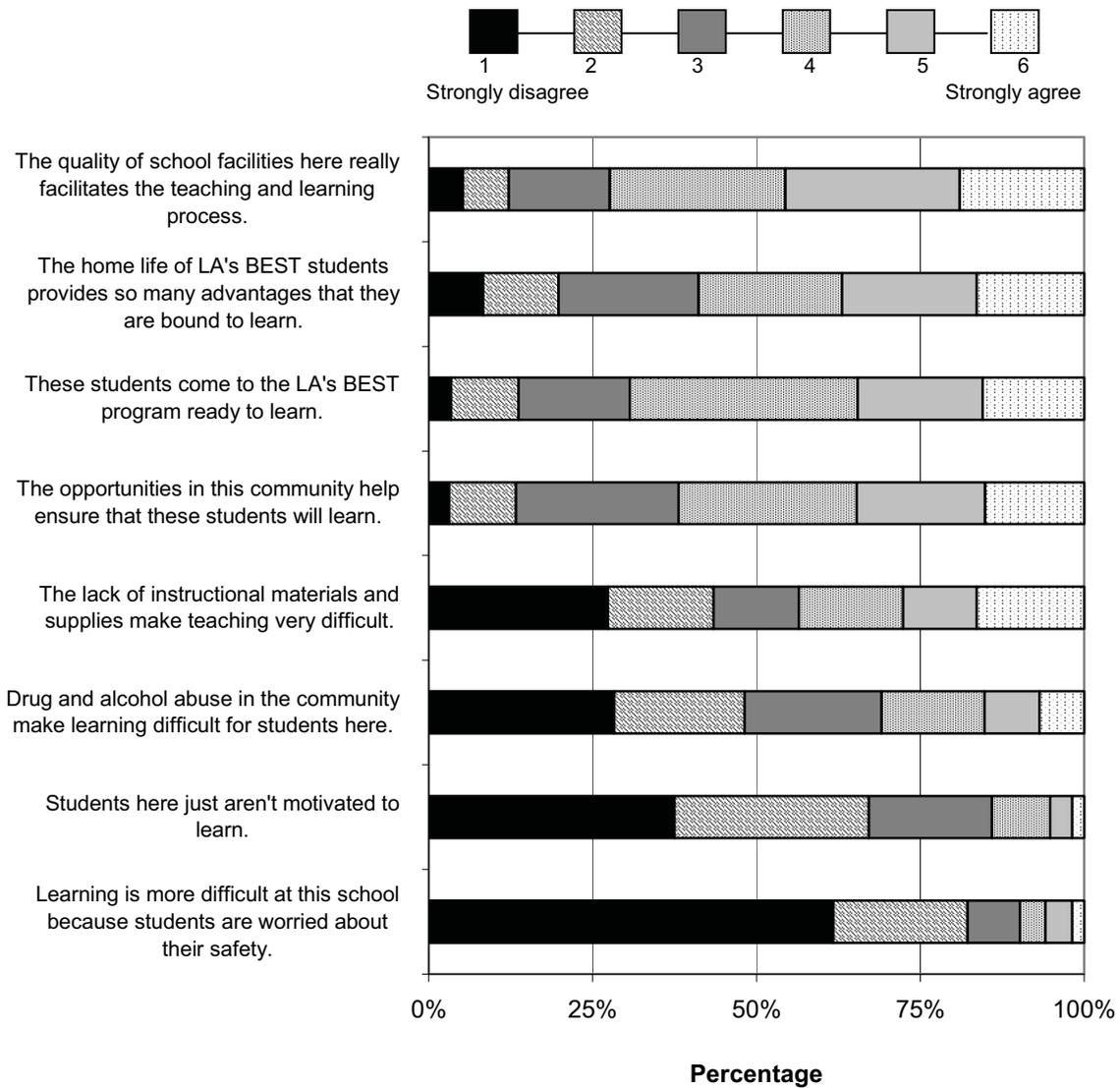


Figure 3. Collective efficacy: Task analysis

In general, staff reports of collective staff efficacy were positive, although more so for assessment of group competence than for analysis of teaching task. The staff perceived themselves and their colleagues as competent in teaching and encouraging students. They also reported feeling capable of managing the inherent challenges that emerge in both the school and community.

## Communication and Teamwork

To further enhance program impact, most of the staff made intentional efforts to develop practices that would foster the development of trusting relationships, communication, and decision-making. The staff members reported on the communication and teamwork practices at their respective sites. There were 15 survey questions used to create the total communication and teamwork scale. This factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.88 which indicates that these items were internally consistent. Again, for the purposes of clarity, this section is divided into these subtopics: (a) frequency of communication and teamwork, (b) comfort, and (c) communication practices.

**Frequency.** Staff reported working both collaboratively and individually on a regular basis. As illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of staff reported daily communication and teamwork (74% and 58%, respectively). In addition, the great majority of staff members (85%) worked individually at least several times a week.

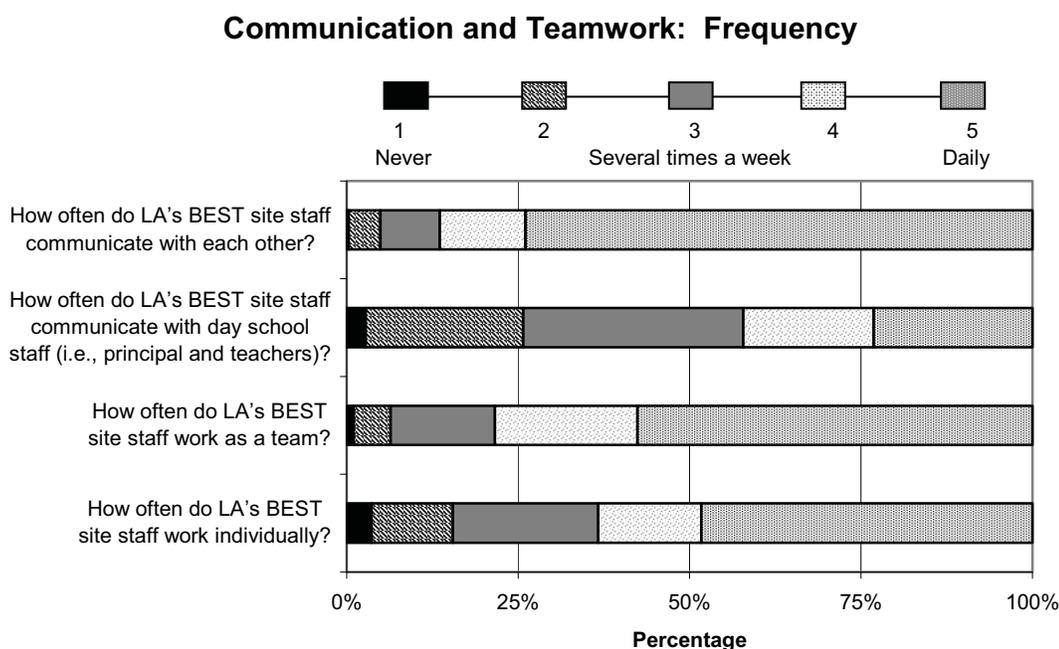


Figure 4. Communication and teamwork: Frequency

Coordination between the afterschool program and the day school is important for reinforcing what is learned in school and for providing students with additional assistance that might be needed in a particular problem area. In order to provide students with a united effort, afterschool and day school staff must have a system of

communicating. When asked how often staff communicated with the day school staff, responses varied from infrequently to daily with 32% reporting “several times a week.” This variation could be attributed to many factors, including differences in teacher and staff schedules, heavy workloads, or the lack of mandatory formal meetings between the two.

**Comfort.** A different five-point rating scale was used for examining comfort level among staff. This scale ranged from “not at all (comfortable)” (1) to “very comfortable” (5).

As shown in Figure 5, the majority or 73% of staff reported that they are “very comfortable” communicating with other LA’s BEST staff at their school. More specifically, 80% of the staff responded that they are “very comfortable” working as part of a team and 73% of the staff responded that they are also “very comfortable” working individually.

The comfort level of staff with the day school was less positive. For instance, 44% of the staff responded that they are “very comfortable” (5) communicating with the day school staff, 22% indicated between “somewhat” and “very comfortable” (4), and 26% reported that they are “somewhat” comfortable (3) communicating with the day school staff. This variation in responses relative to other items on this sub-scale is consistent with previous findings at some LA’s BEST school sites. For example, Huang et al. (2006) pointed out that the majority of communication between LA’s BEST and the day school is through the site coordinator and that these conversations tend to be informal. Huang et al (2006) stated:

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

### Communication and Teamwork: Comfort

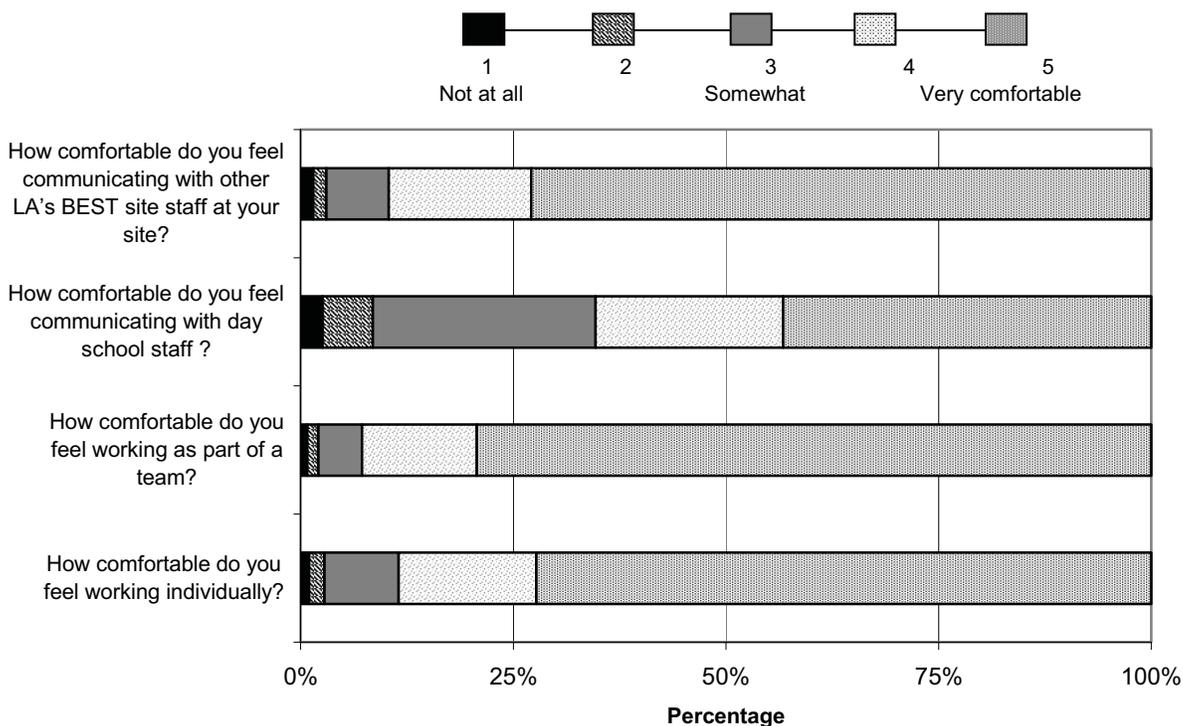


Figure 5. Communication and teamwork: Comfort

**Practices.** Questions relating to practices were asked on a scale of 1 to 5 with a score of 1 representing “strong disagreement” and a score of 5 representing “strong agreement.” Results are shown in Figure 6. LA’s BEST staff were likely to respond with a high score (‘4’ or ‘5’) indicating agreement. On six of the seven questions, more than 75% of the LA’s BEST staff reported agreement with positive communication and teamwork practices. For example, 89% agreed that staff respect the thoughts and opinions of other staff, 84% agreed that staff share ideas, including teaching ideas and behavior modification techniques, and 80% agreed that staff help out even though it may not be a part of their official assignment. Although slightly lower, the majority of the staff (57%) agreed that LA’s BEST staff effectively communicated with the day school staff.

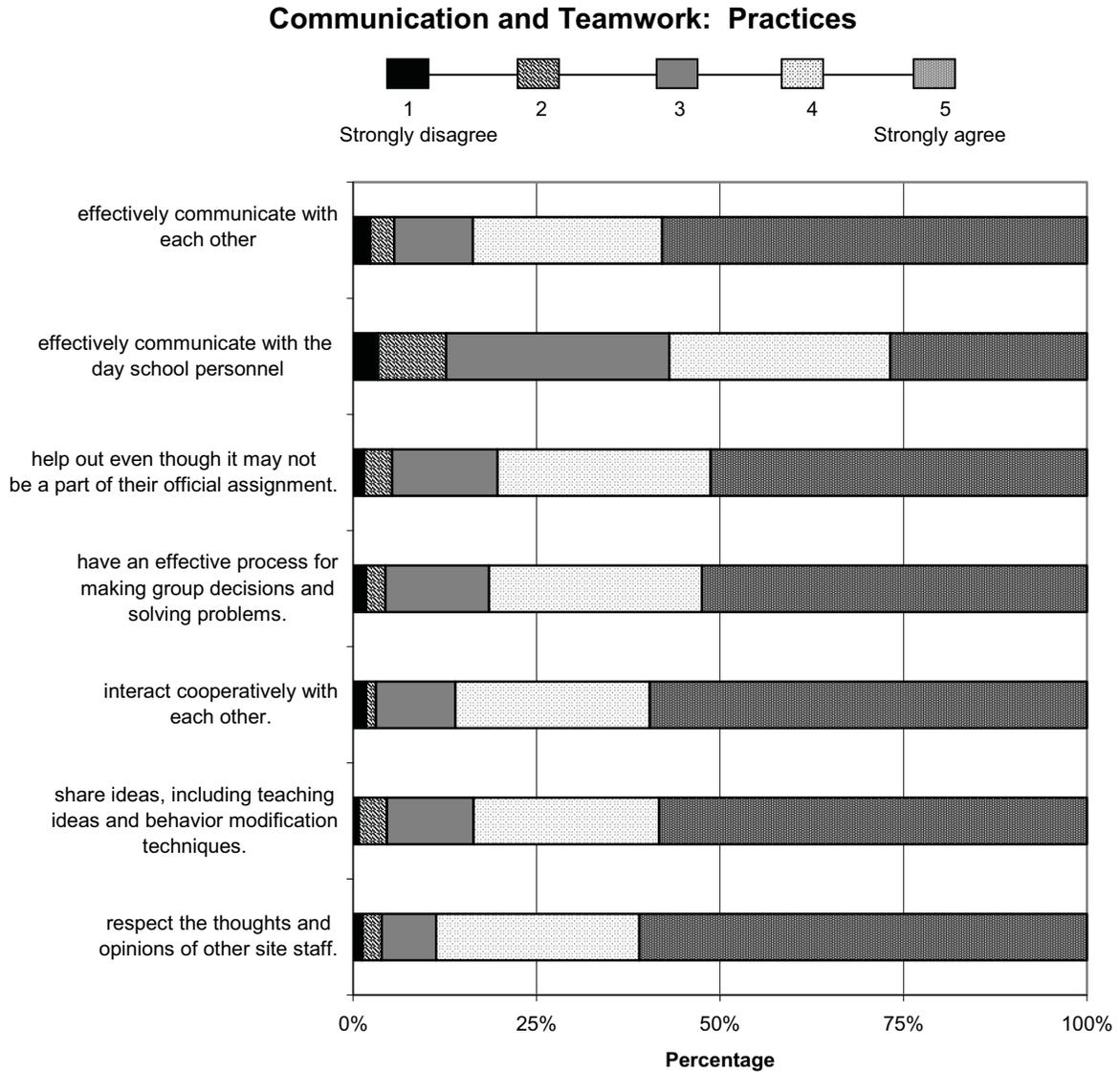


Figure 6. Communication and teamwork: Practices

Overall, LA’s BEST staff reported that they effectively collaborate and communicate with one another on a frequent basis. They worked as a team to share ideas, solve problems and assist each other. Staff members incorporated and felt comfortable working independently as well as combining their efforts. Although there is room for more collaboration with the day school, the majority of staff reported that they communicate effectively and comfortably with teachers and principals. Next, staff perceptions of staff-student relationships were examined.

## Staff Perceptions of Relationships with Students

To measure the perceived quality of the relationship between staff and students, staff were asked a series of questions regarding their expectations, beliefs, and relationships with students. Also, staff reported on several social capital indicators (i.e., trust, bonding, and support) in order to examine the potential mechanisms for how staff-student relationships foster a stronger value for education and thus enhance student engagement. In total, there were 15 survey questions used to create the staff social capital scale. This factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.84 which indicates that these items were internally consistent. The following section covers (a) staff descriptions of their relationships and interactions with students, (b) perceptions of trust, and (c) perceptions of support<sup>1</sup>.

As illustrated in Figure 7, when asked to describe the relationship they had with their students, the overwhelming majority reported descriptors such as mentoring, warm, important, and influential. In addition, more than 75% of staff characterized their relationship with students as positive, supportive, encouraging, and strong. Similarly, more than two-thirds of staff reported that they liked the LA's BEST students in their program (74.5%) and believed in them (67.7%).

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<sup>1</sup> 83.2% of staff reported that LA's BEST provided professional development training specifically targeting the relationship with students.

### How Would You Describe the Relationship That You Have With the Students in the Afterschool Program?

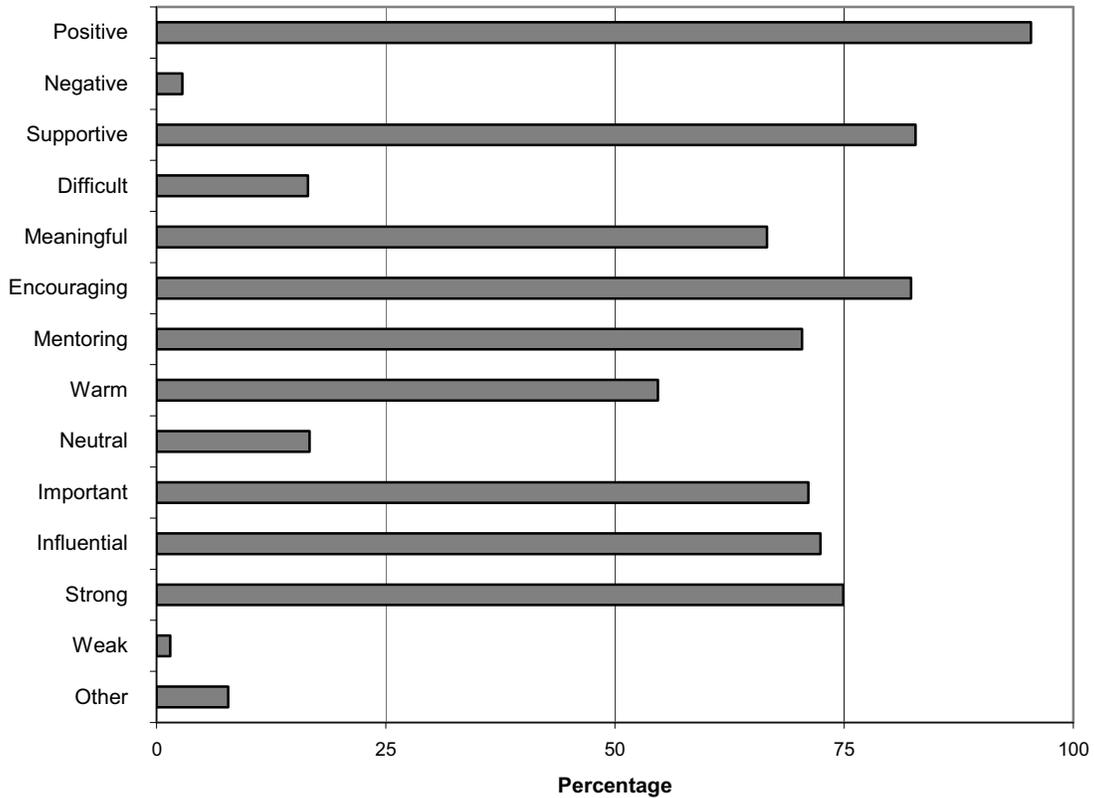


Figure 7. Relationship with Students- Staff survey responses

When asked about the types of staff-student interactions, the majority of staff reported positive statements such as feeling comfortable approaching students (79.5 %) and reported that students felt comfortable approaching them (57.1%). Considering that afterschool programs foster a unique context in which staff and students have the opportunity to connect on a level beyond academics, staff were asked about their specific interactions with students.

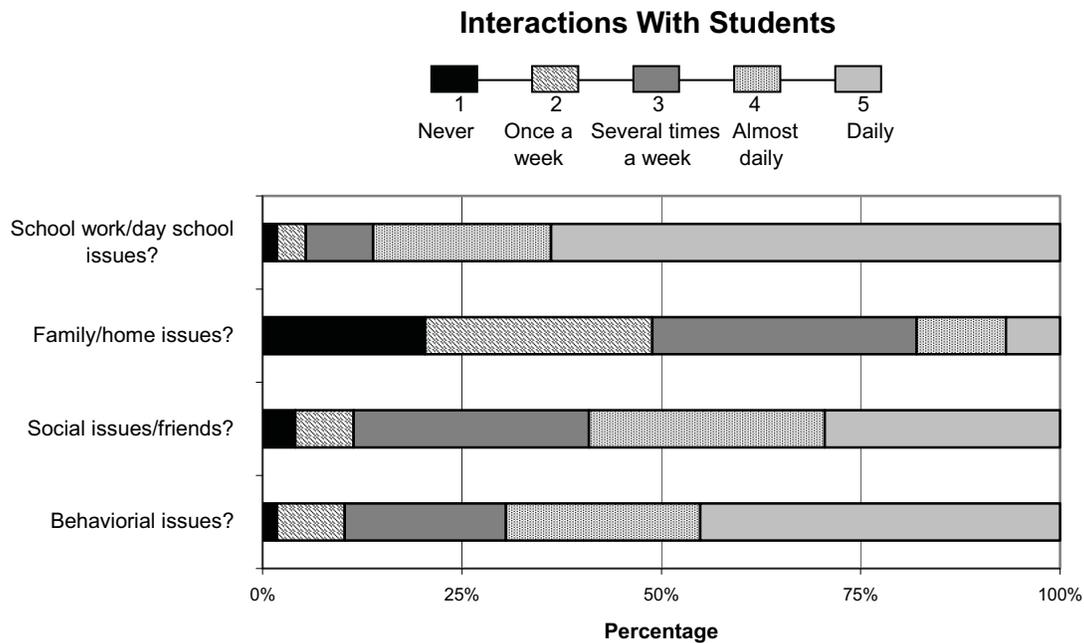


Figure 8. Interactions with Students- Staff survey responses

Most staff reported interacting with students regarding school work and behavioral issues “almost daily” or “daily” (85.6% and 69.4%, respectively). As shown in Figure 8, however, the interactions were not limited to issues strictly related to school. The majority of staff also reported interacting with students regarding family and home issues at least once a week (80%) and interacting with students regarding social and friend issues “almost daily” or “daily” (59%).

### Trust

Staff were also asked to report on levels of trust and respect with students. As Figure 9 illustrates, over half of the staff reported that LA’s BEST students trusted and respected them a lot (57.8% and 52.7%, respectively). In addition, more than 75% of the staff reported that they respected the students a lot. Most LA’s BEST staff felt their students were more than “somewhat” trustworthy and more than “somewhat” confident in the reliability of their students (73% and 74%, respectively).

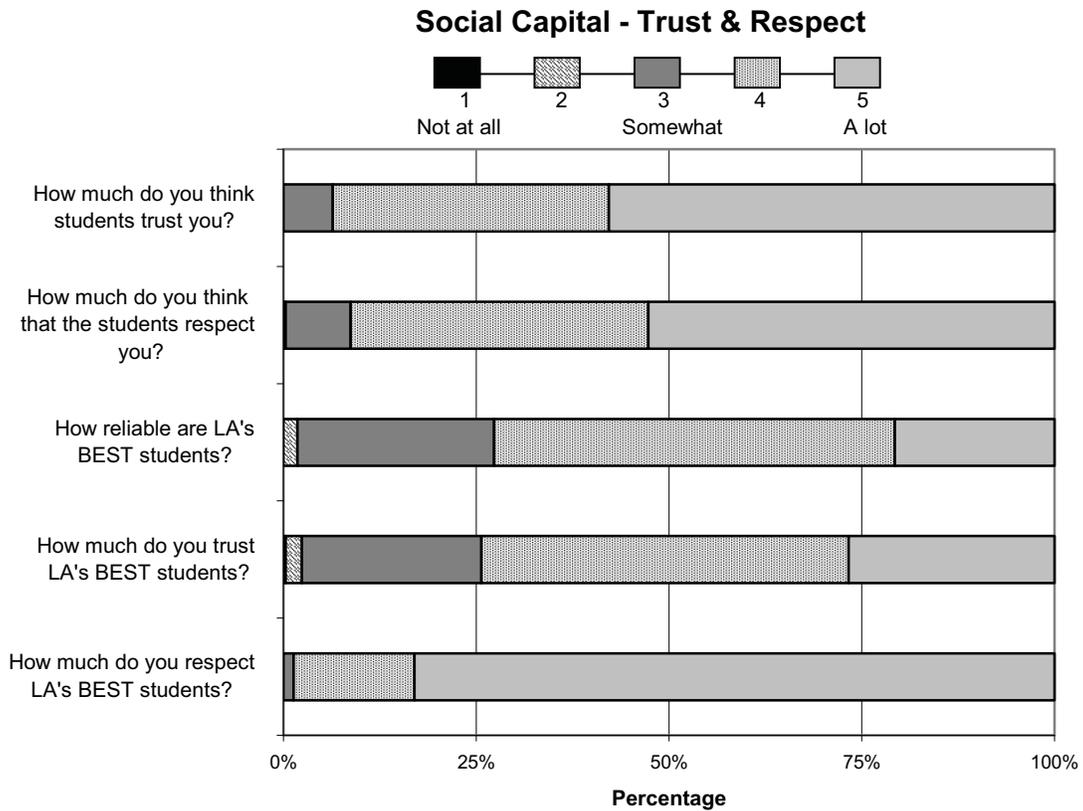


Figure 9. Trust and Respect- LA's BEST staff survey responses

## Support

Staff feedback on support demonstrated the high expectations that staff had for their students. As illustrated in Figure 10, the vast majority of staff reported that they discussed the importance of education with students and encouraged them to try hard in school at least several times a week (95.7% and 98.5%, respectively).

## Social Capital- Support and Encouragement

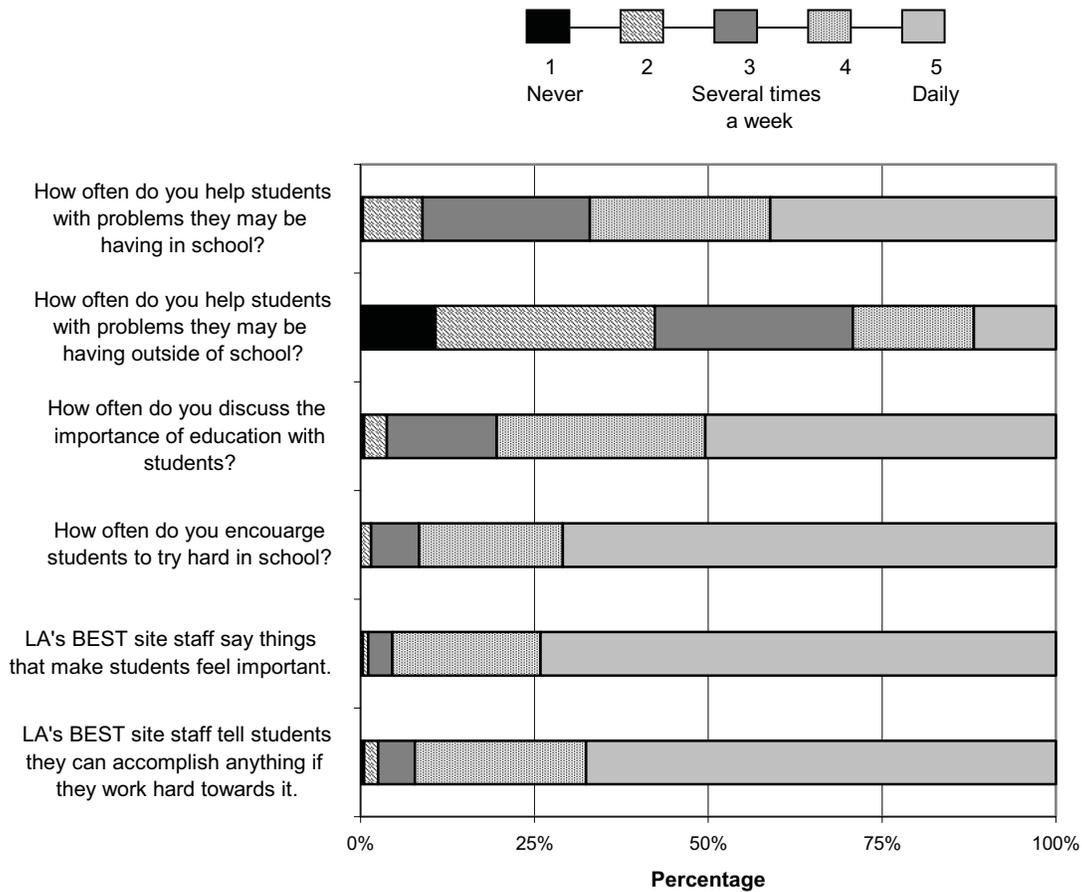


Figure 10. Support and encouragement- LA's BEST staff survey responses

Further, almost all staff (99.7%) reported making students feel important at least several times a week and most staff reported that they anticipated LA's BEST students would graduate from high school (86.4%) and go on to college (73.1%).

## Bonding

Staff feedback on bonding also demonstrated strong staff-student connections. The majority of staff reported that they strongly agreed with statements indicating they liked and believed in their students (74% and 68%, respectively). The great majority (79%) of staff also indicated that they felt very comfortable approaching students while most (57%) also thought the students were very comfortable approaching them.

## **In Summary**

The staff at LA's BEST reported that they communicated well and worked both collaboratively and independently to make a better experience for their students. Although there is room for more collaboration with day school, the majority of staff reported effective communications with school principals and teachers. Most importantly, the staff perceived themselves as having the ability to make a difference in the lives of their students. They reported a strong mentoring and encouraging relationship, one that was characterized by trust, support, and respect. They interacted regularly with the students in issues concerning families and everyday lives, social relationships and friendships, as well as academics. At the same time, staff maintained high academic expectations for their students and encouraged them to do well in school. Overall, staff felt competent, effective, and largely positive about their relationship with students.

## **Student Descriptive Results**

The following section illustrates student descriptive results. This includes surveys administered to 2,270 students at 50 school sites. The focus of the current investigation was (a) student perceptions of their relationships with staff (i.e., student reports of trust, bonding and support), (b) value of education, (c) future aspirations, and (d) student engagement in the afterschool program and the day school. In order to provide a clear illustration of participant feedback, survey sections were divided and presented by subtopic. Table 2 briefly summarizes the demographic information of the student participant sample.

Table 2

## Student Participant Demographic Information

<b>Grade level, gender, and language spoken at home</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of valid total</b>
<b>Grade level</b>	2,270	100.0%
Third grade	761	33.5%
Fourth grade	867	38.2%
Fifth grade	642	28.3%
<b>Gender</b>	2,269	100.0%
Boys	1,095	48.3%
Girls	1,174	51.7%
<b>Language Spoken at Home</b>	2,242	100.0%
English Only	553	24.7%
Spanish Only	203	9.1%
English and Spanish	1486	66.3%

**Student Perception of their Relationships with Staff**

As a measure of staff-student relationship quality, students were asked to report on important relationship characteristics. There were 14 survey questions used to create the total student social capital scale. This factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.92 which indicates that these items were internally consistent. Item results are reported in three groups (trust, bonding, and support) so as to aid in the ease of description. As shown in Figures 11 through 13, the majority of LA's BEST students reported being comfortable with and had feelings of trust toward the LA's BEST staff

(57% and 62%, respectively). However, students were less likely to respond “yes” with respect to staff trust toward students and believe in what they say (44% and 19%, respectively), although the majority responded at least “sometimes” (79% and 68%, respectively). Meanwhile, more than 75% of student respondents at least “sometimes” believed that LA’s BEST staff listen and believe in them, and a similar percentage of students reported that they like the LA’s BEST staff. In addition, most students were positive with issues surrounding support and encouragement (see Figure 13). That is, when asked if LA’s BEST staff helped students when they did not understand something, 69% of the students responded “yes.” Likewise, when asked if LA’s BEST staff helped them as needed, 59% of the students responded “yes.”

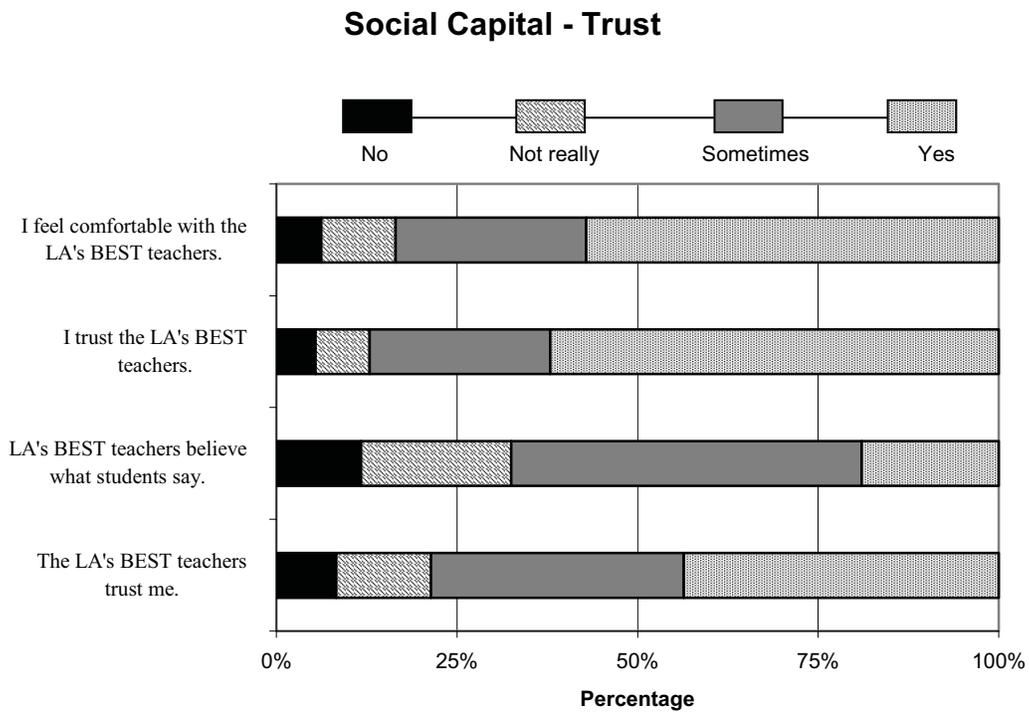


Figure 11. Trust - LA’s BEST student survey responses

## Social Capital - Bonding

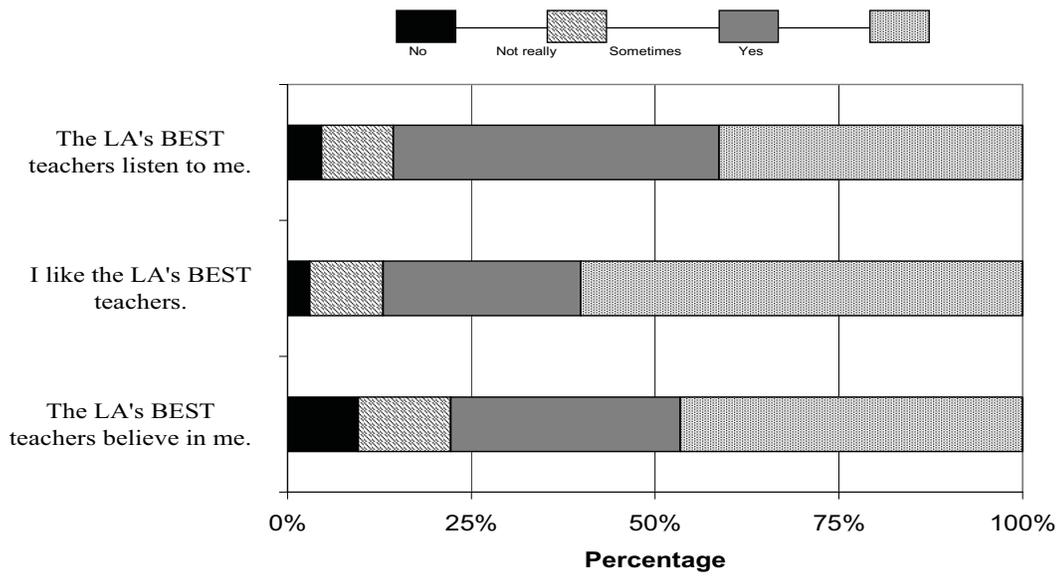


Figure 12. Bonding - LA's BEST student survey responses

## Social Capital - Support and Encouragement

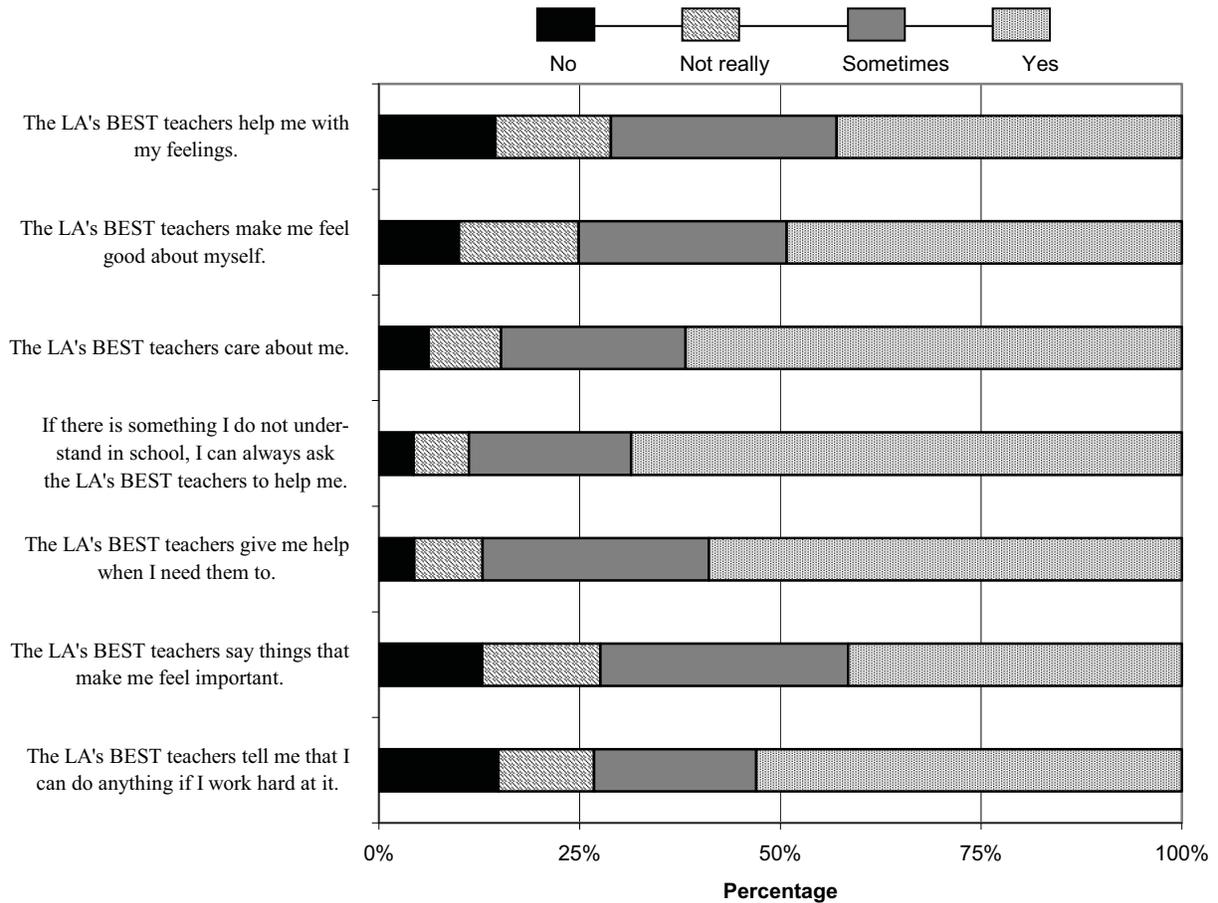


Figure 13. Support and encouragement - LA's BEST student survey responses

More than half of the students reported that LA's BEST staff care about them and inform them that they can do anything if they work hard (62% and 53%, respectively). In addition, for each of the seven support and encouragement questions, over 70% of the students responded at least "sometimes" feeling important and emotionally supported by LA's BEST staff. Overall, student perception matched those of the afterschool staff regarding the shared relationship. There was an apparent mutual bond and similar positive reports of trust and support.

### Student Engagement

The extent to which staff-student relationships influenced student engagement in the day school and the afterschool program was an important part of the current study. Because the relationships formed in the afterschool program are likely to directly

influence engagement during the afterschool hours, engagement in the afterschool and day school were measured separately. Students provided feedback regarding their effort, behavior, and emotions while attending day school and at LA's BEST. There were 10 survey questions used to create the LA's BEST student engagement scale and 13 survey questions used to create the day school student engagement scale. The LA's BEST student engagement factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.84, and the day school student engagement factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.86. These results indicated that the items within both scales are internally consistent.

### **LA's BEST Student Engagement**

Overall, the majority of students responded positively to measures of engagement in LA's BEST. In response to the question "It makes me feel happy when I do well in LA's BEST," nearly two-thirds of the students (66 %) reported "yes" while just 13% indicated "no" or "not really." Of the nine survey questions illustrated in Figure 14, six were framed positively and three negatively. Over 50% of the students responded "a lot" or "all the time" to each of six positively framed questions, although there was a range in variation depending on the question. For example, over two-thirds (69%) of the students indicated "a lot" or "all the time" that when the teacher asked them questions they do their best to answer, compared to 51% who responded that they ask questions when they do not understand something. The majority of the students also reported working hard, learning a lot, and consequently feeling good about the experience. Only 11% of the students indicated that they get into trouble "a lot" or "all the time," and less than 20% felt that LA's BEST activities were boring "a lot" or "all the time."

## LA's BEST: Engagement

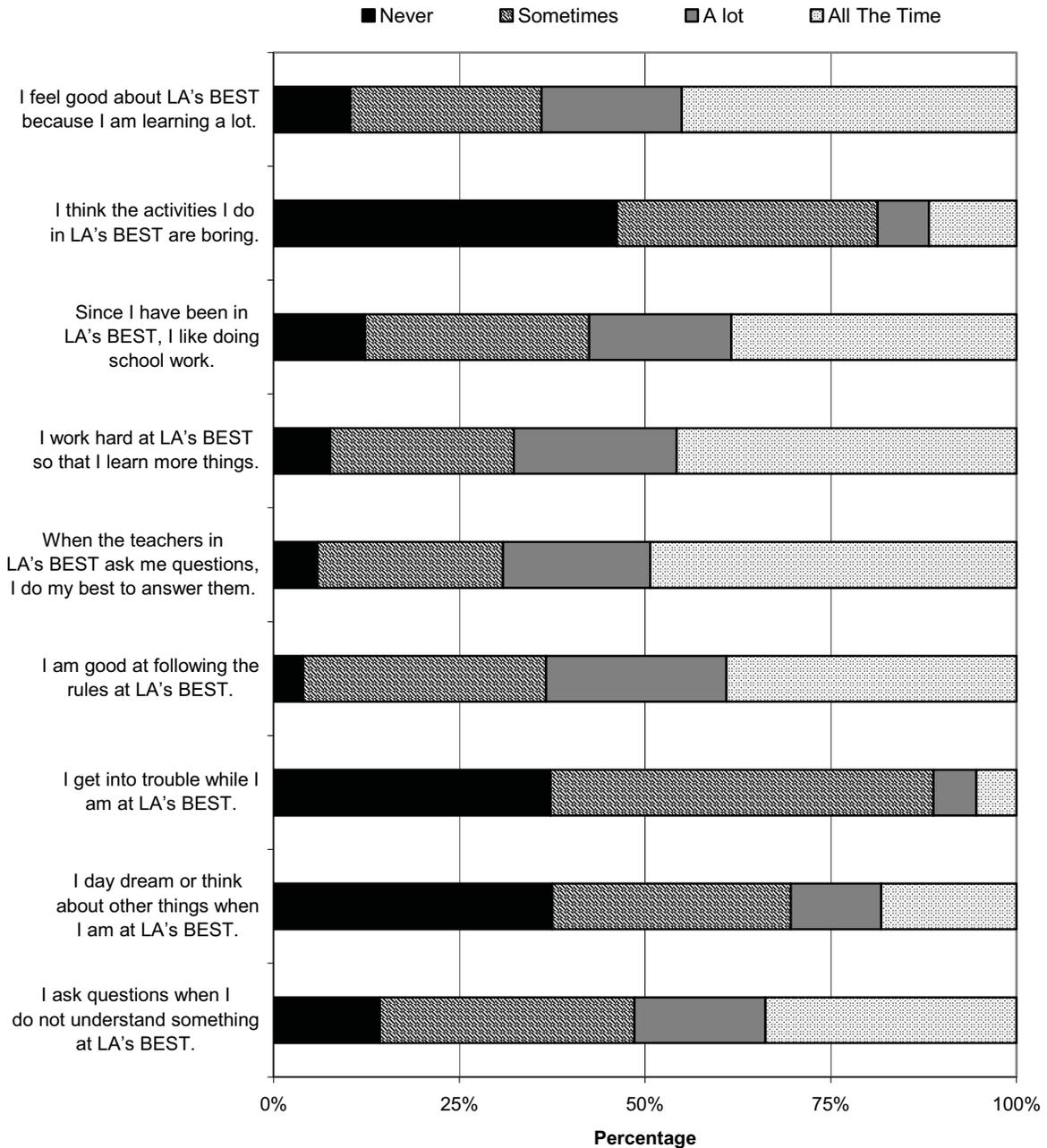


Figure 14. LA's BEST engagement - LA's BEST student survey responses

## Day School Student Engagement

Overall, most students responded positively on the measure of day school student engagement. Results are indicated in Figures 15 and 16. Over 50% of the students responded "yes" to each of three positively framed questions in Figure 15 indicating the

students liked school, were learning a lot, and consequently felt good about the experience. Of the ten survey questions illustrated in Figure 15, seven were framed positively and three negatively. Over 50% of the students responded “a lot” or “all the time” to each of seven positively framed questions although there was a range in variation depending on the question. For example, 79% of the students indicated “a lot” or “all the time” that they felt good because they were learning a lot, compared to 59% who said they were good at following rules at school. The majority of students reported working very hard on school work and seeking assistance when they did not understand something, “a lot” or “all the time” (79% and 58%, respectively). Students also responded positively regarding their behavior at school; the majority reported being good at following school rules (59%), although just one-third reported they never got into trouble.

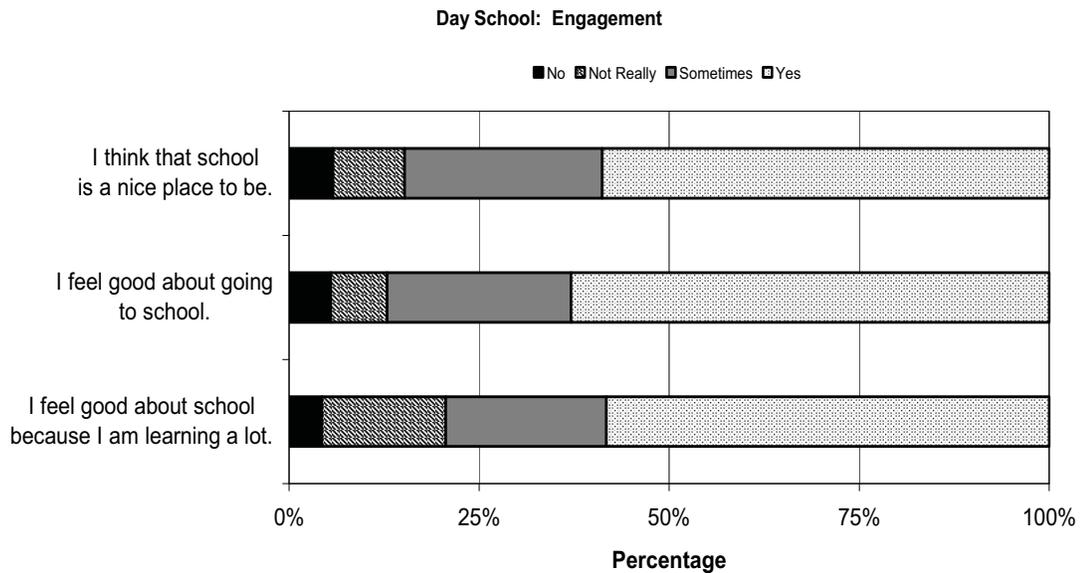


Figure 15. School engagement- LA’s BEST student survey responses

### Day School Engagement

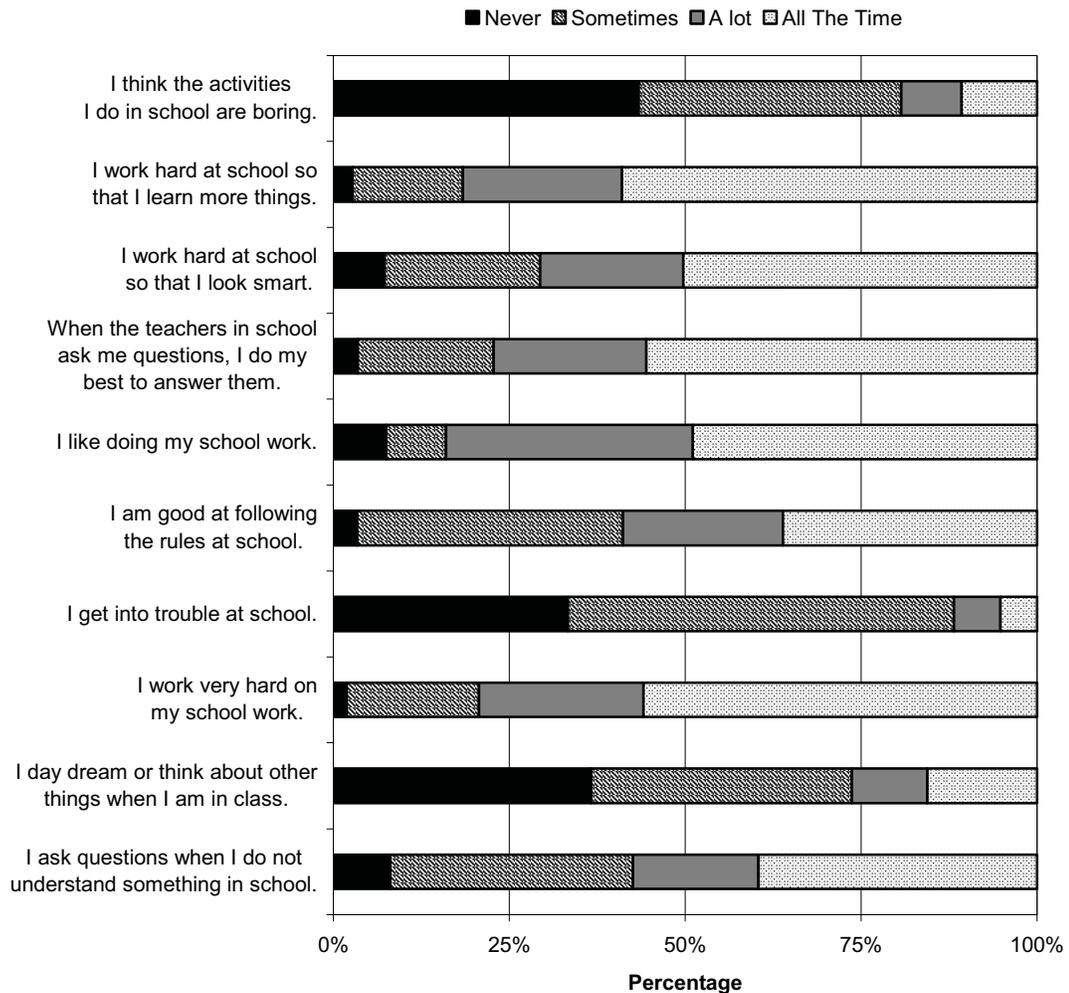


Figure 16. School Engagement- LA's BEST student survey responses

In addition, most students reported working hard in order to learn more, and feeling good as a result of their efforts (82% and 79%, respectively). Likewise, more than 75% of the students reported doing their best to answer questions from staff and were motivated to work hard.

## Value of Education

Students were also asked questions regarding how much they value education. There were eight survey questions used to create the value of education scale and this factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.82. Again, this indicated that these items were internally consistent. The majority of LA's BEST students were very positive when reporting their value of education (see Figure 17). Specifically, 93% of the students responded "yes" when asked if they felt it was important to get good grades in school. Similarly, most students (over 90%) felt it was important for them to have a good education and that doing well in school would impact their future success.

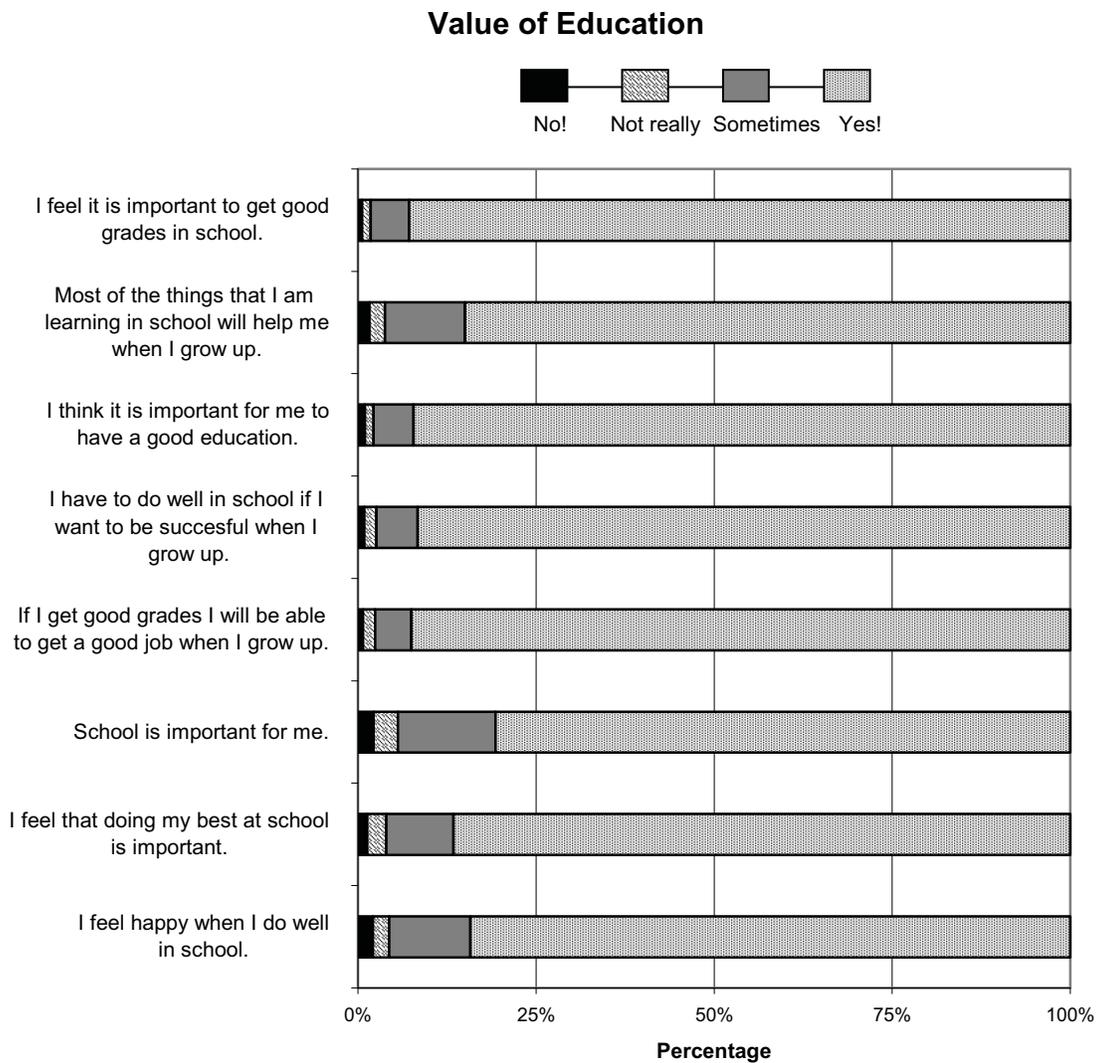


Figure 17. Value of education- LA's BEST student survey responses

Students were also very positive when asked about the importance of school and their beliefs about their efforts. For instance, when asked if it was important for them to do their best in school, 87% of the students responded “yes,” and when asked if they felt happy when they did well in school, 84% of the students responded “yes.”

### Future Aspirations

There were six survey questions used to create the future aspirations scale, and this factor had a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of 0.75. As illustrated in Figure 18, the overwhelming majority of LA’s BEST students surveyed had positive aspirations for the future. Over 90% of the students felt capable of getting good grades with hard work, believed it was important to finish high school, and planned to go to college. Similarly, over 75% of the students felt optimistic about their futures and believed they would be successful in life.

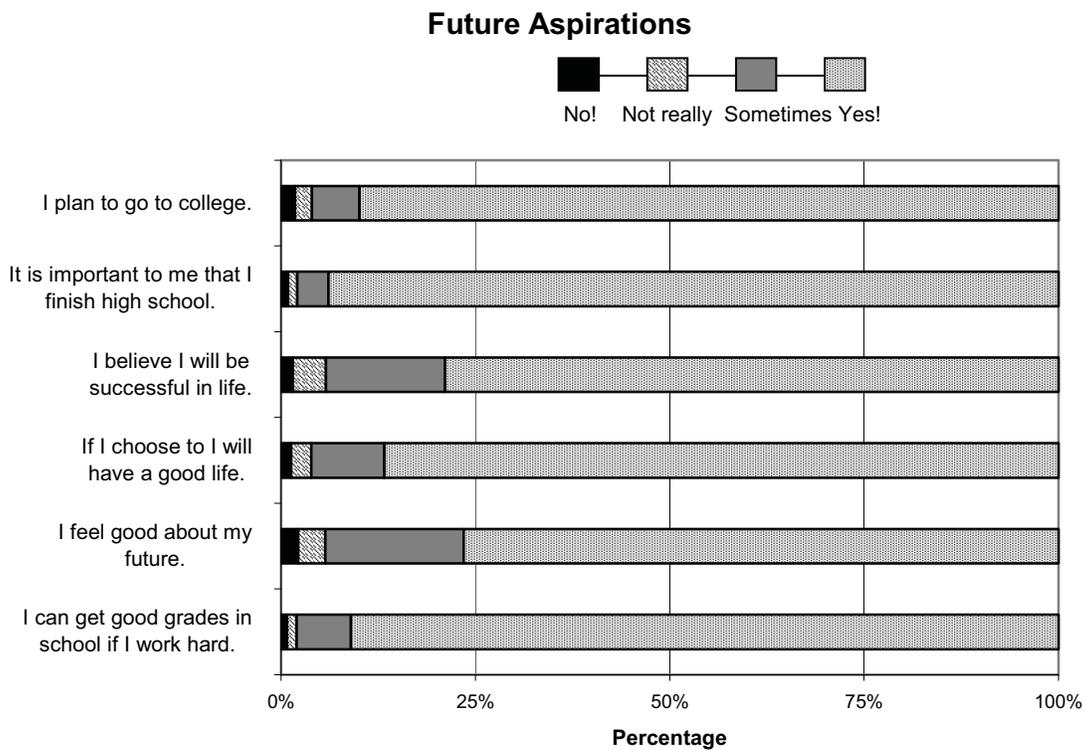


Figure 18. Future aspirations- LA’s BEST student survey responses

## **In Summary**

Similar to staff reports, students perceived their relationship with staff as encouraging, positive, and supportive. Students felt comfortable with and trusted their LA's BEST instructors. Students also felt cared about and important. Further, students were also positively engaged in both the afterschool program and the day school. They reported behaving well, working hard, and feeling good about the experience of learning in school and LA's BEST. Students also reported placing a high value on education, believed it to be important in their life and to their futures. The majority of students anticipated finishing high school and attending college.

## **Inferential Statistics**

The following section describes inferential results that include data analysis from surveys administered to 2,270 students and 395 staff at 50 school sites. An important goal of this evaluation was to examine if staff reports of their relationship with students, collective staff efficacy, and teamwork and communication were related to student perceptions of their relationships with staff. The following questions were tested:

- 1) What is the relationship between staff perceptions of staff-student relationships at the site level and student perceptions of these same relationships?
- 2) What is the relationship between collective staff efficacy scores at the site level and student perceptions of staff-student relationships?
- 3) What is the relationship between teamwork and communication scores at the site level and student perceptions of staff-student relationships?

At the staff level, latent factors representing "staff-student relationships," "collective staff efficacy," and "teamwork and communication" were created using principal components factor analysis. Internal consistency of the measured items indicated that each of the three scales reliably measured a single construct. Thus, aggregated means of the three factor scores were computed for each of the 50 LA's BEST sites by averaging the factor scores for staff within each site. Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) was then employed to examine the relationship between site and student level variables.

Question 1: *What is the relationship between staff perceptions of staff-student relationships at the site level and student perceptions of these same relationships?*

In this analysis, the outcome variable in the student level equation (Level 1) was student social capital (student perceptions of staff-student relationships). To control for demographic differences, variables representing student gender, grade level, and languages spoken were included in the model. At the site level (Level 2), mean site scores on staff-student relationships were modeled against the intercept of students' perceptions of staff-student relationships. The HLM equations were specified as follows:

#### Level-1 Model<sup>2</sup>

$$Y = B0 + B1*(GRADE4) + B2*(GRADE5) + B3*(GENDER) + B4*(SPONLY) + B5*(SPENG) + R$$

#### Level-2 Model

$$B0 = G00 + G01*(SITE_SOCAP) + U0$$

$$B1 = G10$$

$$B2 = G20$$

$$B3 = G30$$

$$B4 = G40$$

$$B5 = G50$$

Results of this model are presented in Table 3. It was found that while controlling for the demographic variables, site level (staff perception of student-staff relationships) social capital was significantly related to student perceptions of social capital. That is, a one unit increase in the staff perceptions of staff-student relationships predicted a 0.58 unit increase in student perceptions of staff-student relationships. In addition, girls perceived their relationships with staff more positively than boys, Spanish-speaking students perceived their relationships more positively than English-only speaking students, and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders perceived their relationships more positively than 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

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<sup>2</sup> Where: Y=student perceptions of staff-student relationships, SPONLY=Spanish speakers only, SPENG=Spanish and English speakers, and SITE\_SOCAP=site level perceptions of staff-student relationships. Reference values for the background variables in the level 1 equation were represented by grade level=3, gender=boys, and languages spoken=English but not Spanish.

Table 3

HLM Results for Site Level Perceptions of Staff-Student Relationships, Student Level Perceptions of Staff-Student Relationships, and Student Demographics

Fixed	Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	T-ratio	Approx. d.f.	P-value
Intercept (B0)						
Intercept	G00	-0.347	0.129	-2.696	48	0.010
Site Level perceptions of staff-student relationships	G01	0.576	0.175	3.285	48	0.002
Grade 4 Slope (B1)						
Intercept	G10	-0.106	0.089	-1.198	2263	0.232
Grade 5 Slope (B2)						
Intercept	G20	-0.380	0.097	-3.928	2263	0.000
Gender (girls) Slope (B3)						
Intercept	G30	0.570	0.075	7.585	2263	0.000
Spanish Only (B4)						
Intercept	G40	0.563	0.152	3.695	2263	0.000
Spanish and English (B5)						
Intercept	G50	0.235	0.095	2.465	2263	0.014

Question 2: *What is the relationship between collective staff efficacy scores at the site level and student perceptions of staff-student relationships?*

A similar HLM model was used to analyze the relationship between site level collective staff efficacy and student level perceptions of staff-student relationships. In this model, site level (Level 2) mean scores on staff perceptions of staff-student relationships were replaced with site level mean scores on collective staff efficacy.

Results of this model are presented in Table 4. These results indicate that site level collective staff efficacy was also significantly related to student perceptions of staff-student relationships, even while controlling for the demographic variables.

Table 4

HLM Results for Site Level Collective Staff Efficacy, Student Level Perceptions of Staff-Student Relationships, and Student Demographics

Fixed	Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	T-ratio	Approx. d.f.	P-value
Intercept (B0 )						
Intercept	G00	-0.361	0.131	-2.750	48	0.009
Site Level Collective Efficacy	G01	0.457	0.194	2.354	48	0.023
Grade 4 Slope (B1)						
Intercept	G10	-0.109	0.089	-1.232	2263	0.218
Grade 5 Slope (B2)						
Intercept	G20	-0.383	0.097	-3.957	2263	0.000
Gender (girls) Slope (B3)						
Intercept	G30	0.570	0.075	7.584	2263	0.000
Spanish Only (B4)						
Intercept	G40	0.581	0.152	3.809	2263	0.000
Spanish and English (B5)						
Intercept	G50	0.249	0.095	2.615	2263	0.009

Question 3: *What is the relationship between teamwork and communication scores at the site level and student perceptions of staff-student relationships?*

Again, the same approach was used to analyze the relationship between site level teamwork and communication and student level perceptions of staff-student relationships. Results are presented in Table 5. The prediction equation estimated that a one unit increase in site level teamwork and communication would result in about a

0.25 unit increase in student perceptions of staff-student relationships. This estimated increase was not large enough to be considered statistically significant. In other words, staff perceptions of teamwork and communication did not influence the students' perceptions of their relationships with staff.

Table 5

HLM Results for Site Level Teamwork and Communication, Student Level Perceptions of Staff-Student Relationships, and Student Demographics

Fixed	Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	T-ratio	Approx. d.f.	P-value
Intercept (B0)						
Intercept	G00	-0.373	0.134	-2.791	48	0.008
Site Level						
Teamwork/Communication	G01	0.246	0.178	1.387	48	0.172
Grade 4 Slope (B1)						
Intercept	G10	-0.109	0.089	-1.229	2263	0.220
Grade 5 Slope (B2)						
Intercept	G20	-0.383	0.097	-3.963	2263	0.000
Gender (girls) Slope (B3)						
Intercept	G30	0.569	0.075	7.568	2263	0.000
Spanish Only (B4)						
Intercept	G40	0.576	0.153	3.776	2263	0.000
Spanish and English (B5)						
Intercept	G50	0.244	0.095	2.558	2263	0.011

In summary, student perceptions matched those of the afterschool staff regarding shared relationships. Students perceived positive relationships with staff when: staff interact with them frequently, and under a variety of circumstances such as with family, peer, behavioral and school related issues; staff demonstrate trust and respect for the students and expect the same from them; staff offer students support and

encouragement for problems at home or school; and staff make them feel important and encourage them to try hard in school. These relationships are found to be especially influential for younger students (3<sup>rd</sup> graders), Spanish-speaking students, and female students.

Meanwhile, staff perceptions of collective staff efficacy in terms of group capability and assessment of the teaching task were also positively associated with student perception of staff-student relationships. This finding emphasized the importance of building social capital at the site level. When the site climate reflects confidence in group competence and efficacy in task accomplishment, thus creating a supportive and enriching learning environment for the students, the interactive dynamics of all group members at the site contribute to positive student perceptions.

While staff reported positive communication and teamwork, it appeared not to impact student perceptions of staff-student relationships. Although it is noted in literature that communication and teamwork are important practices to build collective staff efficacy, the end product of collective staff efficacy is more important to student perception of the site climate rather than the interaction styles among the staff members. Future studies may investigate this phenomenon further.

### **Student Social Capital Path Analysis**

An important goal of this study was to understand the relationships between student perceptions of staff-student relationships and outcome variables such as student school engagement, educational values, and their future aspirations. The following question served as a guide for our analysis:

What is the association between students' perception of their relationship with staff, their value of education, future aspirations, and engagement in the afterschool program and the day school?

To address this question, an analytic model was proposed based on the theoretical model whereby student perceptions of staff-student relationships influenced day school student engagement and future aspirations, and those effects were mediated by LA's BEST student engagement and value of education (See Figure 19). Structural equation modeling (SEM) using EQS software was employed to test whether or not the proposed latent path analysis design fit the data. Figure 19 shows the results of the path analysis between latent constructs with numbers and arrows representing the standardized path coefficients (beta weights). A diagram of the complete model is presented in Appendix 2. The comparative fit index (CFI) of the model was 0.95 and the root mean-square error

of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05, indicating a very good fit. Chronbach alpha of the model was 0.84, indicating that the latent constructs had strong reliability.

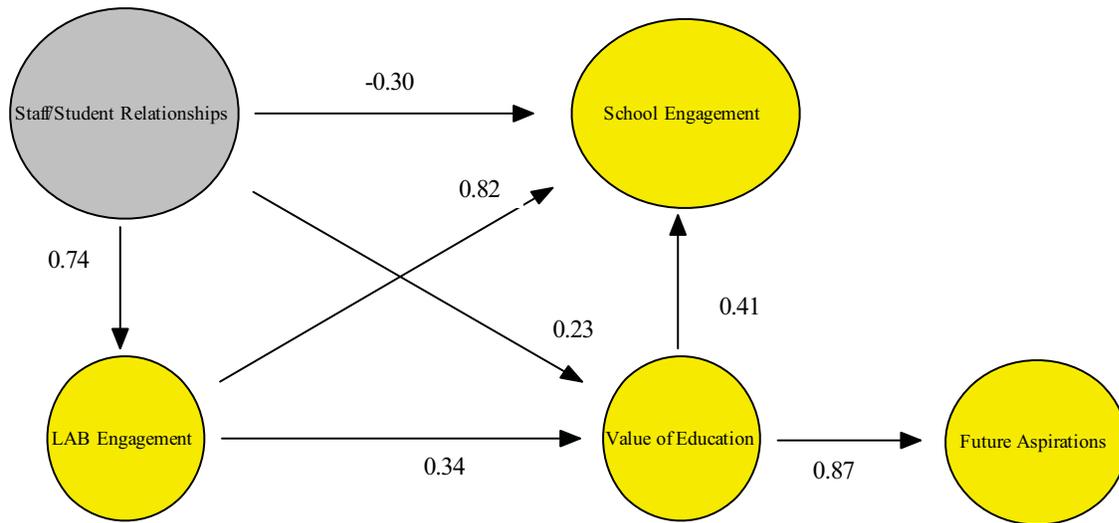


Figure 19. Path Analysis Results

### Indirect Effects of Staff-Student Relationships on Day School Engagement

Indirect effects are effects that are mediated through one or more additional variables. The indirect effects of staff-student relationships on day school engagement are calculated by multiplying the path coefficients from Figure 19 for each pathway of interest. The total indirect effects are then calculated by adding these effects together, which indicates the percentage of variation in the outcome as explained by all the indirect effects.

More specifically, the indirect effect of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement as mediated by LA’s BEST student engagement was equal to  $0.74 \times 0.82 = 0.61$ . The indirect effect of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement as mediated by both LA’s BEST student engagement and the value of education was equal to  $0.74 \times 0.34 \times 0.41 = 0.10$ . Similarly, the indirect effect of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement as mediated solely by the value of education was equal to  $0.23 \times 0.41 = 0.09$ . The total indirect effects were calculated by adding these effects together ( $0.607 + 0.103 + 0.094 = 0.80$ ). This indicates a strong indirect relationship between staff-student relationships and day school student engagement most of which is mediated by LA’s BEST student engagement.

Since such a large percentage of the variation in day school student engagement was explained by the indirect effects of staff-student relationships, the negative direct

effect of staff-student relationships represented a smaller portion of students who did not follow the dominant mediating path. That is, students who perceived a strong relationship with the afterschool staff, but who reported lower engagement levels in the afterschool program than the average student, were also likely to have lower engagement levels in the day school. It should be noted, however, that the total effect of staff-student relationships on day school student engagement was positive and was calculated by adding the direct and indirect effects together ( $-0.297+0.804=0.51$ ).

Overall, the analyses offered support for the theoretical model. In this model there were three paths that linked strong staff-student relationships to day school student engagement: (a) students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were also more likely to be positively engaged in LA's BEST and, in turn, more engaged in the day school; (b) students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were also more likely to be engaged in LA's BEST, placed a higher value on education and, in turn, were more highly engaged in the day school; (c) students who perceived positive relationships with LA's BEST staff were also associated with placing higher value on education and were more engaged in the day school.

### **Indirect Effects of Staff-Student Relationships on Future Aspirations**

Another important outcome in this study was future aspirations. Although the association was not as strong as the relationship to day school student engagement, significant indirect effects of staff-student relationships on students' future aspirations were found. Namely, significant effects leading to future aspirations were mediated through the value of education.

More specifically, the effect of staff-student relationships on aspirations mediated through the value of education was equal to  $0.23*0.87= 0.20$ . The effect of staff-student relationships on aspirations mediated through both LA's BEST student engagement and the value of education was equal to  $0.74*0.34*0.87= 0.22$ . Therefore, the total indirect effect of staff-student relationships on future aspirations was 0.42. However, there was a very strong relationship between students' value of education and their future aspirations as can be seen by the beta weight (0.87) associated with the direct path connecting the two constructs.

A discussion of these results is presented in the next section.

## **Discussion**

Afterschool programs are in an ideal position to provide students access to positive and supportive relationships with adults. Although programs differ in goals,

philosophies, and resources, they all possess this common and powerful element. It is this social connection that may serve as an important mechanism for influencing positive student change.

Applying social capital theory to educational research is a relatively new undertaking, yet when operationalized as an asset resulting from strong relationships, studying these connections is anything but new. What is less understood, however, are the subtleties within these relationships that potentially impact important student outcomes. As indicated in the literature, the trust, bonding and support that are communicated between staff and students can affect the academic futures of students—particularly those coming from disadvantaged environments (Croninger & Lee, 2001). In the current study, it was hypothesized that the underlying mechanisms that influence future aspirations and student engagement are the competent staff who effectively impart the value of education while establishing strong and supportive relationships with their students.

The current findings reaffirm this hypothesis. Specifically, it was found that LA's BEST students have access to efficacious staff who not only perceive themselves as competent, but also perceive the teaching task as within their capabilities. Subsequently, caring and encouraging staff members foster students' educational values and engagement. Afterschool staff who were able to encourage students in this way, not only affected student engagement in the afterschool program, but ultimately influenced student engagement during the day school as well.

### **Afterschool Program Environments**

Afterschool programs are unique contexts for student learning and support. In contrast with day school environments, and as reported in this study and others, afterschool programs provide opportunities for students to form relationships with adults familiar with the community; these relationships not only assist with academics but provide support for other social or personal experiences (Rhodes, 2004). In an environment where students spend several hours everyday, there is a potential for this social context to influence students in profound and pervasive ways.

### **Staff-Student Relationships and Impact on Student Variables**

Student engagement has become an important predictor for longevity in school. The ability to address issues of low achievement or student boredom--often correlates of disengagement—is an important step in promoting school longevity and success. When students possess a certain negative perception of the school environment in

general, then low levels of student engagement in any academic environments are likely to ensue. Because student engagement represents a set of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions, it should be expected that behaving one way in one environment is likely to correlate with the behaviors in a similar environment. Student engagement, however, is malleable and susceptible to change with shifts in the social environment (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Paris, 2004). Therefore, it is important for afterschool staff who have established a bond with their students to take advantage of the opportunity to change student perceptions of the learning environment and impart the value of education and encourage their students academically.

The structural equation model of the current study suggests that students who perceive positive relationships with afterschool staff are more likely to be actively engaged in the program and, in turn, more engaged in the day school. Similarly, students who feel supported and encouraged by staff are also more likely to place a higher value on education and have higher aspirations for their futures. It is suggested that these positive outcomes are a function of the relationship between students and staff. More importantly, since the value of education is so strongly correlated with a student's aspirations for their future, such as going to college, there is a unique opportunity for afterschool staff to convey the importance of academics and encourage their students to establish a commitment to education.

### **The Power of Social Capital**

Communication and teamwork among LA's BEST staff was evidenced in their reports of collaboration and support. Because they perceived themselves as having the ability to make a difference in the lives of their students, staff maintained high collective staff efficacy and high academic expectations and encouraged the students to succeed. Not only did students have access to staff who served as academic guides, but the relationship was further enhanced by the diversity of the interactions (i.e., support in regards to issues pertaining to friends and family, etc.). The establishment of this bond directly influenced student engagement in the afterschool program and served as a powerful predictor of student engagement in the day school. The unique context of afterschool programs allows staff to serve as supportive mentors, thus offering benefits that bridge the gap between afterschool time and the day school.

For students coming from a disadvantaged environment, the power of this relationship is particularly strong. Not only do staff have the potential of assisting with personal issues, but they possess the power to encourage and instill educational values and future aspirations. Young students, in particular, who are exposed to these

lessons, begin to believe in their own efforts and develop the hope and expectation of succeeding. This belief system potentially serves as the protective factor needed to buffer against adverse contextual and social factors. This impact is particularly important with populations at risk for dropping out.

As demonstrated in this study, the students at LA's BEST benefited from the influential relationship with the afterschool staff. Most notably, students felt important, cared about, supported, and encouraged. These perceptions were significantly related to their feelings about education, goals, which may thereby translate into meaningful and successful futures. In many inner cities and economically disadvantaged areas where adverse social conditions define the environment of the students, the ability of the afterschool context to impact students in this positive way is essential.

### **Limitations**

The current study suggests that the variables under investigation (i.e., staff-student relationships and student outcomes) were significantly associated, but not necessarily causally related. It is possible that other models representing different directional paths between the latent constructs could also fit the data. For example, rather than student perceptions of the social relationships influencing LA's BEST student engagement and thus day school student engagement, it could be that an underlying student engagement factor was influencing staff-student relationship perceptions. Although theoretically sound, the current methodology does not permit us to make conclusive causal statements.

### **Implications**

The relationship between afterschool staff and students is very important for encouraging and promoting longevity in school. Afterschool staff should intentionally make the program fun, interesting, and meaningful (i.e., related to students' personal lives) so that students willingly engage in the program and benefit fully from the experience. This active engagement in the afterschool program may lead to enhanced educational values and the learning process, high expectations for themselves, and decisions to remain in school. Professional development training programs should equip afterschool staff with the necessary tools to promote their relationship with students, increase the knowledge of their power and the importance of their influence. Afterschool programs have become much more than childcare providers for working parents or safe havens within violent communities. They have blossomed into powerful learning centers for students with lasting and far-reaching effects. Afterschool programs

possess an asset that gives them the ability and opportunity to influence students to develop a belief system that will ultimately impact their academic and social futures— that asset is social capital.

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APPENDIX A

Date \_\_\_\_\_

LA's BEST Evaluation - Site Staff Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your input is especially important for us to understand your perceptions about the teaching efforts of the LA's BEST site staff (**site staff includes the Site Coordinator and all program staff at the school where you work**), as well as the relationship and interactions between you and the students in the LA's BEST program. Please be aware that your answers will be kept confidential and will not be associated with either your name or the LA's BEST school site in our report.

Background Questions

- 1. How many years have you worked as a...
  - a) Program staff with LA's BEST \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Site Coordinator with LA's BEST \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. How many years have you worked at this LA's BEST site? \_\_\_\_

LA's BEST Site Staff Expectations and Relationships with Students

- 3. On average, how many LA's BEST students do you work with on a daily basis while working during LA's BEST program hours? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. In general, how would you describe the relationship that you have with the students in the after school program? Check all that apply.

_____ Positive	_____ Encouraging	_____ Influential
_____ Negative	_____ Mentoring	_____ Strong
_____ Supportive	_____ Warm	_____ Weak
_____ Difficult	_____ Neutral	_____ Nonexistent
_____ Meaningful	_____ Important	
_____ Other, specify:	_____	

5. How often do you interact with LA's BEST students about...

		Never	Once a week	Several times a week	Almost daily	Daily
a.	school work or day school issues?	1	2	3	4	5
b.	family/home issues?	1	2	3	4	5
c.	social issues/friends?	1	2	3	4	5
d.	behavioral issues?	1	2	3	4	5

6. Of the LA's BEST students that you work with, with what percentage of these student do you discuss issues that are NOT related to LA's BEST activities? \_\_\_\_\_%

		Not at all	Somewhat			Very comfortable
7.	How comfortable do you think students are approaching you?	1	2	3	4	5
8.	How comfortable do you feel approaching students?	1	2	3	4	5

		Not at all	Somewhat			A Lot
9.	How much do you think students trust you?	1	2	3	4	5
10.	How much do you think that the students respect you?	1	2	3	4	5
11.	How reliable are LA's BEST students?	1	2	3	4	5
12.	How much do you trust LA's BEST students?	1	2	3	4	5
13.	How much do you respect LA's BEST students?	1	2	3	4	5

		Never	Several times a week			Daily
14.	How often do you help students with problems they may be having in school?	1	2	3	4	5
15.	How often do you help students with problems they may be having outside of school?	1	2	3	4	5
16.	How often do you discuss the importance of education with students?	1	2	3	4	5
17.	How often do you encourage students to try hard in school?	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The LA's BEST site staff say things that make students feel important.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The LA's BEST site staff tell students that they can accomplish anything if they work hard towards it.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree
20.	In general, I like the students in my afterschool program.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	The LA's BEST site staff believe in their students.	1	2	3	4	5	6

What percentage of LA's BEST students who you currently work with on a daily basis are performing...

22. \_\_\_\_\_ far below grade level.  
 23. \_\_\_\_\_ below grade level.  
 24. \_\_\_\_\_ at grade level.  
 25. \_\_\_\_\_ above grade level.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 100% Total

One year from now, what percentage of these students do you expect to be performing...

26. \_\_\_\_\_ far below grade level.  
 27. \_\_\_\_\_ below grade level.  
 28. \_\_\_\_\_ at grade level.  
 29. \_\_\_\_\_ above grade level.

\_\_\_\_ 100% Total

30. What percentage of your students do you expect to graduate from high school? \_\_\_\_\_%

31. What percentage of your students do you expect to go to college? \_\_\_\_\_%

32. Has LA's BEST provided you with any professional development training geared specifically toward the relationship between LA's BEST site staff and students?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No      \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know

**LA's BEST Site Staff Collective Efficacy**

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	
33.	LA's BEST site staff in this school are able to get through to difficult students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
34.	LA's BEST site staff here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
35.	If a child does not want to learn, LA's BEST site staff here gives up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
36.	LA's BEST site staff do not have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
37.	If a child does not learn something the first time, LA's BEST site staff will try another way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
38.	LA's BEST site staff in this school are skilled in various methods of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
39.	LA's BEST site staff here are prepared to teach the subjects they are assigned to teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
40.	LA's BEST site staff here fail to reach some students because of poor teaching methods.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
41.	LA's BEST site staff in this school have what it takes to get the children to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
42.	The lack of instructional materials and supplies make teaching very difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

LA's BEST Site Staff Collective Efficacy (continued)

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	
43.	LA's BEST site staff in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
44.	LA's BEST site staff in this school think there are some students that no one can reach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
45.	The quality of school facilities here really facilitates the teaching and learning process.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
46.	The home life of LA's BEST students provides so many advantages that they are bound to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
47.	These students come to the LA's BEST program ready to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
48.	Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
49.	The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
50.	Students here just aren't motivated to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
51.	Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
52.	LA's BEST site staff here need more training to know how to deal with the students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
53.	LA's BEST site staff in this school really believe every child can learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

**LA's BEST Site Staff Communication and Teamwork**

		Never	Several times week			Daily
54.	How often do LA's BEST site staff communicate with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
55.	How often do LA's BEST site staff communicate with day school staff (i.e., principal and teachers)?	1	2	3	4	5
56.	How often do LA's BEST site staff work as a team?	1	2	3	4	5
57.	How often do LA's BEST site staff work individually?	1	2	3	4	5

		Not at all	Somewhat			Very Comfortable
58.	How comfortable do you feel communicating with other LA's BEST site staff at your site?	1	2	3	4	5
59.	How comfortable do you feel communicating with day school staff (i.e., principal and teachers)?	1	2	3	4	5
60.	How comfortable do you feel working as part of a team?	1	2	3	4	5
61.	How comfortable do you feel working individually?	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree
62.	LA's BEST site staff effectively communicate with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	
63.	LA's BEST site staff effectively communicate with the day school personnel (i.e., principal and teachers)	1	2	3	4	5	
64.	LA's BEST site staff help out even though it may not be a part of their official assignment.	1	2	3	4	5	
65.	LA's BEST site staff have an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	1	2	3	4	5	



Attach label here.

## LA's BEST Evaluation – Student Survey

### **Part I. Background Information**

Please mark only ONE box for the next four questions like this:



1. I am a  boy  girl

2. What grade are you in?

3<sup>rd</sup>  4<sup>th</sup>  5<sup>th</sup>  Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What school track are you on?

Traditional  Track A  Track B  Track C  Track D

4. When you first attended LA's BEST, what grade were you in?

K  1<sup>st</sup>  2<sup>nd</sup>  3<sup>rd</sup>  4<sup>th</sup>  5<sup>th</sup>

**For the next two questions, you can mark more than ONE box.**

5. What language(s) do you speak at home?

English  Spanish  Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What language(s) do the adults (parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) at your home speak?

English  Spanish  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:**

- Find the word that best describes how you think or feel and circle it.
- Remember that when you see **LA's BEST teachers** in a sentence that this includes both the LA's BEST site coordinator and all of the LA's BEST teachers at your school.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

**Example A**

a.	I like the snacks provided by LA's BEST.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
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**Part II. After School Teachers and Students' Relationship**

7.	The LA's BEST teachers listen to me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
8.	I like the LA's BEST teachers.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
9.	The LA's BEST teachers help me with my feelings.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
10.	The LA's BEST teachers make me feel good about myself.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
11.	I feel comfortable with the LA's BEST teachers.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
12.	The LA's BEST teachers care about me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
13.	If there is something I do not understand in school, I can always ask the LA's BEST teachers to help me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!

**Part II. After School Teachers and Students' Relationship** (continued)

14.	I trust the LA's BEST teachers.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
15.	The LA's BEST teachers give me help when I need them to.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
16.	LA's BEST teachers believe what students say.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
17.	The LA's BEST teachers trust me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
18.	The LA's BEST teachers say things that make me feel important.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
19.	The LA's BEST teachers tell me that I can do anything if I work hard at it.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
20.	The LA's BEST teachers believe in me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!

**Part III. Value of Education**

21.	I feel it is important to get good grades in school.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
22.	Most of the things that I am learning in school will help me when I grow up.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
23.	I think it is important for me to have a good education.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
24.	I have to do well in school if I want to be successful when I grow up.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
25.	If I get good grades, I will be able to get a good job when I grow up.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
26.	School is important for me.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
27.	I feel that doing my best at school is important.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!

**Part III. Value of Education** (continued)

28.	I like doing my school work.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
29.	I feel happy when I do well in LA's BEST.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
30.	I feel good about going to school.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
31.	I think that school is a nice place to be.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
32.	I feel happy when I do well in school.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!

### Part IV. Future Aspirations

33.	I can get good grades in school if I work hard.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
34.	I feel good about my future.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
35.	If I choose to, I will have a good life.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
36.	I believe I will be successful in life.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
37.	It is important to me that I finish high school.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!
38.	I plan to go to college.	No!	Not really	Sometimes	Yes!

### Example B

b.	I am good at listening when the teacher or another adult is talking.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
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### Part V. Student Engagement: School

39.	I am good at following the rules at school.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
40.	I get into trouble at school.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
41.	I work very hard on my school work.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
42.	I day dream or think about other things when I am in class.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
43.	I ask questions when I do not understand something in school.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
44.	I feel good about school because I am learning a lot.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
45.	I think the activities I do in school are boring.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
46.	I work hard at school so that I learn more things.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
47.	I work hard at school so that I look smart.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
48.	When the teachers in school ask me questions, I do my best to answer them.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time

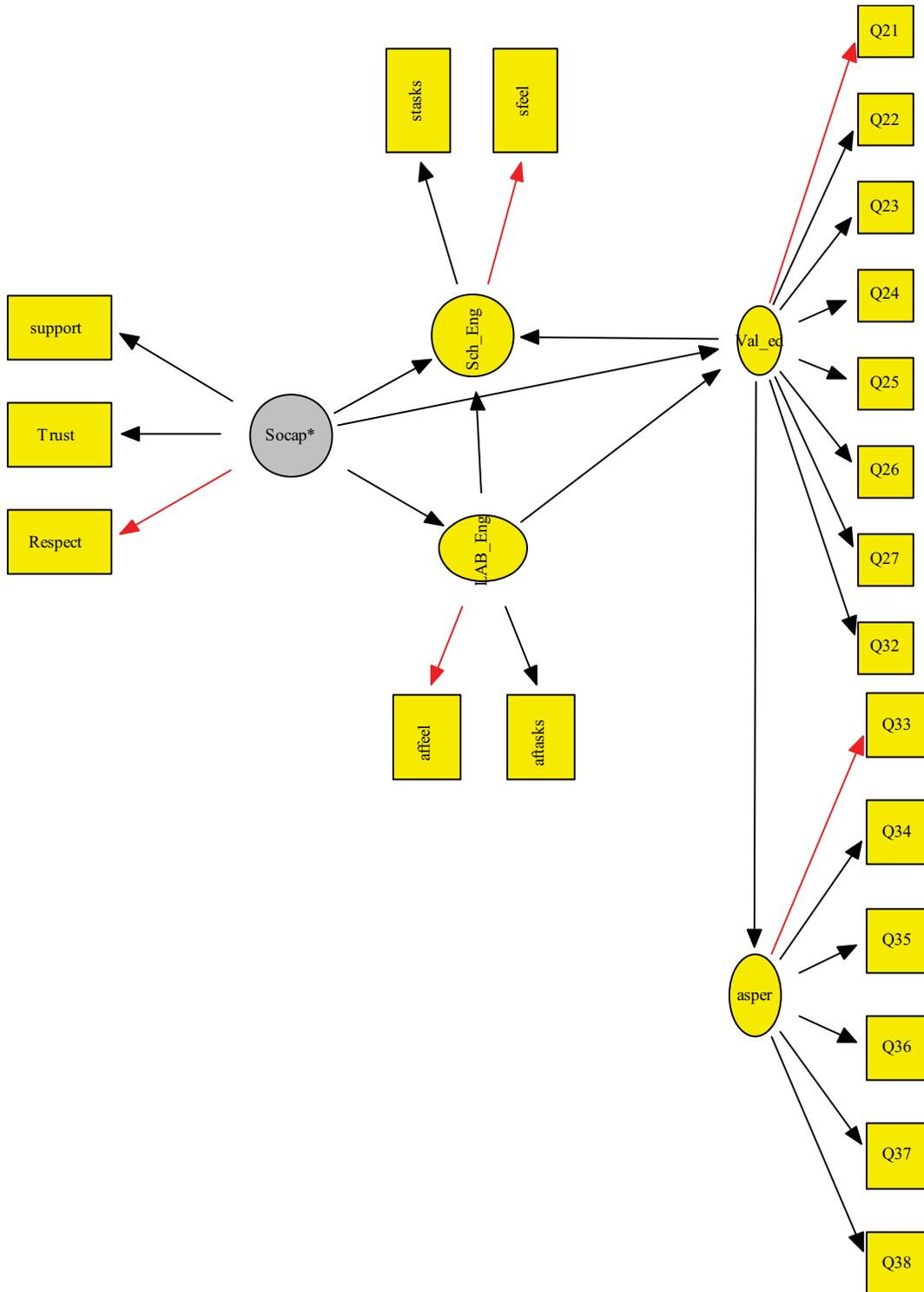
**Part VI. Student Engagement: LA's BEST Program**

49.	I am good at following the rules at LA's BEST.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
50.	I get into trouble while I am at LA's BEST.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
51.	I day dream or think about other things when I am at LA's BEST.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
52.	I ask questions when I do not understand something at LA's BEST.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
53.	I feel good about LA's BEST because I am learning a lot.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
54.	I think the activities I do in LA's BEST are boring.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
55.	Since I have been in LA's BEST, I like doing school work.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
56.	I work hard at LA's BEST so that I learn more things.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
57.	When the teachers in LA's BEST ask me questions, I do my best to answer them.	Never	Sometimes	A lot	All the time

*Thank you for completing this survey.* 😊

APPENDIX B

Social Capital 2005-2006 Student Level Path Analysis - Full Model Diagram



This model examines the relationship between five latent constructs at the student level. These constructs are Social Capital, LA’s BEST Student Engagement, Day School Student Engagement, the Value of Education and Future Aspirations. The latent Social Capital variable was comprised of 14 measured survey items which were combined into 3 item parcels representing Support, Trust and Respect. Similarly, the latent variables for LA’s BEST Student Engagement and Day School Engagement were comprised of scales with 10 original items that were combined into parcels representing Task Engagement and Emotional Engagement. The Value of Education and Future Aspirations were comprised of scales with 8 and 6 measured survey items respectively. The structural layout definitions are presented in the table below.

Measured Composites/Items from student survey	Latent Factor Scales
Trust (composite of 4 survey Items)	Social Capital (3 Parcels)
Respect (composite of 3 survey Items)	
Support and Encouragement (composite of 3 survey Items)	
I feel it is important to get good grades in school.	Value of Education (8 Items)
Most of the things that I am learning in school will help me when I grow up.	
I think it is important for me to have a good education.	
I have to do well in school if I want to be successful when I grow up.	
If I get good grades, I will be able to get a good job when I grow up.	
School is important for me.	
I feel that doing my best at school is important.	
I feel happy when I do well in school	
I can get good grades in school if I work hard.	Future Aspirations (6 Items)
I feel good about my future.	
If I choose to, I will have a good life.	
I believe I will be successful in life.	
It is important to me that I finish high school.	
I plan to go to college.	

School: Task Engagement (composite of 5 survey Items)	Day School: Engagement (2 Parcels)
School: Emotional Engagement (composite of 5 survey Items)	
LA's BEST: Task Engagement (composite of 5 survey Items)	LA's BEST: Engagement (2 Parcels)
LA's BEST: Emotional Engagement (composite of 5 survey Items)	