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# Developing the Whole Child: An Evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI)

Virginia Diez

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## **Developing the Whole Child: An Evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI)**

October 2007

Virginia Diez

This evaluation was conducted by The Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at UMass Boston under a contract with the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI). Posted on [www.gaston.umb.edu](http://www.gaston.umb.edu) in November 2007.

# Developing the Whole Child: An Evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI)

## Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI), an umbrella organization that provides funding, educational guidelines, staff development, and networking opportunities to after-school programs in the Greater Boston area. LASI funds seven Latino-led after-school programs servicing children ages 7-14. The programs are located in Lynn, Cambridge, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and Chelsea. LASI was established in 2001 by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay as a five-year demonstration project to improve academic achievement—as measured by MCAS scores and high school retention rates—among Latino children.

The evaluation focused on the following questions:

1. What are the activities being carried out by LASI and its affiliated service programs?
2. To what extent has the coordinating program's theory of change been adopted by the service programs?
3. Are there differences between LASI's expectations of how service programs will adopt the educational model and how the programs are actually implementing it?
4. How do the service programs and LASI monitor program implementation?
5. What are advantages and disadvantages to the service programs of participating in LASI?

## Findings

Below we summarize the findings of this evaluation

### Program description and activities

- **Who is served?**
  - Currently, LASI serves approximately 250 children between the ages of 7 and 14 years old, split roughly evenly by gender.
  - The children and their families come from different national origins; the largest groups served are families from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Central America.
  - LASI participants show a wide range of language proficiencies; from native English speakers whose Spanish is limited, and others are native Spanish speakers with very limited English skills.
- **Governance:** LASI is governed by a central administration (LASI Central) with input from the Steering Board, which includes the seven executive directors of LASI affiliates.

- **Funding:** LASI is not the sole funding source for its affiliated programs. At most, LASI funds 50% of its programs' budgets, with no clear designation of the program component which LASI funds support.
- **Services Offered:** Most programs provide academic support services including: homework support, reading and writing, science, "computer time," and various arts programs. Of all components, homework and art are the most common.

### Adoption of the coordinating program's theory of change by the service programs

- LASI's educational approach has not been implemented uniformly across participating organizations.
- From the outset, there were problems with the formulation of Whole Brain Learning and the quality of training. Changes in LASI leadership undermined the consistent implementation of Whole Brain Learning.
- Today, LASI sites have different interpretations of what Whole Brain Learning is and what it looks like on the ground.

### Programmatic Approaches of the LASI programs

- LASI programs are housed by community organizations whose missions, broadly speaking, are to improve community and enhance individual self-determination.
- These organizations have different approaches to redressing disparities.
  - **Service-Orientation:** Some, for example, focus on "equal access to services", leading them to provide educational, public and mental health services not easily available in its community.
  - **Empowerment Orientation:** Others emphasize "empowering youth and families to enhance their own lives" and focus on raising awareness about the social forces that conspire to make these services unavailable; it aims to equip youth with academic, cognitive and social tools necessary to bring about change.
- LASI programs perceive themselves as a transitional spaces **between home and school**. Their curriculum and staff bridge these two worlds.
- LASI programs, like other non-Latino after-school programs, share the goal of "developing the whole child." One common element across programs is the need for children to develop **good self-esteem**. Another is attention to the **child in the context of his/her family**.
- Three objectives are mentioned most frequently in connection with developing "the whole child":
  - improving academic outcomes;
  - increasing youths' "life" or "soft" skills, which are viewed as "tools for success"; and
  - guiding youth in the development of a positive cultural identity.
- Some LASI sites are attached to schools that see homework completion as necessary to improve grades. The programs support homework completion and use it to reinforce academic materials covered in the classroom.
  - When students have limited English proficiency, homework requires support for second language acquisition.

- LASI programs working with fluent English speakers have more time to offer enrichment activities.
- Programs try to differentiate themselves from schools to keep students engaged and interested in learning. For this purpose, they use instructional strategies that make learning fun, they personalize attention, they offer programs that are being cut by the schools (such as supports for English-language learners, the arts, and physical education activities). They also offer emotional support and actively seek to connect with families.
- For some, educating the “whole child” requires teaching competencies for the workplace and for leadership – e.g., critical thinking, planning, decision-making, conflict resolution, public speaking, and social skills. These skills supplement others within the traditional purview of schools such as math, writing, technology, and teamwork.
- A strong sense of self is universally seen as a necessary outcome in a healthy “whole child.” Developing a positive cultural identity requires accepting one’s cultural roots, selecting positive aspects of one’s culture of origin, and incorporating them, together with positive aspects of the host culture, into a strong bicultural identity. Everything programs do, in other words, builds toward the development of a positive cultural identity and, ultimately, raises self-esteem.
- In general, LASI programs understand the “by and for” Latinos designation as a form of affirmative action to redress the gap in educational outcomes experienced by Latino students.

What is the value added of LASI participation
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- LASI Central’s key roles, from the perspective of program sites, are:
  - fundraising,
  - the facilitation of inter-agency networking, and
  - technical assistance.
- Program staff appreciates the opportunity to develop a community of practice with colleagues in similar situations.
- Conversely, executive directors are divided on the value of attending Steering Board meetings.
- Most agree that contact among program participants from the different sites has been insufficient and there is broad support for increasing it.

## Recommendations

<b>From the Advisory Committee</b>
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LASI needs to fund specific strategies toward the accomplishment of its these goals and monitor how these are implemented across programs.

- Whichever component LASI chooses to promote as its trademark will require the formulation of a set of expected outcomes and a commitment to ongoing evaluation.
- The development of a more explicit LASI program will facilitate fundraising and expansion.

## From LASI Programs

- LASI needs to encourage collaborative relationships between LASI Central and the programs as well as across LASI sites. This is especially the case in decision-making related to program development, implementation and evaluation.
- LASI Central needs to communicate clearly about the purpose of meetings and committees and promote participation of the sites in setting goals and agendas
- Promote the participation of youth in the leadership of the program. Two committees created to foster collaboration among sites (Steering and Program committees) have supported the development of formal mechanisms for site directors and after-school program staff to meet and work on common issues. What is missing at this point is a mechanism for students to collaborate, generate project ideas.
- LASI Central should develop “voice” for Latino educational issues,
- LASI’s technical assistance should be tailored to the specific needs of each program. LASI program staff expressed an interest in receiving technical assistance that is tailored to their specific needs and levels of expertise.

## From the Evaluator

- **LASI could focus on capitalizing on the cultural strengths of Latino-led programs**  
LASI programs have unique understandings of what Latino children need to develop positive cultural identities and what their families need to do in order to support their children in different developmental stages. LASI programs also know how to infuse culturally-relevant curriculum into their classrooms. These are strengths that justify the existence of a program “by and for” Latinos, as well as collaboration toward the development of a “practice manual” that could serve as a model to other programs serving Latino students.

- **Future evaluation will be contingent not only on the formulation of specific outcomes but also on the development of an implementation plan**

After identifying a LASI trademark component, LASI will have to review tools to measure desired outcomes. However, prior to measuring outcomes, we recommend an implementation evaluation. This will enable LASI to understand different implementation strategies used by different programs and how implementation shapes the successful attainment of outcomes.

- **LASI, through its Program Committee, could help develop a “community of practice” focused on the understanding, documentation and dissemination of “best practices” of these programs.**

A few topics came up during this evaluation that could be beneficial for future discussion in Program Committee meetings. They are:

- *Overcoming students’ resistance to after-school academic instruction*
- *Improving after-school program staff’s relationships with schools and teachers*
- *Best curriculum and teaching strategies to improve reading, writing and math*
- *Strategies for “no-homework” days*
- *Teaching children across a wide range of ages, abilities, and languages*
- *Understanding and countering students’ discouragement toward school*

# **Developing the Whole Child: An Evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI)**

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# Introduction

## I. Evaluation Background

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Latino After-School Initiative (LASI), an umbrella organization that provides funding, educational guidelines, staff development, and networking opportunities to after-school programs in the Greater Boston area. LASI funds seven Latino-led after-school programs servicing children ages 7-14. The programs are located in Lynn, Cambridge, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and Chelsea. LASI was established in 2001 by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay as a five-year demonstration project to improve academic achievement—as measured by MCAS scores and high school retention rates—among Latino children.

This evaluation was commissioned in the fall of 2006 as LASI transitioned from a United Way of Massachusetts Bay demonstration to a financially self-sustaining program. At that time, LASI was also preparing to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) with the purpose of recruiting new programs. In commissioning the evaluation, LASI principals expressed an interest in acquiring more knowledge about their organization. LASI had been launched with an original focus on providing curriculum design and technical assistance to participating programs. Over time, LASI's programmatic focus changed and it was not clear which programmatic elements were common to LASI sites. Yet, LASI was at a point where it needed to decide what shape it would take in the future. What exactly was LASI encouraging sites to do with its funding and how could it be measured?

The questions asked in this evaluation are descriptive in nature—that is, this is not an outcomes study. We did not assess the academic and social outcomes of LASI participants. However, we include a section recommending next steps in evaluation that will lead to an effective outcomes assessment.

## II. Evaluation Framework

The Five-tiered Approach to evaluation<sup>1</sup> (Jacobs, 1998; Jacobs, 1988; Jacobs & Kapuscik, 2000) provides a useful framework for assessing the implementation and outcomes of community-based initiatives. As its name suggests, this approach proposes a layered evaluation process. Different layers are relevant at the different developmental stages of a program. The five tiers are:

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs, F. (1988). The Five-tiered Approach to evaluation: Context and implementation. In H. Weiss & F. Jacobs (Eds.) *Evaluating family programs* (pp.37-68). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.



*Tier 1: Needs Assessment.* Defining the problem, conducting an inventory of existing services, and identifying needs that remain unmet.

*Tier 2: Monitoring and Accountability.* Establishing for whom (clients), what (services), by who (staff), and for how much (cost) of the program. The data in this tier answer the fundamental question “What is going on here?” It enables a program to tell funders what it is planning to do and how it is going to evaluate its success.

*Tier 3: Quality Review and Program Clarification.* Developing a more detailed picture of the program as it is being implemented, assessing the quality and consistency of the intervention, and providing information to staff for program improvement.

*Tier 4: Achieving Outcomes.* Determining the program’s effectiveness, usually in the short-term, and disseminating knowledge.

*Tier 5: Establishing Impact.* Producing evidence of effectiveness, usually including long-term results, and disseminating knowledge to the field.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, LASI was launched as a response to data presented by the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Public Policy and Community Development on the persistent achievement gap experienced by Latino students in Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> This report identified significant and widespread differences by race and ethnicity in 1998 MCAS scores. Latino students in particular, experienced the highest rates of test failures in all three MCAS categories at all grade levels. In addition, test failures were considerably higher in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade than in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. For example, English test failures went from 39% in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 58% in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Math failures increased from 50% to 83% and Science & Technology from 32% to 70%. The 29% Latino dropout rate was the highest of all racial groups in Massachusetts.

Almost simultaneously with achievement gap statistics a report was released by the Mayor’s Task Force on After-School Time, headed by Chris Gabrieli. Entitled “Schools Alone Are Not Enough: Why Out-of-School Time Is Crucial to the Success of our Children.”<sup>4</sup> This report became an instant blueprint for action. In the Five-Tiered Approach, these two reports served as a Tier 1 needs assessment. The United Way of Massachusetts Bay responded by launching an after-school initiative to address the achievement gap.

The questions addressed in the current evaluation are largely Tier 2 questions. They enable LASI Central and programs affiliated with LASI to get to know what they have in common. Chapter 2 presents demographic facts while also highlighting heterogeneity across programs to avoid reinforcing assumptions of homogeneity among “Latinos.” Chapter 3 looks at the kinds of

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, F. H., & Kapuscik, J. L. (2000). *Making it count: Evaluating family preservation services*. Medford, MA: Department of Child Development, Tufts University.

<sup>3</sup>Uriarte, M., & Chavez, L. (2000). *Latino students and the Massachusetts public schools*. Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy: University of Massachusetts Boston.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, J., & Farbman, D. (2002, Summer). Schools alone are not enough: After-school programs and education reform in Boston. In G. Noam & B. Miller (Eds.) *Youth development and after-school time: A tale of many cities*. *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 94.

services that LASI provides to participating sites and how these services are perceived. Chapter 4 documents how the initial educational approach proposed by LASI quickly ran into problems during the implementation phase. As a result, LASI programs have continued developing their own unique characteristics. In Chapter 5, some common elements among programs are identified that could be fine-tuned to meet LASI's self-designation as a program "by Latinos for Latinos." To be effectively implemented, theories of change must detail "how and why" a program works.<sup>5</sup> The current theory of change is a first step toward delineating LASI's goals and objectives, together with the strategies and activities that are expected to bring about the desired change. In Chapter 6, we discuss the meaning of the "by and for Latinos" label. In Chapter 7, we discuss the most obvious evaluation capacity in place today, while suggesting next steps to consider for further evaluation. We conclude with recommendations in Chapter 8.

### **III. Evaluation Questions**

The main question driving this evaluation has been the description of LASI and of its perceived value as assessed by its affiliates and their staffs. For a complete list of questions and sub-questions, see Appendix A.

### **IV. Data Collected**

This is a qualitative study involving documentary data, interviews, and observations collected both from LASI and from each participating site.

The documentary data used include:

- a) Training materials about Whole Brain Learning used by the coordinating organization. The main one was: "Latino After School Initiative (LASI) Whole Brain Learning and its Integration with Academic, Technological, Vocational, Bilingual and Occupational Literacy Programs," compiled by Bruce Kaiper in collaboration with the United Way of Mass Bay and the Child Care Resource Center (updated annually between 2002 and 2004);
- b) A previous evaluation of LASI: "Project Evaluation: The Latino After School Initiative" by Kelly Bates and Diane Franklin (2005);
- c) Demographic and end-of-year reports submitted by LASI sites in June, 2006;
- d) Program budgets;
- e) Site websites and general descriptive literature;
- f) Site requests for funding proposals.

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<sup>5</sup> Weiss, C. H. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring Theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: Concepts, methods and context*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

In addition to the documentary data, a total of 23 “intensive” interviews<sup>6</sup> were conducted to elicit narratives pertaining to the evaluation questions. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes, was recorded with participants’ consent, and subsequently transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti.5.1 software for qualitative analysis. The following individuals were interviewed:

- a) LASI managers and advisory board members (6);
- b) Executive directors of LASI participating sites (7);
- c) Educational directors of LASI participating sites (4);
- d) After-school program coordinators (7).

To supplement the data gathered through interviews and documentary evidence, a total of seven observations were conducted, one at each site. During observations, the researcher recorded detailed fieldnotes of as many activities and interactions (adult-youth, youth-youth) she could observe in the course of one program session.

## **V. Limitations**

This study did not have an iterative design allowing for a second round of interviews with all program participants to probe deeper into some of the questions that inevitably come up when researchers scrutinize the data collected in the first round. The theory of change presented for the entire LASI initiative is general and does not present all the links between objectives, strategies and activities. This Tier 3 question will be better addressed at a later date.

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<sup>6</sup> Charnaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## DESCRIPTION OF LASI

**Finding 1:** Currently, LASI serves approximately 250 children between the ages of 7 and 14 years old, split roughly evenly by gender. The children and their families come from different national origins; the largest groups served are families with roots in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Central America. LASI participants show a wide range of language proficiencies; from native English speakers whose Spanish is limited, and others are native Spanish speakers with very limited English skills.

### I. Who Does LASI serve?

The total of LASI participants reflected in Table 2 was drawn from annual demographic reports provided to LASI by each of its participating sites in June, 2006. At the time data were collected for this evaluation, the total number of participants had increased from 201 (as per Table 1) to around 250 (as per interviews with executive directors). This was due to growth in some programs coupled with stability among those that did not grow. The programs managed by Alianza Hispana and La Vida were the ones experiencing most rapid growth between the time of the reports and the interviews. Alianza had gone from 15 to around 30 regular participants and La Vida from 40 to 65 participants.

In terms of age, as of June 2006, 91.5% of participants were 7 to 14 years old, 54% were boys and 46% girls, 88.5% were Latinos, and the largest national/regional origins were the Dominican Republic (37%), Puerto Rico (21.5%), and Central America (16.5%). The communities serviced were largely Boston neighborhoods (67%), along with three cities in Greater Boston: Chelsea, Somerville and Lynn.

The aggregate numbers presented above mask program differences. It is important to point out these differences because of the connotations of homogeneity inherent in a label such as “Latinos.” For example, there are clear ethnic differences among LASI programs. These differences tend to reflect the demographic makeup of the communities the programs serve. At one end of the spectrum, La Vida is located in Lynn and its participants are predominantly the children of recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic. This program is staffed by native Spanish speakers, mostly with roots in the Dominican Republic, and provides language support to participants. At the other end of the spectrum, Sociedad Latina’s Mission Hill participants are first generation, U.S.-born English-speaking Latinos, and about 30% are non-Latinos. The program’s full-time staff is not Latino.

**Table 1—Demographic Profile of Participants in LASI-Funded Programs**

Total students served		201	
Ages	5-6	5	
	7-14	184	
	15-18	12	
Gender	Girls	92	
	Boys	109	
Place of origin	Dominican Republic	75	
	Puerto Rico	43	
	Central America	33	
	Other Latinos	13	
	Non-Latinos	23	
Neighborhoods (for 187 participants Only)	Boston	Dorchester	14
		Hyde Park	5
		Jamaica Plain	45
		Mission Hill	21
		Roslindale	7
		Roxbury	13
		Other	9
	Greater Boston	Chelsea	13
		Lynn	40
		Somerville	20

Regarding gender, overall LASI sites are balanced except for Centro Latino, which is predominantly a girls’ program, and Centro Presente which is predominantly attended by boys. Centro Presente’s principals speculate that the gender of the after-school full-time staff (two males) biases participation in favor of boys. However, other program characteristics may have an impact as well, such as recruitment practices, program content, and location.

## II. Structure

**Finding 2:** LASI is governed by a central administration (LASI Central) with input from the Steering Board, which includes the seven executive directors of LASI affiliates.

LASI is financially managed and has its offices on the premises of the Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, Mass. Members of the central administration (from here on, “LASI Central”) include: Director Marcelo Juica, CCRC Manager Mitzi Fennel, Advisory Board Chair Celina Miranda of Mellon Financial Corporation, and current legislative consultant and former CCRC executive director Marta T. Rosa, who has been involved in this initiative from inception and remains a strong supporter.

The seven LASI-affiliated programs are:

- |    |                  |                       |
|----|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Alianza Hispana  | Roxbury               |
| 2. | Centro Latino    | Chelsea               |
| 3. | Centro Presente  | Cambridge/Somerville  |
| 4. | HOPE             | Jamaica Plain/Roxbury |
| 5. | HSTF             | Jamaica Plain         |
| 6. | La Vida          | Lynn                  |
| 7. | Sociedad Latina. | Mission Hill/Roxbury  |

The executive directors of the seven LASI sites are involved in LASI’s Steering Board. For outsiders, it can be difficult to navigate LASI’s leadership structure. The executive directors sometimes take leadership in LASI policy-making and are perceived as LASI “principals.” Yet, some executive directors do not believe that there is a well-formulated mechanism for adopting their suggestions and have stopped participating. This has led to distrust and confusion among LASI parties.

It was not the purpose of this evaluation to study structural issues, since this was done previously by Bates and Franklin.<sup>7</sup> However, it seems necessary to report the structural tension between LASI Central and the sites because this relates to program design and implementation.

### III. Funding

**Finding 3:** LASI is not the sole funding source for its affiliated programs. At most, LASI funds 50% of its programs’ budgets, with no clear designation of the program component which LASI funds support.

Most of LASI’s funding comes from line items in the Massachusetts state budget (\$150,000 from the Department of Workforce Development and \$250,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health). LASI receives additional funding from the following private foundations and institutions: United Way of Mass Bay, Millenium Fund, Clowes Fund, Hyams Foundation, Bingham McCouchen, and Citizens Bank.

Of these funds, LASI allocates \$30,000 to each site for after-school programming. More recently, LASI has added a youth development component for which it allocates an additional \$15,000 per site.

LASI programs are different in size and budgets. Smaller programs serve about 15 participants while large programs range from 40 to 65. In the smaller programs, LASI’s funding can account for roughly 50% of total expenses, whereas in the larger programs LASI’s funding may only account for roughly 10%. Although sites refer to their after-school programs as the “LASI program,” in actuality these programs must respond to other funders in addition to LASI. At this point, it is unclear which specific program component LASI funding supports.

<sup>7</sup> Bates, K., & Franklin, D. (2005). “Project evaluation: The Latino After School Initiative” (unpublished report).

#### IV. Services Offered by LASI Programs

**Finding 4:** Most programs provide academic support services including: homework support, reading and writing, science, “computer time,” and various arts programs. Of all components, homework and art are the most common.

In this section we focus on services offered by LASI programs. In Chapter 3, we discuss services provided by LASI Central to the programs.

*Homework:* All LASI programs except Centro Presente offer homework support. Homework takes place in the first part of the afternoon, after students come in, have a snack, and have some down time. The length of homework time fluctuates across, and even within programs depending on students’ needs. Homework can be used by after-school staff to assess students’ learning needs and personalize instruction accordingly.

*Arts:* The arts are used to enhance self-esteem via cultural exploration and self-expression. It is expected that enhanced self-esteem will give students confidence to improve academic performance. All programs have an arts component, but the centrality of the arts as a means to accomplish developmental outcomes varies. At Centro Presente, art is the main medium for accomplishing various outcomes. Other programs such as La Vida, Centro Latino, Alianza Hispana, and Hyde Square Task Force use the arts largely for recreational purposes.

*Technology:* Centro Latino, HOPE, Alianza Hispana and Sociedad Latina have access to technology to support multiple program objectives. Of the programs that have access to technology, Centro Latino appears to have a clearly-formulated theory of how to use technology to enhance educational and career outcomes. Some centers have limited access to technology. Hyde Square Task Force, for example, states in its year-end report that technology is an ongoing need.

*Reading and writing tutoring:* There is a range of needs and of curricula in place to help students work on their reading and writing skills. The most striking need is the need to learn English experienced by students who are in English-only immersion classes. Yet, English-speaking students also have reading and writing needs. Programs have a variety of curricula in this area.

*Science:* Four programs are using the AXIS curriculum put out by the Intercultural Center for Research in Education (INCRE). The adoption of this curriculum was facilitated by LASI Central.

## PERCEPTIONS OF LASI CENTRAL AND ITS VALUE

**Finding 5:** LASI Central's key roles, from the perspective of program sites, are: fundraising, the facilitation of inter-agency networking, and technical assistance. Program staff, in general, appreciate the opportunity to develop a community of practice with colleagues in similar situations. Conversely, executive directors are divided on the value of attending Steering Board meetings. Most agree that contact among program participants from the different sites has been insufficient and there is broad support for increasing it.

### I. Funding/Fundraising/Public Relations

After-school programs, like all other programs, need money to deliver quality services. Some LASI sites openly admit that the main value of participating in LASI is to obtain dependable, steady funding that does not require extensive reporting throughout the year.

"I'm not going to lie, the funding has been huge, the funding has really supported our program and it's steady funding, it's consistent and dependable." (401)<sup>8</sup>

The prospect of making sites responsible for raising funds for LASI is a potential deterrent to participation, especially since LASI is not their sole source of funding. A great deal of tension between LASI Central and participating sites has been caused by the possibility of shifting fundraising responsibilities from LASI Central to the sites.

"If you can go to a funder and get \$50,000 for you, why would you go to a funder and get \$50,000 to split in 7 ways?" (104)

If LASI retains fundraising responsibilities, a contentious issue is how to ensure that LASI does not compete for scarce resources with the individual after-school programs it funds. Two specific concerns already expressed by sites about LASI's current fundraising from private foundations are: a) When LASI seeks funding from the same sources that already support LASI sites, LASI is competing for what is already a very limited pool of money available to community-based organizations. b) This sense of competition is compounded by the fact that LASI's goals are very broad and coincide with the goals of its affiliated sites as a whole.

One funder recommended that a way to possibly overcome the potential of competition between LASI and the program it funds is for LASI Central to clearly demarcate what exactly LASI funds

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<sup>8</sup> Each interviewee was assigned a number to preserve anonymity. Numbers in parentheses represent different individuals.



in participating programs. This would enable funders to expect different outcomes from funding that reaches sites through LASI than from funding that goes directly to the sites.

In its 2006 year-end report, Centro Latino suggests that LASI raise funds from “sources [that] offer support to larger national organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club. A strong case can be made that Latino students in our public schools and after school programs would benefit by such support. If the development coordinators of each agency in the LASI network consolidated their efforts to seek funding from these sources, it might be possible to be awarded larger sums of money. Some examples of such funds are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Suffolk Construction Co., Inc., Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund, J. C. Kellogg Foundation, Liberty Mutual Foundation, Bank of America, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Hearst Foundation, Blue Cross, and Blue Shield of Massachusetts.”

## **II. Network Coordination**

LASI Central has set up two separate networks: the Steering Board, where executive directors meet with members of the advisory board, and the Program Committee, where program staff meets monthly.

*The Steering Board:* LASI participation offers executive directors a forum to convene and develop a public policy agenda.

“The network creates the critical mass that is necessary whether it is to impact public policy, impact funding, impress foundations, make the public sector think differently, the department of education, the governor, whoever. A single organization, *por mas* successful, is not going to be able to form that critical mass. The network provides that as a value.” (802)

So far, however, considerable time has been spent in strategic planning and the development of an organizational structure. Participation has been inconsistent which creates tension between those who participate regularly and those who do not.

*The Program Committee:* This committee was created based on recommendations made in the Bates and Franklin evaluation. The committee has been in existence for approximately one year. This is where networking among program staff takes place. The program committee meets once a month and provides a space where program coordinators, LASI principals, and some board members can come together as a community of practice. Although there is some disagreement around whether program committee meetings should be mandatory, in general program staff sees value in having a forum for sharing ideas, best practices, as well as a mutual support system. Some value this opportunity to break the isolation inherent in teaching, where, as one participant said, “you’re kind of out in an island by yourself” (402).

“As much as sometimes there are complaints about the network meetings, I think that there is a benefit in getting to know ... what these other Latino organizations are doing... we can be an asset to one another ... each

organization is great at doing specific things... bringing all these organizations together ... it's been very helpful ... there are other people that might share the same issues that I'm having ... that has been a big plus with LASI." (301)

The Program Committee's purpose and the process for setting the agenda have not always been clear to sites. In the beginning, meetings were used largely to give "updates" and make announcements about upcoming events. With time, committee members have claimed more ownership over the agenda, which increases their enthusiasm for participation. Currently, the Program Committee is valued because:

1. As staff turns over, it serves as a training ground and supports the work of new coordinators and members of the LASI community.
2. Staff members learn from each other and adopt useful practices. Informally, this committee could serve a quality control function. It could also become a community of practice around the implementation of youth leadership components.
3. Over time, the benefits of participating in this committee can "spill out" to the establishment of bilateral collaborations.

### **III. Coordination of Social Events for Youth**

LASI's vision for improving social skills includes bringing together youth from different centers to develop cross-community relationships and learn about life outside their neighborhoods. Sites are developing a vision for youth to meet throughout the year in bilateral collaborations that can then be showcased in an annual celebration organized by LASI Central.

The strategy of having only one annual meeting is perceived as problematic because bringing youth together once a year to celebrate does not help develop relationships among them. So far, the year-end meeting has largely served a public relations purpose only. Some have expressed a desire that, in the future, the year-end meeting be the culmination of a year-long process of collaboration across sites rather than the first time that youth come together.

"Skiing was a first step. In the future, we expect to meet in order to talk about problems we face in our communities, some topic that is of common interest. Sometimes I get the impression that LASI gives us money to create a space for youth but there is no clear objective of what we are trying to do with that space. What are we trying to accomplish?" (201)

It seems that the next major task for LASI is to develop "community" among youth in the same way that it has developed a network of executive directors and a community of practice for program staff. Sites have ideas about projects that could foster partnerships among participants in different programs.

#### **IV. Technical assistance**

Another important role taken on by LASI Central has been the identification and coordination of technical assistance and professional development opportunities for program staff. All program staff were offered Museum of Science training. LASI also developed a relationship with the Harvard After School Initiative (HASI) that has made resources available to all LASI sites. HASI provides training for program coordinators and other staff. For example, in 2006, program staff was trained to use a national database about youth development. In addition, HASI provides materials, such as educational games, for use in the after-school classroom.

LASI sites also have their own sources of technical assistance. One such source is the United Way of Mass Bay. One site speaks about the value of the United Way's technical assistance to help sites find "research based tools" for measuring program outcomes. Other sources of technical assistance include the Intercultural Center for Research in Education (INCRE) and Educators for Social Responsibility, as well as the developers of curricula such as: MathWorks, Writers Express, ReadBoston, and Accelerated Reader.

## LASI'S EDUCATIONAL APPROACH: WHOLE BRAIN LEARNING

**Finding 5:** LASI's educational approach has not been implemented uniformly across participating organizations. From the outset, there were problems with the formulation of Whole Brain Learning and the quality of training. Changes in LASI leadership undermined the consistent implementation of Whole Brain Learning. Today, LASI sites have different interpretations of what Whole Brain Learning is and what it looks like on the ground.

### I. Background

When LASI launched, the United Way of Mass Bay, LASI's original sponsor, hired a "Whole Brain Learning" expert who was charged with managing LASI and implementing the educational approach across sites. This is what the United Way of Mass Bay stated about Whole Brain Learning:

"The bedrock of the Latino After-School Initiative will be its teaching methodologies. Renowned educator Bruce Kaiper, who has worked with at-risk youth nationwide, will train LASI staff on those methodologies which will promote skill-building, character development, cultural pride, creativity and cooperation as well as conflict resolution. These methodologies, when combined with the academic components of the program, will help ensure the success of Latino youth on both a social and academic plane."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Whole Brain Learning became, and still is, the number one strategy promoted by LASI Central to meet the dual goal of improving the academic and social skills of Latino children and youth.

#### *Key Strategy #1:*

*After-school programs use the tools and practices of Whole Brain Learning prominently to engage children in intentional learning.*

<http://www.cccinc.org/Lasi.shtml>

The implementation of LASI's educational model encountered obstacles from the outset, however. In the following section, we look at some of those obstacles, as presented by

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Kaiper, B. (2002). *Latino After-School Initiative Whole Brain Learning and its integration with academic, technological, vocational, bilingual and occupational literacy programs.*

individuals interviewed for this evaluation, the current state of LASI's original educational model and what, if any, curricular activities LASI sites have in common.

## **II. Obstacles to implementation**

Upon launching this initiative, the United Way of Mass Bay selectively invited sites located in Latino communities to join LASI. The only requirement attached to LASI funding was an agreement to receive training in Whole Brain Learning, an educational approach which had been used successfully with Latino children in the Southwest. This approach claimed to offer pedagogical methods to enhance the teaching of academic content and other program components. Participating programs seemed initially open to this proposal.

Yet, obstacles to the implementation of Whole Brain Learning emerged from the outset. They were: a) low quality of training and reference materials; b) lack of consultation with sites about the implementation of LASI's model; c) staff turnover at both the leadership and direct-service levels; d) lack of buy-in for the "by and for" Latinos designation.

### *1. Low Quality of Training*

There is overall consensus among those who participated in the original Whole Brain Learning training sessions that they did not go well. LASI manager and expert educator Bruce Kaiper did not earn the agencies' trust and respect even though he claimed an extensive trajectory developing successful curriculum for Latino students in New Mexico and Texas. Executive directors and staff at the sites had issues with both the content of training sessions and the manner in which they were delivered.

The low quality of LASI trainings became most apparent in the course of this evaluation when individuals were asked to describe LASI's educational approach. Many of the interviewees referred to a "thick binder"<sup>10</sup> as the best representation of Whole Brain Learning and proceeded to give a highly personal interpretation. Statements like the following have been echoed repeatedly by staff at LASI sites:

"LASI was first introduced to me ... in the form of a very thick binder that spoke about ... the LASI coordinator at the time, his ideas on whole brain learning and the different ways that children learn and that, as being part of the Latino After School Initiative, we had to keep in mind in our planning that we were going to be very conscious of using these different strategies to help the kids even more in what was happening in the after school program." (301)

The Whole Brain Learning manual referred to as the "thick binder" contains references to educational theories, classroom learning activities, and curriculum guidelines. Principles of Whole Brain Learning in the manual are consistent with brain-based learning as described in the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

“Funderstanding” website (Appendix B).<sup>11</sup> Brain-based learning calls for teaching strategies such as orchestrated immersion, relaxed alertness and educational approach. It is not clear that relaxed alertness and active processing were proposed as part of the approach.

LASI’s Whole Brain Learning also emphasizes Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences – the prevailing interpretation of Whole Brain Learning subsisting today at all LASI levels.

The manual recommended experiential teaching strategies such as the project-based approach and service learning, as well as mentoring, the only strategy for which pre-existing evidence of success with Latinos was presented.

Without conducting further research and having an expertise in curriculum development, it is not easy--from an examination of the Whole Brain Learning manual--to fully understand how the different theoretical frameworks put forth in LASI’s original educational model form a coherent whole. This comment made by a LASI principal sums up an overall feeling about Whole Brain Learning:

“Over the years none of us really understood what whole brain learning was, given the training - if there was any, given a huge binder with a collection of different approaches ... multiple intelligences and different materials ... you know teachers, instructors and educators all over the world. But none of us really understood what that meant for the sites.” (101)

Yet, Whole Brain Learning still figures prominently in LASI’s promotional materials as a series of “tools and practices” that can be used to enhance academic learning.

## 2. *Assumptions Implicit in the LASI Model*

In hindsight, the lack of consultation between LASI Central and participating sites about the adequacy of Whole Brain Learning as a suitable educational approach for their participants is troublesome. Three assumptions implicit in the way LASI Central proceeded initially, still seem to pertain. They are:

*Assumption 1:* The adoption of Whole Brain Learning suggests that sites did not have pre-existing, effective educational models. This is a common assumption made about community-based organizations by outside observers. It is common for community programs to not have explicitly formulated theories about why they do what they do and why they are successful. This tends to be interpreted by outsiders as an a-theoretical approach to practice. However, intervention designers have theories about why they should be successful, even if they are not explicitly stated. When sites are not consulted about the adoption of a particular curricular approach, barriers to implementation may emerge when there are effective approaches in place, especially when adopting a new methodology implies giving up some of the pre-existing theory.

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<sup>11</sup> ([http://www.funderstanding.com/brain\\_based\\_learning.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/brain_based_learning.cfm)).

*Assumption 2:* Secondly, proposing this uniform approach also suggests that sites, participants and staff have somewhat homogeneous characteristics and needs that can be addressed in standardized training sessions. Maybe the “Latino” label masked the fact that sites were serving youth who spoke different languages and were at different stages of acculturation, different ages, and from different countries of origin.

*Assumption 3:* Finally, the structure for LASI participation rests on the notion that by being brought together and paid to participate in a program that they had not initiated, LASI sites would nonetheless find a common voice to speak about the needs of their diverse communities and youth.

These assumptions may explain why, as soon as LASI began implementing its educational model, the sites saw it as an imposition by outsiders who did not understand the realities of their communities and of their agencies. The following statement reflects a general distaste for LASI’s way of approaching programs:

“What people resist, including us, is being handed a program and expected to implement it the way it is without taking into consideration the characteristics of the agency. To strike that balance is very difficult. To say here’s a nice model ... And the guidelines, not so much to tell the agencies how to do the programming, because the reason we are at the table is that we have experience with Latinos...” (803)

### 3. *Staff Turnover*

Staff turnover is a common barrier to program implementation because training new staff drains financial resources that could be used otherwise. In addition to turnover at the coordinator level, there was significant turnover at LASI’s leadership level. Initially, sites were recruited by Carlos Martinez, a trusted member of their community who had taken an executive position with the funding agency – the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. Yet, upon joining, they found themselves in a “shotgun marriage” (103) with a manager – Bruce Kaiper – who had no experience working with Latino students in New England, and whose interactional style did not help him gain the trust and respect needed to execute a multi-site initiative. Eventually Kaiper was asked to resign from his position as the head of LASI. He was succeeded by Marta T. Rosa, a respected Latina community leader who had a proven political trajectory and could work with the executive directors at each of the LASI sites. She hired Marcelo Juica, a program coordinator from one of the sites, to lead LASI on a day-to-day basis. Mr. Juica has remained at the helm for the last three years, after Marta T. Rosa resigned from her post at CCRC in 2004.

LASI’s overall instability and structural changes have had an impact on the implementation of Whole Brain Learning. Some of these changes were: the relocation of LASI’s offices from United Way of Mass Bay premises to the Cambridge offices of the Child Care Resource Center; and the announcement by United Way of Mass Bay that LASI would have to become financially self-sustaining past the demonstration period. These changes shifted the onus for the survival of LASI from the original funder to the fundees, who were expected to fundraise as a collective. However, the expectation that sites would collaborate to raise funds for LASI seemed to

disregard long histories of competition for funding and defensiveness of service territory among some of the LASI agencies.

In the initial phase of Whole Brain Learning implementation, there was an attempt to create at least some uniform teaching and assessment strategies across LASI sites. Programs were required to assess participants' learning styles and types of intelligences upon entering the after-school program, with the expectations that teachers would differentiate their teaching practices in ways that would optimize learning. This was not an easy proposition, as reflected in this statement:

"We had to learn all this stuff about Whole Brain Learning, we had to learn about the Intelligence Theory, we had to do surveys, intelligence surveys to figure out which area each youth was best in, then we had to break them up into groups so that the groups were diverse in terms of areas of intelligence. It was pretty in depth. It was very different." (501)

However, over time, and over changes in LASI leadership and management structure, expectations around Whole Brain Learning became softer, more muted, and more open to interpretation.

"So now, I feel like LASI is a lot more broad and I like that because I feel like each program that's funded by LASI is not you know one size fits all program. Each program is unique, so I feel like LASI's goal of using creative techniques to teach different types of learners, I think that's a great goal ... It's more general. It's not something that we have to focus on x, y, and z, but it is more broad..." (501)

The change in the approach to implementation came at a cost:

"Whole brain is just a philosophy, like how to teach children, how to look at education and it's a lot more complicated than it's being taught ...I think it's come out of other education philosophers and we've never looked at those other education philosophies and really even what is an education philosophy and how do you implement it ... and as LASI progressed, especially after it ended its five-year structure, I think Whole Brain Learning kind of dropped off, which I think in some ways was too bad because we never even really looked at what it really was. But I think for some people that only had the LASI introduction to it, they were kind of like: 'What is this?' 'We don't really feel like doing this.'" (401)

Today, many agree that although a broader, less structured educational approach is easier for after-school staff, there need to be more clearly demarcated expectations and benchmarks in connection with LASI funding.



### III. Current interpretations of Whole Brain Learning

Currently, there are different interpretations of Whole Brain Learning among LASI programs and staff. For some, Whole Brain Learning refers largely to the flexibility and common sense that is a natural by-product of reflective teaching experiences. It is about recognizing the unique learning strengths and needs of individual students, and using multiple teaching modalities to address diverse needs and learning styles. This interpretation is consistent with multiple intelligences theory. After-school programs with a strong academic focus mention these kinds of strategies in connection with Whole Brain Learning/multiple intelligences:

"Whole brain learning ... you just have to make sure whatever you are delivering you do it in a varied way ... of course teachers talk, so there is always listening and writing ... if you see they aren't getting it, you go to the board and draw a picture." (802)

"When I was looking at this, it was basically ... what I was in the process of completing ... it stamped and it sealed what I needed to have in place because it made me think more consciously of making sure that these different ways of learning were going on in the after school and I wasn't doing everything strictly one or two ways. But for the kids that needed to do things manually, I was giving them an outlet for that, for those kids that needed to read things, I was giving them an outlet, for those kids that needed to think analytically and piece things together that I was giving those opportunities for those kids." (301)

"We just try to almost take a whole brain learning approach ... just the idea that we try to go through arts and crafts, we do the history piece going through the Latino culture, we do the science piece with Axis, we do math with the exam preparation and with the HASI tools, we also do English with the HASI tools. And then we've got the physical activities. We also have certain weeks that we theme as far as health, fitness, we've got a finance career, and cooking. So we really try to fit every aspect that we can." (702)

For others, Whole Brain Learning is about taking a holistic approach to education and focusing on the development of the whole child, not just the academic child. These programs emphasize development in different domains.

"Whole brain learning is really focusing on the entire development of the child ... our children have ... language needs, issues that are going on at home ... in school ... in their lives and how do we support that child in a holistic way. So I interpret the 'whole' part of whole brain learning into supporting the entire child and figuring out how we create a plan of learning and development for that child." (101)

"Whole Brain Learning is based on basic skills. It is a way to organize yourself to get to where you want to go... There are steps that you have to take in order to get what you want.... and that includes everything" (602)

A prevalent application of Whole Brain Learning is the use of non-academic teaching and learning strategies. This is also known as "intentional learning"<sup>12</sup>. Intentional learning is predicated on the hypothesis that academic performance can be improved when students work on identity, cultural exploration, self-expression, conflict resolution, and critical thinking.

"I understand [Whole Brain Learning] to be using the part of your brain that's not really focused on ... math, reading ... my approach is ... arts-focused programming. We did poetry, we are doing a heritage quilt that focuses on what their heritage means to them, we make 'Thank You' cards and art projects like that. We also do science exploration which is not a strict science curriculum. It's more like exploring science through reading." (501)

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<sup>12</sup> Noam, G.G., Biancarosa, G., Dechausay, N. (2003). *Afterschool Education: Approaches to an Emerging Field*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 4.

## DEVELOPING THE “WHOLE CHILD”

In this chapter, we look at how program focus affects what is offered and how by examining the theories of the various after-school “interventions.” We look at whether there is some alignment among sites regarding the most desirable outcomes and how to accomplish them. An intervention theory or theory of change has been defined as “an explicit or implicit theory about how and why the program will work” (Weiss, 1995, p. 66). To answer this question, we look first at the social and institutional context of the after-school programs and how these affect the programs’ theories of change. Then we examine how various programs define the “need” or “problem” that they are trying to “solve.” And finally, what are the desired outcomes and how do programs expect to get there?

**Finding 7:** LASI programs are housed by community organizations whose missions, broadly speaking, are to improve community and enhance individual self-determination. However, these organizations have different definitions of “community” and use different approaches to redressing disparities.

The goal of developing the whole child is nested in a broader organizational mission aimed at community improvement. Although this is a common goal among sites, definitions of community vary. For Centro Latino, Hyde Square Task Force, and Sociedad Latina, community means members of their geographic neighborhoods. La Vida aims for a wider community: Catholic Hispanics in Greater Boston. Centro Presente views immigrants throughout the state of Massachusetts as part of its community.

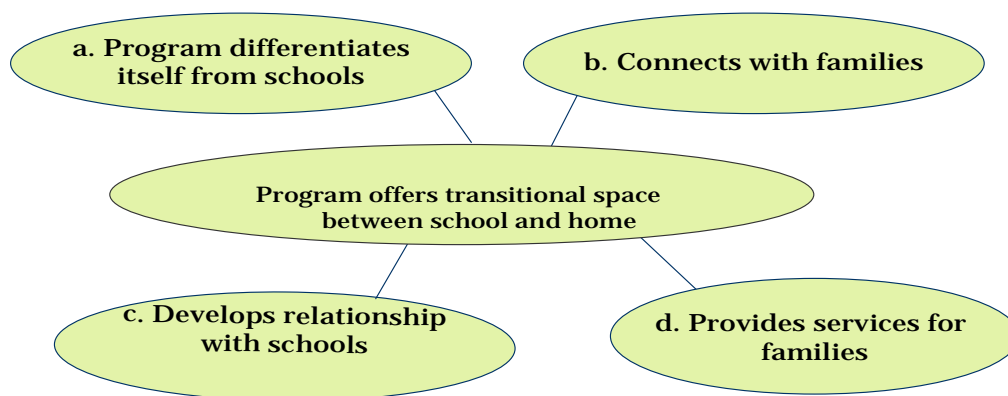
There are also differences in how organizations approach perceived disparities in their communities. Alianza Hispana, for example, wants to provide “equal access to services.” Hyde Square Task Force, on the other hand, focuses on “empowering youth and families to enhance their own lives.” Both organizations are attempting to redress systemic disparities in education and social services for the Latino community. However, while Alianza takes it upon itself to provide educational, public and mental health services not easily available in its community, Hyde Square Task Force raises awareness about the social forces that conspire to make these services unavailable; it aims to equip youth with academic, cognitive and social tools necessary to bring about change.

It is important to keep in mind these differences because they show diversity, once again, among organizations that appear to have the same goals and client base.

**Finding 8:** LASI programs offer a transitional space between home and school. Their curriculum and staff bridge these two worlds.

The following diagram illustrates how programs perceive themselves. Their key mission appears to be offering a transitional space between school and home, as represented in the middle bubble. The bubbles to the left, represent how after-school programs tend to present themselves vis-à-vis schools. On one hand, they aim at differentiating themselves from schools, while on the other hand some, but not all, of them attempt to develop relationships with schools. The bubbles to the right show that family is seen as an equally, if not more, important partner as schools. All programs attempt to connect with families and some, in addition, provide services addressed to their specific needs.

**DIAGRAM 1: LASI programs common perceptions of their general missions**



The transitional space is perceived as advantageous because it gives after-school staff opportunities to complement academic instruction provided by schools and to add programs that are being cut—e.g. arts, physical education—or simply not offered. In addition, as reflected in the course of interviews conducted for this evaluation, community staff appears to have a first-hand knowledge of the strengths and challenges faced by families in their communities. They also seem adept at engaging families effectively to support their children’s development. Immigrant families and families with limited schooling generally need support interacting with the schools. After-school programs can serve to bridge the home-school relationship in culturally relevant ways. They may also facilitate access to services for families who are unfamiliar with rules of engagement.

**Finding 9:** LASI programs, like other non-Latino after-school programs, share the goal of “developing the whole child.” Although developing the whole child may mean different things to different providers, one common element across programs is the need for children to develop good self-esteem.

Directors, site and LASI Central staff speak specifically about “developing the whole child.” Indeed some interpret Whole Brain Learning as an educational approach that focuses on developing the whole child, not just academic competencies. The following citations reflect converging visions of what a “whole child” approach takes into account:

“I think that academic is important, but a well-rounded child is even better. A well-rounded child is a child that ... is given opportunities to interact socially ... to learn, or to value different arts ... the arts as in learning about their culture through dance or learning about how to express themselves through theater. And also, incorporating ... what’s going on, what issues affect them in their communities ... So we’re talking about children that are not only succeeding academically but children who get the bigger picture of everything else around them.” (301)

“It’s a holistic approach to learning. We’re not just focused on academics, we’re not just focused on arts and culture. We’re focused on the whole child and trying to get them supported and to grow in all aspects of who they are.” (402)

“We want to create a whole person. You know, thinkers, problem-solvers engaged in the community.” (403)

“LASI is a very important program for our children because, in addition to helping them academically, it gives them social tools and confidence.” (701)

“Focus on the whole child and that means we can work on their self-esteem and their self concept then, I suspect that all of those improvements from their development as a child could translate into better behavior into school.” (502)

“I like to see them become more comfortable speaking out ... I would like to see them smiling ... having fun ... express hope and dreams ... become bold in how they denounce injustice, or whatever...” (202)

Low self-esteem is mentioned frequently as a problem plaguing youth in the various communities. It manifests in the form of silence, lack of assertiveness, and proneness to physical conflict. It is attributed to discrimination, limited parental education, negative social mirroring, neighborhood violence, and poverty, all of which results in shame. As children are given

opportunities to experience academic and social success, it is expected that their self-esteem will be elevated. However, the most important ingredient for high self-esteem is developing a positive cultural identity. Strategies used to develop a positive identity will be discussed in a section below.

Another important component of developing the whole child is reaching out to families. It is well understood that children are embedded in families and that it is important for the entire family group to do well.

"I think it's great that we are so conducive and so open to Latino families. And I think that's the same as other LASI programs ... we are really open to helping the whole family and supporting the family as a whole..." (501)

**Finding 10:** Three objectives are mentioned most frequently in connection with developing "the whole child": 1) improving academic outcomes; 2) increasing youths' "life" or "soft" skills, which are viewed as "tools for success"; and 3) guiding youth in the development of a positive cultural identity.

## I. Objective 1: Improve academic outcomes

The top priority of LASI programs is the improvement of academic outcomes – as measured in grade reports and MCAS results. However, some programs are predicated on providing academic instruction to support academic outcomes, while others aim at improving self-esteem and non-academic skills as an indirect route to better academic performance. Among the latter are those who disagree with the premise of holding after-school programs accountable for work that should be done by the schools. In the middle, there are programs which attempt to provide academic instruction and to foster the development of "tools for success."

### 1. Strategies for Objective 1

#### a) *Homework support*

**Finding 11:** Some LASI sites are attached to schools that see homework completion as necessary to improve grades. The programs support homework completion and use it to reinforce academic materials covered in the classroom. When students have limited English proficiency, homework requires support for second language acquisition. LASI programs working with fluent English speakers have more time to offer enrichment activities.

Homework is directly linked to academic success because in some schools it is graded, and thus reflected on students' report cards. It also provides an opportunity to reinforce academic material not understood in the classroom.

"We want them to feel good about themselves when they get that report card." (402)

Most programs make homework the first activity of the afternoon. It starts a while after participants arrive, have a snack, and talk casually about their day. The length of homework time varies from around one hour or less to two hours. In programs serving participants with very limited English skills (Alianza Hispana, HOPE, La Vida), homework completion can be a lengthy process. Youth who are most in need of academic support receive more personalized attention from peer leaders and/or college tutors. Program staff acknowledge that completing homework is not their or the participants' favorite task, but see it as a necessary step toward improving academic achievement, especially when their students are in schools where homework is graded.

Supporting homework presents some inherent challenges: a) Program staff relies on students to tell them about daily homework assignments; b) Some students resist homework completion. The combination of these two factors means that students can lie about whether they have homework and teachers will not know it. When no homework is assigned, teachers do not find out about it until the students arrive to the program and then they need to improvise activities for those who were not assigned homework while those who were complete it. These are issues that programs attempt to work through by strengthening relationships with the school and the classroom teachers responsible for their participants. This relationship building, however, is a lengthy and time-consuming process given the unavailability of teachers in general, even when they are supportive of the after-school program, which is not always the case.

#### b) *Differentiating Themselves from Schools*

**Finding 12:** Programs try to differentiate themselves from schools to keep students engaged and interested in learning, as evidenced by well-publicized low educational outcomes of Latino students in public schools. For this purpose, they use instructional strategies that make learning fun, they personalize attention, they offer programs that are being cut by the schools such as support for English-language learners, arts, and physical activities. They also offer emotional support and actively seek to connect with families.

The fact that the strategies listed above are seen as differentiating after-school from day school is a sad testimony to perceived deficiencies in urban public schools. Activities used to differentiate themselves from schools are:

##### ◆ *Activity I: Make learning fun*

“Making learning fun” is about offering academic instruction in engaging ways. One program for example, highlights the use of *projects* as emblematic of its uniqueness:

“I think that we are unique in the way we offer the [non-homework] services because everything incorporates academics ... but we do it in really socially interactive and hands-on ways. And so they're doing MCAS and a lot of different skills and not just academic skills, it's also social skills. But they're doing all of these fun projects ... you know, we really try to integrate it so

that they can kind of float seamlessly through the afternoon and have a positive experience while doing all these different skills." (402)

Another program sees *computer time* as a way of making learning fun:

"We like to differentiate ourselves a little bit and this is why we are trying to get these computer programs. We want to make the experience fun, engaging and holistic." (802)

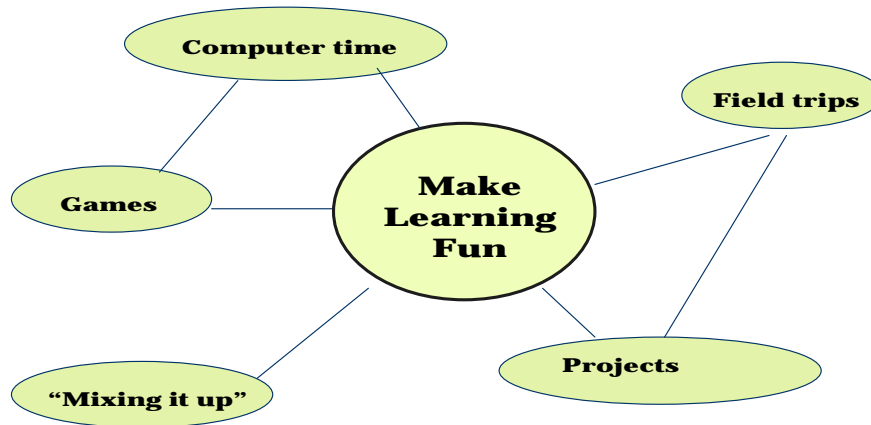
As the following citation shows, *games* are not only helpful to reinforce academic knowledge, but they can serve as tools to discover children's strengths.

"We have a bunch of games and they are all educational. Monopoly- money, scrabble ... Pegboard, have you ever played that? It is a solitary game where you put a peg in a hole and you jump, it's like sudoku where you put this thing and you go ... but kids who have problems, there is one kid who has a lot of issues at home, doesn't want to do his homework, has trouble in school, I've just discovered that he sits down and does this game and it's a way to say, "gosh, you are so smart, I just can't do this" and build on their interests." (802)

Field trips, on the other hand, can be specifically targeted to help students work on identity, as reflected in this quote:

"Last week we went on a field trip on Thursday to a filming on hip-hop culture. It's called Hip Hop Beyond the Beats and Rhymes and it talked about sexism in hip-hop culture, violence" (403).

**DIAGRAM 2: How LASI programs differentiate themselves from schools**



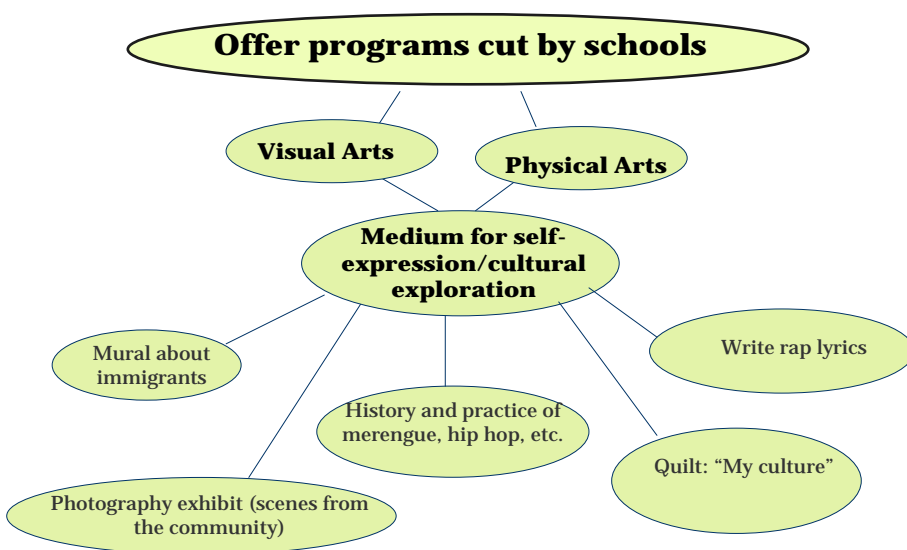


◆ Activity II: Offer programs schools are eliminating

After-school can compensate for school budget reductions by offering some of the programs that schools are cutting such as visual and performing arts, and physical education. The arts programs are used to a large degree for self-expression and identity development, so they will be discussed under Objective 3 below.

**DIAGRAM 3: School budget cuts undermine self-expression/cultural exploration**

This diagram shows that the main programs cut by schools are visual (and other) arts, as well as physical arts. These are programs that facilitate self-expression and cultural exploration. Examples of projects done by LASI programs for this purpose are the bubbles below: murals, photography, lyric writing, musical expression.



Offerings of physical education include: field trips organized by LASI Central or by the sites themselves, time scheduled for weekly indoor sports, outdoor sports during the warmer months, dance or martial arts.

◆ Activity III: Give personalized attention.

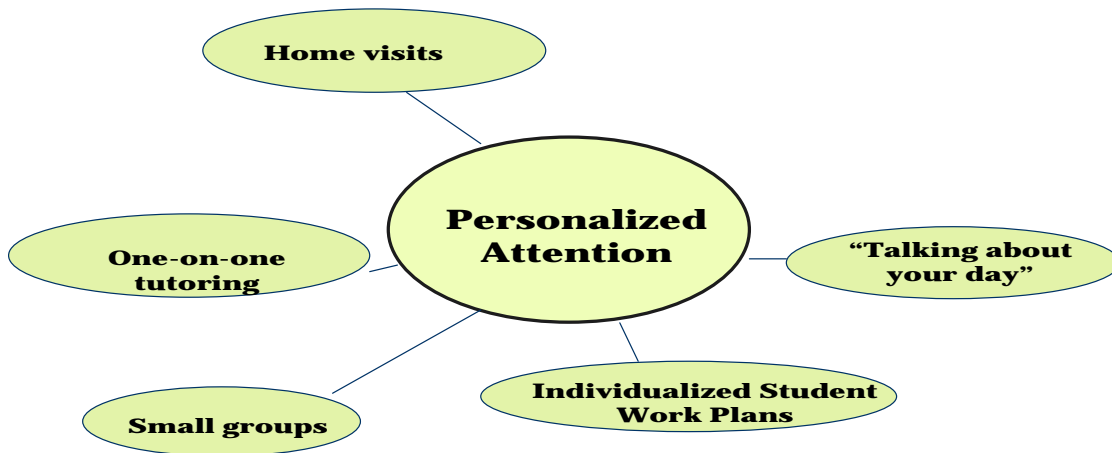
Personalizing attention is a must for LASI programs, all of which deal with students with a wide range of abilities, including different language skills and special education needs. Programs have different ways of individualizing instruction and targeting services. Individual workplans, for example, allow students to tailor their after-school time to meet their specific academic needs. They are also helpful to develop self-reliance and planning skills.

Students also benefit from adult:child ratios that make it possible for them to work individually or in small groups with youth leaders, college volunteers and sometimes even teachers. The freedom to talk about their day also gives students an opportunity to receive emotional support from staff and/or peers.

"Right now it is very individual, one-on-one, case-by-case. Right now we have one child whose mother ... basically abandoned him and his brother ... You know, there are psychological ... he needs someone to bond with. He needs the soft 'how was your day.' I'm the soft one. His aunt took him out of school because of this business with his hand and placed him in some center in Boston. He came in the next day, he wasn't supposed to come in, he integrated into the rest of the room, he wanted to go upstairs, I went with him, he said 'you know I'm not going to school anymore' and I said 'tell me about it' and he said 'I just wanted to talk about our emotions'." (802).

**DIAGRAM 4: Programs differentiate from schools by providing personalized attention**

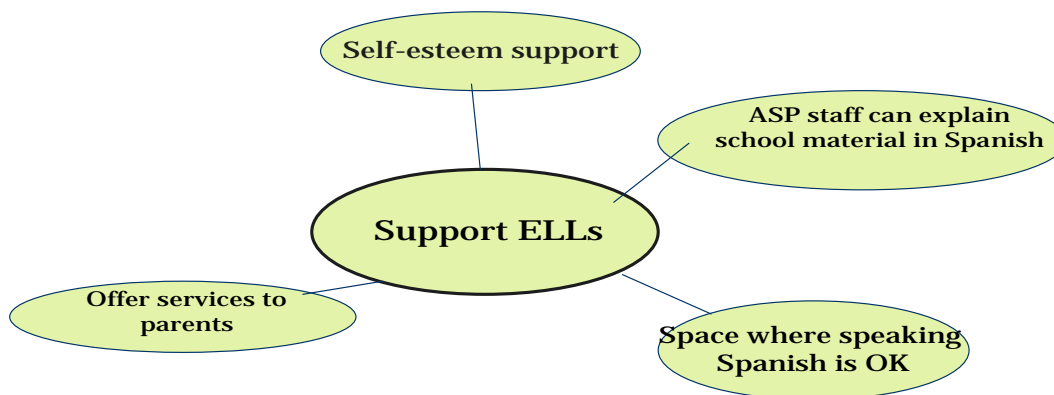
Each of the bubbles is an example of the kinds of personalized attention offered by individual—but not all—LASI programs.



◆ Activity IV: Provide bilingual academic support.

Participants in the programs run by Alianza Hispana and HOPE are immersed in English-only classrooms at school, in spite of their limited English ability. This adds an additional dimension to the work of the after-school staff. In order to support homework, they need to translate back and forth between English and Spanish, and to impart some English language instruction. This places a large and unnecessary burden on the programs.

**DIAGRAM 5: LASI supports English Language Learners**



**II. Objective 2: Give Youth Life or Soft Skills, Non-Academic “Tools for Success.”**

**Finding 13:** For some, educating the “whole child” requires teaching competencies for the workplace and for leadership – e.g., critical thinking, planning, decision-making, conflict resolution, public speaking, and social skills. These skills supplement others within the traditional purview of schools such as math, writing, technology, and teamwork.

Programs label these skills in different ways: life skills, soft skills, tools for success. Academic instruction has built-in opportunities for developing many of these skills. Individual student work plans, for example, teach planning and decision-making. Academic work structured in small groups teaches teamwork and collaboration. Conflict is present in any setting, even the most academic, and can be used constructively to help students acquire conflict resolution skills. Academic activities that encourage participants to interact, work together, and sometimes lead a small group also facilitate the development of social skills.

However, youth development programs make most of these skills the main focus of their training for peer leaders who are helping younger participants in the classroom. For classroom staff, academic knowledge and soft skills are equally important to perform a good job. In youth leadership programs, two tiers of learning happen at once. Peer leaders are being trained for the workplace (e.g. reinforce academic skills and “soft” skills) as younger participants are being trained academically. As LASI moves to incorporate a youth leadership component across all programs, more experienced programs may help identify mechanisms for teaching soft skills to young people who will be working with teachers and other after-school professionals in the classroom.

**TABLE 2—Skills included in the life/soft skills package**

<b>Cognitive skills</b>	+	<b>Social skills</b>
Math		<i>Public speaking</i>
Writing		<i>Meeting facilitation</i>
Technology		Teamwork/collaborate
<i>Planning skills</i>		<i>Conflict resolution</i>
<i>Decision-making skills</i>		<i>Positive attitude</i>
<i>Critical thinking</i>		<i>Assertiveness</i>

These statements capture the kinds of outcomes that youth development programs are seeking to achieve and how programs intend to achieve them:

**1. *Soft skills:***

"All young people, wherever they go, they don't have a voice... We give them that confidence to be able to go up to adults, to speak in public, make their point, facilitate a meeting out in the community. They aren't always here, so when they are making decisions they are thinking about things they learned here. What kinds of consequences will this decision have on me? Having a good attitude goes a long way... It's about the process. It's about greeting people. It's about talking to people. It's about being friendly... So it is all of those skills that are less and less out there... these are things that will get you far - a positive attitude, working with other people in a team, caring for your teammates." (403)

"The main purpose of the program is to teach them teamwork, to come together to get something done, to be respectful of each other, to organize, learn to plan a process step by step..." (201)

"We also give them life skill training so that they get much more than just the skills that they need to accomplish the job. They also, for example, get taught how to create a resume, how to open a bank account, how to speak in public, mediation when the situation arises. So along with the skills that are job related, they also get much broader skills." (301)

So they're kids that want to be there but also need some extra guidance in the academics and in social choices and we focus on both. I mean yes we're an academic program but a lot of the programming that we do that builds academic skills is done in a really social interactive and also like arts, media, hands- on way. (402)

## *2. Leadership skills*

"With the peer leaders we have more specific strategies - how to facilitate meetings, how to design a program - because we want this group of peer leaders, when they are 25 years old, and if I have to leave, to be the next program coordinators. We don't want to have to find someone outside the organization...." (201)

"... we have peer leaders ... during activities, we try to give everyone specific responsibilities... When you put responsibility in their hands, it's a lot easier because they're willing and ready to take it on, and more than capable. So what we try to do is bring them together during activities, getting them working together, needing each others' help for certain things." (702)

## *3. Conflict resolution*

"We try to work to build community and build confidence in each other. Rather than bringing the frustrations from home and from school all out on each other, they can use each other to lift each other up. So that's what we're working on. You see their frustrations in so many different ways. They like to hit each other sometimes, and they're always jumping up out of their seats. They're very loud and it's hard for them to concentrate ..." (701)

"And that's one thing I work on a lot with kids when kids get in trouble instead of just punishing them I bring everyone who is involved in and try to get them to figure out how to handle it like an adult. So I'm very big on 'Did you apologize? Did you accept their apology?'" (302)

"So I'm trying to tie in a little bit of community organizing, just community awareness and then it also ties academic skill, so they are like graphing and charting and researching and interviewing and doing all of these academic skills but they are doing it by interacting and they are doing it in pairs and they do this with their friends." (401)

## *4. Decision-making*

"So not only awareness of the community around them but awareness of how their choices now affect their future choices and that includes both the homework planning, the time management, but it also pertains to bigger choices that they make such as the scary things that teenagers can do." (401)

### 5. *Communication skills*

At Centro Latino, youth are expected to ask questions to presenters from the community who come to the after-school program to talk about their lives and careers. At Centro Presente, youth leaders make presentations about their work in the community to the agency's board of directors.

### III. Objective 3: Develop Positive Cultural Identity and Self-Esteem.

**Finding 14:** A strong sense of self is universally seen as a necessary outcome in a healthy “whole child.” Developing a positive cultural identity requires accepting one’s cultural roots, selecting positive aspects of one’s culture of origin, and incorporating them, together with positive aspects of the host culture, into a strong bicultural identity. Everything programs do, in other words, builds toward the development of a positive cultural identity and, ultimately, raises self-esteem.

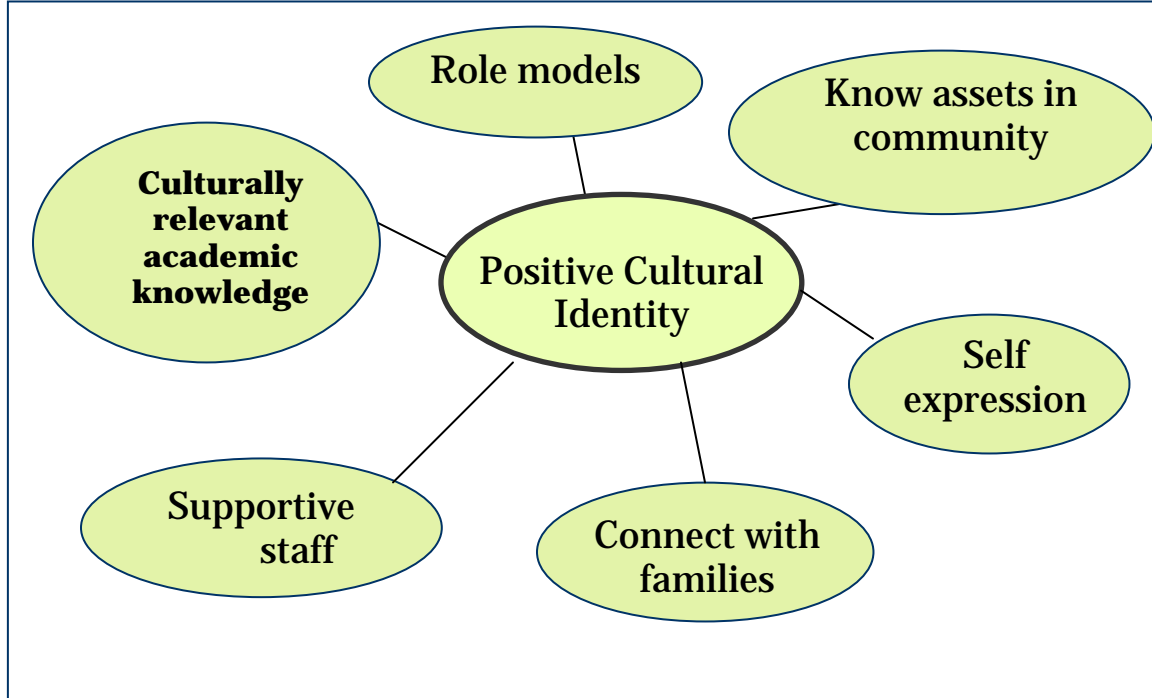
Statements such as the following ones point to a preference for LASI youth to adopt a bicultural identity that preserves the best of both worlds.

“Keep culture alive and strong and be proud of our cultural values. One can acculturate, but we do not have to give up who we are. This is an opportunity to say ‘We are Latinos, we’ve always been here and our contributions haven’t been valued enough.’ And it is important that when these youth grow up, they don’t try to become Americans, but rather that they incorporate where they come from, and the fact that they are living here in how they represent themselves.” (102)

“...validate their roots so they don’t feel they have to hide them. However, only the constructive aspects of roots and culture because some things in Latin America are not worth preserving...but that doesn’t mean you have to turn Anglo. There is a middle point, it is not black and white.” (303)

After-school staff is trained to raise awareness about negative stereotypes internalized by program participants. Artistic self-expression and critical thinking skills are perceived as important vehicles toward the development of a strength perspective. Following is a diagram with prevailing strategies identified by various interviewees for developing a positive cultural identity.

**DIAGRAM 6: Strategies that contribute to positive cultural identity development**



As can be seen in this model, both academic activities and arts projects – even community activism – can support the development of a positive youth identity. There are multiple ways to work on identity and all sites are supporting their participants in this area. Types of activities that facilitate identity work are:

**1. *Academic success in general***

"Academic, that's the pinnacle, but that's the struggle. If they have all C's they have to have at least one B. That's being practical. As we improve the procedures, program and supports ..." (802)

**2. *Academic activities that highlight Latino strengths such as bilingualism***

"I think the uniqueness of the LASI sites and the unique work that they do to maintain cultural focus on their kids is effective. It works. Kids get to be themselves, they get to speak their language, they get to figure it out with their teachers and their coordinators, but at the same time they are doing homework, they are developing their social skills, and they are seeing additional opportunities for life." (101)

"In this environment, Spanish-speaking kids can speak their own language. In addition, they are asked to help teach Spanish to non-Spanish speakers. This

turns the table around. Now they are in a position of strength vis-à-vis their English-speaking peers." (observation fieldnotes)

### **3. Curriculum modules that allow students to explore their roots**

"Last year, we did focus on this cultural piece where they each took a country that they chose. Often it was a country that they came from, and they had to research it and they built a collective website. So that was a conscious cultural piece." (802)

### **4. Role models:**

"How do we focus on it (Latino identity)? We try to get presenters who are from the community. Our teacher is bilingual and is from Puerto Rico." (802)

### **5. Giving children a space to be themselves:**

"I want to see them develop their own voice and express themselves however they want. When they come here they are silent, they do not see themselves as part of the social world they watch on TV ... " (303)

"In terms of my culture, it's key that I feel like I can speak my language, that I can be myself ... Latino kids are ... being themselves because ... the sites have created a very unique space for them just to be themselves." (101)

"And what I desire most is that students feel that [name of organization] is a continuation of their homes, of their essence. I want them to feel this is their family and they want to come here. I think we have accomplished this 100% because our attendance has increased considerably." (701)

### **6. Cultural exploration**

"...and erase that fear of being Latino and speaking a different language from English...and most of all that they feel a part of society. They also need to understand the Latino community because there are many differences and ideas." (701)

"...this is cultural work. It is about understanding that our culture is like many others in this country. And there are many of us, so there should be more focus on our culture...the children avoid this cultural piece also because they are ashamed of themselves and their parents." (701)



## ***7. Learning to live with others in peace***

This was an opinion given by a LASI staff member who was not Latino: "So we want to try to teach others how to build themselves up by also raising others above them. It's definitely an identity, you know, if you know who you are, if you're okay in your own skin, you don't need to put others down--so getting them to build their self-esteem, to be okay when they look in the mirror in the morning with who they are." (402)

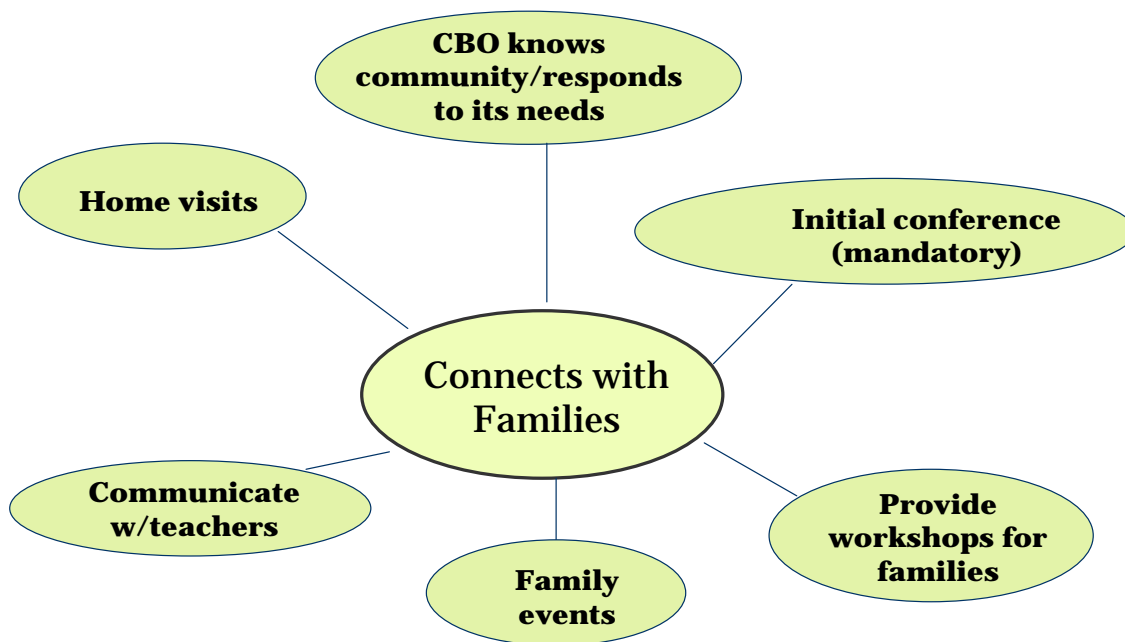
Specific arts projects were mentioned as examples of opportunities that gave students a chance for self-exploration and greater cultural acceptance. Some of them are listed here.

- ◆ Work as a group on a heritage quilt
- ◆ Field trip to a presentation on "Hip Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes"
- ◆ Project on migration and roots
- ◆ T-shirts with messages
- ◆ Paint mural about the daily lives of immigrants
- ◆ Photo exhibit on "How we see the world"
- ◆ Discussion of Taino Indians

## **IV. Objective 4: Connect with Families**

Connecting with families is seen as a mechanism that helps students develop a positive cultural identity, but it is a goal in itself that serves the organizational mission of working with adults (as well as youth) to improve the community. Relationships with families develop in the context of the after-school, but they can also begin when families are referred for services. The communication strategies that are used, and the approaches to building relationships with families, indicate cultural knowledge that may greatly facilitate outcomes in this area.

The following diagram shows how connections with families are conceived.



## 1. Services Provided to Families

The kinds of connections that agencies seek to make with families depend on each site's mission. For example, Centro Latino, which describes its focus as adult education and training, builds relationships with parents through its services in these domains.

"The agency since its inception has been doing English classes and training. Inevitably, that's where the agency developed its strength. And so adult basic education services ... academic and year-round program that provides literacy, some native literacy for people who can't read or write at all, so we do literacy in Spanish and then we get people to go to English as a Second Language ... and so, developing the skills to get you better paying work is where we can contribute the most. And so that is what brings us to this."

Service-oriented organizations such as Alianza Hispana and HOPE, on the other hand, offer mental health services as well as parenting workshops.

"Our goal is academic, develop academic skills, social skills and integrate parents into our work because if parents do not cooperate, we can't do it ... talk to parents about their children's development, how to be patient, and also bring them to Alianza so they can learn about other programs such as

the English Department, "La Casita" or the family counseling center, so they know they are not alone and that Alianza offers services they may need."  
(AH)

Sometimes, sites may be willing to stretch beyond their mission to accommodate parents' requests. Sociedad Latina, for example, conducted a community needs assessment before launching its after-school program to determine what families wanted and created a slightly off-mission program to address those needs.

"So we did a community needs assessment and included focus groups with parents, a staff retreat, a board of directors retreat, one with youth leaders and parents and collected all of this information. The top things that came out of that were access to technology, especially in Spanish and we do have open computer lab hours so people can walk in. We are still providing classes to adults, which doesn't really fit in with what we do overall as an organization, but we are still doing it."

At one organization, Hyde Square Task Force, after-school program coordinators are willing to talk to teachers when they see that parents do not have the skills to navigate the system.

"A lot of times I would have to come in when the parent would come to talk to a teacher, I would have to be like kind of like a, when you talk about partnership, I had to be that parent's partner to go talk to the teacher and kind of be that support system for them and when it was a language issue or rather it was that they just felt like the teacher wasn't hearing them, then here comes Brenda and her loud mouth through this program that we'll make sure that you know something happens, and that the parent gets some feedback and does get some immediate answers."

## **2. Ways of Communicating with Families**

Given their long histories in the communities they serve, LASI sites are savvy about different ways of communicating with and engaging parents.

Hyde Square Task Force notes in its year-end report:

"One of the primary goals of our after-school program is to engage our students' families through regular program events, one-on-one parent-teacher conferences, and informational meetings on topics such as school assignments and city / state budget priorities. Staff regularly assist parents through translation and support and school meetings and through referral to other family support resources."

Sociedad Latina requires meetings with the parents of their after-school participants in order to explain program expectations, secure parental support, and connect with the families.

"We communicate in a lot of different ways. We have a requirement that each parent/family meets with us one time before their child starts in the program. That was new this year... we talk about our expectations in the program, their expectations and we also talk about all the different services that we have here at SL"

La Vida uses a variety of strategies to communicate with parents daily and regularly throughout the school year.

"We stand in the door and have the parents come in and sign. If they have questions they stay to ask if not they just say hi or bye.... I'd say 70% of the kids are picked up by their parents... We have an orientation and throughout the year we have a couple of other meetings with the parents and we have updates. But if we see a student is having a hard time we call the parent."

## A Program by Latinos and for Latinos

**Finding 15:** In general, LASI programs understand the “by and for” Latinos designation as a form of affirmative action to redress the gap in educational outcomes experienced by Latino students.

One way in which LASI portrays its uniqueness is by calling itself an initiative “by and for” Latinos or “Latino-led.” But what exactly does this mean? Is it largely a demographic designation? Is there an advantage in having Latinos working with Latinos? Do Latinos have different needs than other minority youth or than mainstream youth?

For some program staff, LASI should be directed at Latino children exclusively in compensation for the lack of opportunities these children and their families have experienced historically. These programs, endorsing the Latino designation as a demographic label focus on “the head count” when asked about the meaning of “by and for” Latinos. How many Latino children does a program serve? What percentage of the staff is Latino?

Others programs see themselves as serving geographical “communities” that are largely but not exclusively, Latino. They perceive the exclusion of participants based on ethnicity as the perpetuation of the kind of discrimination they are trying to eradicate. These programs are more likely to enroll some percentage of non-Latinos. Programs that enroll participants of different ethnic backgrounds claim that their multicultural classrooms can quickly become a diversity training ground where manifestations of inter-ethnic tensions latent in their communities can be resolved in a positive manner.

For some programs, the Latino label may be tightly tethered to accountability to community, and that is why it is valuable to have organizations led by Latinos.

*“Latino-directed organizations in MA are few and far between. How many are we? 5-10? And there are many Latinos in MA. Everyone serves Latinos, because that is the flavor du jour. Obviously we are the fastest growing population. But look at those organizations. Look at their boards and senior staff. No Latinos. Yes, they are serving Latinos, but they don’t have to be accountable to the Latino community. I live here. I raise my family here. I have to be accountable to the Latino community. Les tengo que dar la cara en la iglesia, at the store, at school. I don’t get to go off to some suburb and hide. That’s the major difference.” (802)*

Although not always stated explicitly, LASI programs appear tuned into the cultural beliefs and practices of their participants, and intertwine this cultural knowledge into various components. For example, LASI programs understand the centrality of fulfilling family obligations to the

development of a positive identity. The facilitation of “family involvement” (note that the use of “family” rather than “parent” involvement recognizes the role of extended family in nurturing the child) takes on unique dimensions in Latino communities. For example, program staff, in order to preserve relationships with families, is likely to take on parenting and advocacy roles that mainstream institutions and practitioners may perceive as being beyond their boundaries.

“I think it’s great that we are so open to Latino families. And I think that’s the same as other programs that are funded by LASI. We are really open to helping and supporting the whole family.... The parent calls with a certain concern, I try to refer them and I think that’s great. I mean every family is so unique. But I think that’s something that I really admire about [name of organization].” (502)

“A lot of times I would have to come in when the parent came to talk to a teacher, I would have to be ... that parent’s partner ... and kind of be that support system for them and when it was a language issue, or if it was that they just felt like the teacher wasn’t hearing them, then ... we’ll make sure that something happens, and that the parent gets some feedback and does get some immediate answers.” (302)

In general, programs help parents explore college options with their children; they provide parenting workshops, and workshops on navigating the school system. In this, they are not extremely different from other non-Latino after-school programs, except that they incorporate cultural knowledge into everything they do. Thus, when talking to Latino immigrant parents, it is easier for culturally savvy trainers to address differences in home-school relationships, to support families who are separating because a child has been admitted to an out-of-town college, or to counter social pressures to separate youth from their families earlier than they may be ready to do so.

Culturally savvy programs provide safe havens – “a space” – where participants can speak their home languages, talk about their homelands (if they were not born in the U.S.), be mentored by youth who started off in similar circumstances to their own, see models of successful bicultural adaptation, develop friendships with others who share their experiences, and find a transitional space where the worlds of home and school can be reconciled and integrated in a positive manner. All of this contributes to the development of a positive cultural identity.

If Latino programs are allowed to work together in a meaningful coalition, they can help develop a Latino “voice,” not only so that adult program leadership can advocate for educational change now, but also for young leaders to work with each other across communities and develop a “voice” of their own.

## Preparing for Future Evaluation

### I. Preparing to Evaluate Program Implementation

As a publicly-funded program, LASI needs to develop evaluation capacity. As LASI formulates more clearly what aspect of an after-school program it funds, and what outcomes are expected, it will become possible to explicate an intervention theory (theory of change) and, eventually, to assess outcomes directly attributable to LASI funding. But even before outcomes can be measured, programs will need to monitor implementation to ensure that the program is being delivered the way it is intended. At this point, LASI is developing evaluation capacity at a Tier Two (of the Jacobs Five-tiered model) level<sup>13</sup>. The main inputs to monitor are: participants, services, staff, and cost.

Participant data should include:

1. demographic characteristics of program participants and their families;
2. academic performance of participants upon entering the program;
3. goals of participants upon entering the program.

Service data should cover:

1. duration and intensity;
2. types of services available and utilized;
3. services from other providers received while clients are in the program.

Staff data should include:

1. demographic and professional characteristics;
2. workers' training and professional development while on the job.

Cost data should include:

1. sources of program funding;
2. program-specific costs;
3. in-kind support.

Sources of data in these categories may include:

1. enrollment forms that include demographic categories;
2. report cards, SAYO "School-Day Teacher Version";
3. statements of goals from participants upon signing up for the program;
4. staff files including demographic and professional characteristics;
5. numbers of peer leaders employed by the program, pay and job descriptions;
6. number of volunteers;

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Jacobs, F. H., and Kapuscik, J. L. Ibid.

7. individual student records of each day in the program;
8. program financial statements.

Based on these data, the following indicators can be developed:

1. number of participants enrolled;
2. demographic characteristics of participants enrolled;
3. number of days, hours, weeks of continuous program involvement;
4. type of services participants are receiving;
5. who is providing these services.

Currently, LASI can produce demographic indicators, as shown in Chapter 2. Some new categories to consider for future collection are: number of participants who need bilingual instruction; demographic characteristics of participants' families, including language spoken at home and date of arrival in the U.S. if applicable.

In the future, LASI will also need to monitor program participation. The Harvard Family Research Project has developed the following conceptual model of the "participation equation": participation = enrollment + attendance + engagement.<sup>14</sup> Enrollment is "the process of getting youth in the door." Attendance is "an indication of the time youth spend in programs." Engagement is the "process of active involvement via affect, behavior and cognition." "This equation proposes that attendance is a necessary but not sufficient component of participation; that enrollment and attendance without engagement do not reflect true participation."<sup>15</sup> The distinction between participation and engagement is important. Program participation may be high when attendance is mandatory (e.g., Hyde Square Task Force, La Vida). However, high participation based on mandatory attendance may mask a lack of engagement.

Currently, LASI programs each keep attendance records, but a system for monitoring attendance systematically across programs is not in place. It will be necessary to create such a system, as well as a system to identify obstacles to participation to be considered for future program expansion.

Similarly, recruitment criteria are not uniform. One program recruits participants based on their ethnicity, age, and school enrollment. Another selects them based on ethnicity, school enrollment, and potential for achieving desired outcomes. School-based programs tend to take students from the school where they are located based on their ethnicity and/or language ability. One program is a drop-in type that accepts anybody who wishes to participate, whether they are in school or not, and does not focus on academic outcomes. LASI programs may want to develop more uniform recruitment criteria that will enable them to have a single answer for the question: "For whom is LASI?" In addition, programs will need to identify indicators of student engagement and systematically document activities that denote student engagement. Eventually,

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<sup>14</sup> Weiss, H. B., Little, P.M.D., & Bouffard, S.M. (2005). "More than just being there: Balancing the participation equation." *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 105. pp. 15-31.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 19-20.



it would be desirable to connect student and family characteristics with staff characteristics, engagement, and outcomes.

The following case study of Centro Presente and Centro Latino's differences in participation by gender points to possible interactions between various program variables and who decides to enroll and remain active in a program.

### **The Case of the Two "Centros": Participation by Gender**

- ◆ **Staff:** *Centro Presente has a male coordinator and a male teacher whereas at Centro Latino both the coordinator and the teacher are females.*
- ◆ **Recruitment:** *Centro Presente functions largely as a drop-in center, with admission open to any youth who shows an interest in the program and respect for program rules regardless of ethnicity and whether or not they are in school. At Centro Latino, the coordinator develops relationships with school counselors and teachers to purposefully recruit Latino students who are doing well enough ("C students") to benefit from after-school instruction (move to a B).*
- ◆ **Program content:** *Centro Latino functions as an extended day program taught by two experienced teachers with a strong academic focus. On the other hand, Centro Presente de-emphasizes academic content in favor of promoting self-esteem through artistic expression and critical thinking.*
- ◆ **Site:** *The Centro Latino after-school program, "Jovenes Latinos Saliendo Adelante," is located on the premises of the community organization. "Pintamos Nuestro Mundo," the Centro Presente program, is located at the Somerville Youth Center.*
- ◆ **Relationships with families:** *Both Centros conduct home visits once a year to meet and introduce themselves to the parents of their participants. Indeed, Centro Latino learned about Centro Presente's home visiting practice through LASI network meetings and subsequently adopted it.*

Whereas some sites, such as La Vida and Hyde Square Task Force, mandate attendance, others such as Sociedad Latina and Alianza Hispana engage their participant base in a voluntary way. Clearly, then, attendance may be tied to program characteristics other than mandatory attendance. Following is a comparison of two programs, La Vida and Sociedad Latina, showing similarities and differences between attendance and other program characteristics.

### *Attendance and Program Characteristics*

- ◆ **Staff:** *At La Vida, the entire staff (full- and part-time) speaks Spanish fluently and most have roots in the Dominican Republic. By contrast, at Sociedad Latina, the program coordinator is European-American and does not speak Spanish. His program still has some Spanish-speaking capacity, as the part-time staff includes youth leaders and college volunteers who speak Spanish.*
- ◆ **Attendance:** *Both La Vida and Sociedad have high rates of attendance in spite of using very different attendance policies. Whereas La Vida mandates attendance and has a strict policy for allowing late arrivals and early dismissals, Sociedad takes attendance but does not mandate it.*
- ◆ **Program strategies:** *La Vida provides instruction in Spanish to many recent arrivals who are struggling in English immersion classes. On the other hand, at Sociedad Latina most instruction is in English.*
- ◆ **Location:** *La Vida's after-school program convenes in a gym with an auditorium, which is adjacent to a church. Sociedad's "Mission Enrichment Program" is located at the Tobin Elementary School in Mission Hill and draws largely from this school and an adjacent private grammar school.*
- ◆ **Transportation:** *In both cases, students can access the programs easily. Sociedad participants stay in the same building or walk over from an adjacent one. La Vida has arranged for students to be transported in school buses directly from their schools in Lynn.*

As can be inferred from these charts, the same variables that encourage participation, can also pose challenges. Some challenges identified in the interviews conducted for this study were: transportation, discouragement with schooling, insufficient outreach on the part of ASP, excessive academic focus, sport season, winter weather, staff turnover.

## **II. Preparing to Evaluate Program Outcomes**

Currently, LASI uses the SAYO (Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes) as its main outcome measure. The SAYO has been developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at the Wellesley Center for Women in Wellesley College; it is endorsed by the Massachusetts Department of Education. LASI program staff has been trained and use the SAYO annually to report participant improvement.

The SAYO measures participants' homework performance; behavior in the program; initiative; relations with adults and relations with peers. Thus, it includes both academic and social categories. However, the social categories relate mostly to types of classroom behavior that are conducive to improved academic performance. Social behavior with peers, an important component of many LASI programs, is not captured in enough detail to show improvement.

Underlying the SAYO is a vision of after-school programming as an extension of the school day with a focus on improving academic performance. Unfortunately, the SAYO does not capture important components of LASI after-school programming such as family engagement, identity work, diversity training, and so forth.

LASI staff has expressed overall skepticism about the ability of the SAYO to pinpoint specific outcomes attributable to LASI.

Another common but not universally used measurement tool is the student's report card, whose availability is contingent on the signing of waivers and special releases by participants' families. Again, this is a simple academic measure.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this section are in addition to others interspersed throughout this report. The following paragraphs capture specific ideas provided by members of the advisory board, the steering and program committees, and additional recommendations from the research team.

### **I. From Advisory Board Members**

LASI's goals--"improving academic and social skills"—are broad in relation with the funding it provides programs. Although, ultimately, everything after-school programs do is geared toward improving academic and social skills, LASI needs to fund specific strategies toward the accomplishment of these goals. For example, LASI might expect that its funding be directed toward supporting a sub-group of after-school students (e.g. the most academically at-risk), or towards developing a specific component (perhaps in relation to the development of a positive identity) as the LASI trademark. Whichever component LASI chooses to promote as its trademark will require the formulation of a set of expected outcomes and a commitment to ongoing evaluation. The development of a more explicit LASI program will facilitate fundraising and expansion.

### **II. From LASI Sites**

#### **1. The development of collaborative relationships across LASI sites requires an infusion of clarity into everything that LASI does**

LASI's history, leadership changes as well as structural changes have created LASI did not come together from the ground up—i.e. sites did not choose to associate for a common cause. Rather, LASI sites were given funding to use an educational approach chosen without their input. This approach was top heavy, requiring tight management and implementation, and did not help the development of trust and collaboration among sites. Over time, as management changed and attempted to adopt a more horizontal, inclusive decision-making style, the original educational approach became diluted and has not been replaced by a clearly-formulated component. The absence of a clear program design has created ambiguity and distrust, thus hampering collaboration.

Although committee participation is mandated, meetings are not always fully attended. Incomplete participation has been interpreted as a lack of interest by LASI Central. Yet, committee members are not clear about the exact purposes of meetings. Or, if the purposes are clear, they may not be responsive to sites' interests. Some sites have suggested that if they were empowered to set the agenda and to tailor that agenda to their collective needs and interests, participation in network meetings might increase.

## **2. Youth could lead inter-agency collaboration**

The two committees created to foster collaboration among sites (Steering and Program committees) have supported the development of formal mechanisms for site directors and after-school program staff to meet and work on common issues. What is missing at this point is a mechanism for students to collaborate bi- or tri-laterally throughout the year. Some LASI sites would like to go beyond the gatherings that take place around specific social events to give students from different communities projects on which they would have to work together. Youth themselves might generate project ideas. Learning about each others' communities and finding common interests might extend collaboration beyond the academic year. At the end of each school year, each team could showcase their work and present future plans.

## **3. LASI Central could develop “voice” for Latino educational issues**

LASI Central is in a unique position to take on a leadership role and galvanize sites around a common educational agenda that helps close the achievement gap for Latino students. After-school programs are in an ideal position to identify “what’s missing” in public schools and to propose ways for urban public school students to receive education that is on par with that received by children in suburban middle class students.

## **4. LASI’s technical assistance should be tailored.**

Rather than arrange “one-size-fits-all” trainings, some program staff expressed an interest in having LASI tailor training to fit their specific needs.

### **III. From Researchers**

#### **1. LASI could focus on capitalizing on the cultural strengths of Latino-led programs**

As mentioned in Chapter 6, LASI programs have unique understandings of what Latino children need to develop positive cultural identities and what their families need to do in order to support their children in different developmental stages. LASI programs also know how to infuse culturally-relevant curriculum into their classrooms. These are strengths that justify the existence of a program “by and for” Latinos, as well as collaboration toward the development of a “practice manual” that could serve as a model to other programs serving Latino students.

#### **2. Future evaluation will be contingent not only on the formulation of specific outcomes but also on the development of an implementation plan**

In the previous Chapter (7), we have given recommended ways for LASI to prepare for future evaluation. Basically, after identifying a LASI trademark component, LASI Central will have to review tools to measure desired outcomes. However, prior to measuring outcomes, we recommend an implementation evaluation. This will enable LASI to understand different implementation strategies used by different programs and how implementation shapes the successful attainment of outcomes.

### 3. LASI Central could develop more tailored technical assistance strategies.

LASI program staff expressed an interest in receiving technical assistance that is tailored to their specific needs and levels of expertise. They also appreciate being part of a community of practice such as the Program Committee where there are opportunities to learn from each other. The Program Committee could play a pivotal role for the dissemination of best practices and for problem solving. A few topics came up during this evaluation that could be beneficial for future discussion in Program Committee meetings. They are:

- ◆ *Overcoming students' resistance to after-school academic instruction:* Some programs have difficulty keeping students engaged while others have high rates of engagement.
- ◆ *Improving after-school program staff's relationships with schools and teachers:* Programs have expressed different levels of interest and have had different levels of success developing close relationships with schools and teachers. Sharing best practices around this topic may be productive.
- ◆ *Best curriculum and teaching strategies to improve reading, writing and math:* Programs are using different curricula to improve the three "R's". It might be beneficial for staff from different sites to learn about pros and cons of various curricula.
- ◆ *Strategies to prepare for "no-homework" days:* All programs have to scramble when faced with students' unexpected "no-homework" days.
- ◆ *Teaching children across a wide range of ages, abilities, and languages:* After-school settings are more heterogeneous than classrooms in that students come from a range of grade levels and speak different languages. In addition, some children have special needs. How to deal with heterogeneity and special needs requires training.
- ◆ *Understanding and countering students' discouragement toward school:* Students become discouraged with school for different reasons and programs use a variety of strategies to counter lack of motivation.

These and other topics could be integrated into an annual technical assistance program led by a member of the LASI community.

## APPENDIX A: LASI Evaluation Questions and Sub-Questions

Question	Sub-Questions	Data Source
1. What are the activities being carried out by LASI and its affiliated service programs?	a. What services are provided? b. Who is participating in the programs? (#'s, age, gender, ethnicity, home language) c. How often do they attend the after-school program? d. What do they do while they are at the after-school program? e. To what extent are families engaged in the programs?	Documentary, interviews, observation
2. To what extent has the coordinating program's theory of change been adopted by the service programs?	a. What is LASI's the theory of change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What is the overall "problem" as LASI sees it?</li> <li>✓ What are LASI's goals? Who/what does LASI want to change? (Children? Staff? Organizations?)</li> <li>✓ What outcomes does LASI seek in children/staff/organizations?</li> <li>✓ What strategies does LASI recommend to achieve these changes? Why?</li> <li>✓ What are the strengths and weaknesses of LASI's theory of change?</li> </ul> b. What are the theories of change implicit in the goals LASI-affiliated after-school programs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What is the "problem" that the after-school program is trying to solve?</li> <li>✓ What are the desired outcomes?</li> <li>✓ How are strategies used in the after-school program expected to bring about the desired change?</li> <li>✓ How does the after-school program fit in the site's overall 'theory of change'?</li> <li>✓ What strengths and weaknesses are there in the after-school program's design and theory of change?</li> </ul> c. What are the matches and mismatches between LASI and service programs theories of change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In terms of goals?</li> <li>✓ In terms of strategies used to accomplish those goals?</li> <li>✓ In terms of the assumptions made about how strategies lead to desired goals?</li> </ul>	Documentary, interviews and observation

Question	Sub-Questions	Data Source
3. Are there differences between LASI's expectations of how service programs will adopt the educational model and how the programs are actually implementing it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How do programs understand LASI's educational model?</li> <li>b. What do they see as strengths and weaknesses?</li> <li>c. What aspects of LASI's model have been incorporated into the after-school programs?</li> <li>d. What is the site's process for adopting programmatic/curricular innovations?</li> <li>e. What elements within an organization are most conducive to adoption of LASI's model and vision?</li> <li>f. How does funding as a percentage of an organization's after-school budget affect the adoption of guidelines recommended by LASI?</li> <li>e. What type of support do organizations and their staff need?</li> </ul>	Interviews
4. How do the service programs and LASI monitor program implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What outcomes do programs seek? What outcomes does LASI seek?</li> <li>b. How does each measure outcomes?</li> <li>c. How is progress monitored?</li> </ul>	Interviews
5. What are advantages and disadvantages to the service programs of participating in LASI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do sites, staff, children gain?</li> <li>b. What are the costs?</li> </ul>	Interviews



## **APPENDIX B: Brain-Based Learning** ([http://www.funderstanding.com/brain\\_based\\_learning.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/brain_based_learning.cfm))

### **Definition**

This learning theory is based on the structure and function of the brain. As long as the brain is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal processes, learning will occur.

### **Discussion**

People often say that everyone **can** learn. Yet the reality is that everyone **does** learn. Every person is born with a brain that functions as an immensely powerful processor. Traditional schooling, however, often inhibits learning by discouraging, ignoring, or punishing the brain's natural learning processes.

The core principles of brain-based learning state that:

1. The brain is a parallel processor, meaning it can perform several activities at once, like tasting and smelling.
2. Learning engages the whole physiology.
3. The search for meaning is innate.
4. The search for meaning comes through patterning.
5. Emotions are critical to patterning.
6. The brain processes wholes and parts simultaneously.
7. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception.
8. Learning involves both conscious and unconscious processes.
9. We have two types of memory: spatial and rote.
10. We understand best when facts are embedded in natural, spatial memory.
11. Learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.
12. Each brain is unique.

The three instructional techniques associated with brain-based learning are:

1. **Orchestrated immersion** – Creating learning environments that fully immerse students in an educational experience
2. **Relaxed alertness** – Trying to eliminate fear in learners, while maintaining a highly challenging environment
3. **Active processing** – Allowing the learner to consolidate and internalize information by actively processing it

### **How Brain-Based Learning Impacts Education**

*Curriculum* – Teachers must design learning around student interests and make learning contextual.

*Instruction* – Educators let students learn in teams and use peripheral learning. Teachers structure learning around real problems, encouraging students to also learn in settings outside the classroom and the school building.

*Assessment* – Since all students are learning, their assessment should allow them to understand their own learning styles and preferences. This way, students monitor and enhance their own learning process.

### **What Brain-Based Learning Suggests**

How the brain works has a significant impact on what kinds of learning activities are most effective. Educators need to help students have appropriate experiences and capitalize on those experiences. As Renate Caine illustrates on p. 113 of her book *Making Connections*, three interactive elements are essential to this process:

- Teachers must immerse learners in complex, interactive experiences that are both rich and real. One excellent example is immersing students in a foreign culture to teach them a second language. Educators must take advantage of the brain's ability to parallel process.
- Students must have a personally meaningful challenge. Such challenges stimulate a student's mind to the desired state of alertness.
- In order for a student to gain insight about a problem, there must be intensive analysis of the different ways to approach it, and about learning in general. This is what's known as the "active processing of experience."

A few other tenets of brain-based learning include:

Feedback is best when it comes from reality, rather than from an authority figure.

People learn best when solving realistic problems.

The big picture can't be separated from the details.

Because every brain is different, educators should allow learners to customize their own environments.

The best problem solvers are those who laugh!

Designers of educational tools **must be artistic** in their creation of brain-friendly environments. Instructors need to realize that the best way to learn is not through lecture, but by participation in realistic environments that let learners try new things safely.

### **Reading**

Renate and Geoffrey Caine, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*

Leslie Hart, *Human Brain, Human Learning*