

LA's BEST
Victory Elementary Healthy Behaviors Learning Center



Contact Information

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Site Background

LA's BEST is a non-profit after school program whose mission is to provide educational, enrichment, and recreational opportunities for children in grades K-5. We are located in elementary schools throughout the City of Los Angeles, serving in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District. LA's BEST has been in operation at Victory Elementary since 2006. The program serves 120 students daily with demographics of 91.5 percent Hispanic; 2.4 percent African American; 1.1 percent Asian; 0.7 percent Filipino; 0.1 percent Pacific Islander; and 4.1 percent White. Free and reduced price meals are offered to 91.7 percent of the student population. Victory's LA's BEST staff consists of a diverse group of individuals that include Hispanic, Caucasian, and Armenian. Our goal at Victory Elementary is to offer students an array of experiences that will provide ongoing learning opportunities which will enhance students' lives and well-being. We strive to accomplish these goals by providing a variety of engaging activities and field trip opportunities, and by developing community partnerships. The core activities at Victory are divided into three and a half sessions: 1) help with homework, 2) a nutrition or fitness learning activity that integrates core academic skills such as reading, math, or science, 3) physical activity, and a nutritious snack. Victory Elementary offers a variety of programs and activities that are highly customized based on our students' needs and our staff's interests and experience.

Making a Difference

As a Healthy Behaviors Learning Center, all LA's BEST staff at Victory has participated in ongoing staff development and trainings provided through partnerships with agencies such as the *Network for a Healthy California*, LA County Department of Health Services, UC Cooperative Extension, and Youth Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. Staff received various resources to address personal health awareness to encourage healthy lifestyle changes. In addition, staff was continuously provided with resources to enhance fitness and nutrition opportunities for all students. Anecdotes from staff show us that they are becoming mindful of "walking the talk." For starters, they agreed not to bring unhealthy food onto the school campus. Staff are making healthier choices, which include providing students with healthier snacks during special events. During the Winter Holidays, a guide was developed to provide staff and parents with a list of healthy options for healthy celebrations. With support from the American Chemistry Council, all students and staff received water bottles and lessons to promote water consumption. The staff and children have eliminated sodas and sugar sweetened beverages on campus. During Nutrition Club, students refer to the *LA's BEST Afterschool Snacks* recipe book to create easy-to-make, healthy, delicious and inexpensive snacks. The book was carefully crafted so that students learn to eat healthy and can easily share these recipes at home with their

families. As a Healthy Behaviors Learning Center, staff members have taken pride in becoming role models for their students and community members.

What We Do

LA's BEST has established partnerships with various agencies to provide high quality programs which promote health awareness and increase physical activity. These activities consist of, but are not limited to, Sport for All, Skillastics, Wii Fitness, GenMoves, Reading Across My Pyramid, Clever Crazes, Children's Power Play!, Twigs Gardening, GoH2O Water Challenge, Drill Team, Seasonal Sports, as well as special events such as field trips to the annual Family Health Festival, the Los Angeles River, and other monthly themed events.

Our Partners

Victory Elementary is funded through ASES and Community Development Department. The site has received a vast amount of training and resources from partnering agencies which include the *Network for a Healthy California*, Youth Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (Y-EFNEP), UC Cooperative Extension, Children's Power Play! Campaign, Clever Crazes, American Chemistry Council, Department of Public Health Services, and the National Latino Children's Institute. Each partner has played a key role in supporting and enhancing our efforts to develop a Healthy Behaviors Learning Center at Victory Elementary. The partnership with the Center for Collaborative Solutions has affected us positively. The Exemplary Practice indicators allowed us to carefully assess our site, but most importantly, they guided us and put us on a course to improve and enhance quality health and wellness programs for our students. The staff at Victory Elementary is privileged to be a Healthy Behaviors Learning Center.

Additional Impacts of Our Program

One challenge that came to light as we implemented the practices was that not all students were participating in physical activity each day. Unfortunately, the only active students were those who had signed up for a club such as basketball or drill team. As a Healthy Behaviors Learning Center, Victory assessed the situation and successfully adopted a new fitness policy. The site schedule was redesigned to ensure that every student in LA's BEST at Victory is provided with 30 minutes or more of physical activity each day. As a result of our experience this policy will be implemented at all LA's BEST sites.

An upcoming project at Victory Elementary will be the installation of the Edible and Native Reading Garden which will be built in collaboration with the Theodore Payne Foundation and FedEx. This garden will provide an area where students can grow their own edible garden and learn the benefits of healthy nutrition. The native plants will attract birds, butterflies and insects, which will help pollinate the garden. The garden will become an outdoor learning environment which will also serve as an inviting and tranquil space where students can visit to sit, enjoy, and read a book.