

# Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Los Angeles Unified School District

<b>Program Name:</b>	Belmont Pilot Schools Network
<b>Implemented:</b>	Phased in beginning 2007-2008 School Year
<b>Program Type:</b>	Pilot Program
<b>Legal Authorization:</b>	Los Angeles Unified School District Board Policy, Memorandum Of Understanding with United Teachers Los Angeles.

Belmont Zone of Choice School Empowerment Benchmarks		
1.	School budgets based on students not staffing	yes
2.	Charge schools actual versus average salaries	yes
3.	School choice and open enrollment policies	yes
4.	Principal autonomy over budgets	yes
5.	Principal autonomy over hiring	yes
6.	Principal training and school-level management support	yes
7.	Published transparent school-level budgets	no
8.	Published transparent school-level outcomes	no
9.	Explicit accountability goals	yes
10.	Collective bargaining relief-flat contracts, etc.	yes
Belmont Zone of Choice met 8 out of 10 school empowerment benchmarks.		



## I. Program Overview

The Belmont Zone of Choice is modeled after the Boston Pilot Schools Network. In the Los Angeles Unified School District the innovative partnership was initiated by teachers and community members with strong support from the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in Boston, UTLA and the Belmont Education Collaborative, a group of more than 40 local organizations.<sup>1</sup>

The plan calls for a network of pilot schools patterned after the Boston Pilot Schools, a group of 20 innovative schools within the Boston Public School (BPS) system. In the pilot school model, schools have autonomy in five significant areas: staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and scheduling. The Boston Pilot Schools are outperforming the Boston district average across most indicators of student performance and engagement.<sup>2</sup> Pilot schools demonstrate higher achievement by students at all grade levels on the Massachusetts state-wide standardized assessment, higher college-enrollment rates and higher attendance rates.

In 2007 in Los Angeles the first two pilot schools opened—Civitas School of Leadership and the Los Angeles High School of the Arts. In 2008, three more pilot schools opened their doors in Belmont Zone of Choice—The School for Visual Arts and Humanities, The Academic Leadership Community and The Los Angeles Teacher Preparation Academy. A total of ten pilot schools are expected in Los Angeles by the year 2012.

These pilot schools represent a fundamentally different approach to transforming urban public education:

provide schools with maximum control over their resources in exchange for increased accountability, all within the economies of scale of an urban school district. In Los Angeles, by virtue of a unique memorandum of understanding between LAUSD, UTLA, AALA and the Belmont Educational Collaborative, pilot schools have charter-like control over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance and schedule.<sup>3</sup> Both the district and the unions agree to allow approved pilot schools to be free from constraints in order to be more innovative. To this end, they are exempt from district policies and mandates. Their teachers are exempt from teacher union contract work rules, while still receiving union salary, benefits and accrual of seniority within the district. Teachers voluntarily choose to work at pilot schools; when hired, they sign what is called an “elect-to-work agreement,” which stipulates the work conditions in the school for the coming school year. This agreement is revisited and revised annually.

## II. Student-Based Budgeting Formula

Pilot schools receive a lump-sum per-pupil budget, the sum of which is equal to other LAUSD schools within that grade span. A lump-sum per-pupil budget allows the school to decide the best programs and services to provide to students and their families.<sup>4</sup> The total funds dispersed to a school will be based on the number of students enrolled. In addition, pilot schools receive a start-up supplement to help with the expenses of opening a new school. In calculating their budgets, pilot schools will budget the actual salaries of faculty that they hire. Most other schools in Los Angeles Unified are charged for their staff based on

district-wide averages instead of the actual cost of their employees.

Pilot schools will also receive access to central discretionary services and have the ability to select the services or instead receive the per-pupil amount for the service added to their lump-sum budget. As well, they will have access to any special initiative funds and programs, as long as they adhere to the requirements that are attached to the initiative.

Administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, substitutes and all other employees at pilot schools who fall under the jurisdiction of the UTLA or AALA and their respective contracts will be members of the appropriate UTLA or AALA bargaining unit. These employees will accrue seniority in the system and will receive, at a minimum, the salary and benefits established in the UTLA or AALA contract. UTLA and AALA employees in pilot schools will be required to perform and work in accordance with the terms of the individual pilot school proposal and annual election-to-work agreement. Pilot school governing bodies may make changes to their election-to-work agreements during the school year.

Employees will work in pilot schools

on a voluntary basis and may remove themselves at the end of the school year. No UTLA or AALA member may be laid off by LAUSD as a result of the existence of pilot schools. The Los Angeles Unified School District retains the right to close a pilot school at any time if malfeasance, fiscal irregularities or violation of the district's nepotism policy is proven to have taken place.

### III. Autonomy

Pilot schools have the autonomy to select and replace their staff in order to create a unified school community.<sup>5</sup> Teachers also play a significant role in staff hiring. Principals can decide on the staffing pattern that creates the best learning environment for students and can hire staff who best fit the needs of the school, regardless of their current status (members of the district or not, although every teacher hired must be properly credentialed and becomes a member of the UTLA bargaining unit). The principal may reassign teaching staff (into the district pool) who do not fulfill the needs of the school. Pilot schools

#### Autonomy from the Los Angeles Unified School District

- Waived from district mandates
- A lump-sum, per-pupil budget
- A start-up budget
- Professional development support
- Facilities
- Human resources services
- Discretionary services per request and purchase

#### Autonomy from the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA)

- Continued tenure for teachers and administrators within the district
- Waived from historical union agreements

provide due process to all staff and are responsible for corrective action.

Pilot schools are free from central office curriculum requirements. They can choose what content to cover and how to cover it. They can structure their own A-G curriculum (California college requirements) and assessment practices, as long as they are equal to or better than the district's level of rigor, to best meet students' learning needs. While held accountable to state and district required tests, these schools are given the flexibility to best determine how to prepare students for state and district assessments. In addition, promotion and graduation requirements are set by the school, not by the district, although they must be commensurate or greater in rigor to the district requirements. Pilot schools also have the autonomy to set longer school days and calendar years for both students and faculty in accordance with their principles or school reform models as permitted by their budget.

#### IV. School-Level Management Support

In the case of the Belmont Pilot Schools Network, the primary school-level management support capacity building comes from the community-based organizations and the Center for Collaborative Education that has established best practices for pilot schools in Boston.<sup>6</sup> These organizations provide extensive training and ongoing support including:

- Planning assistance
- Ongoing leadership/teacher coaching and professional development
- Research and data to assist in decision-making and instruction
- Aspiring principal credentialing program

- Development of pilot schools leadership and teacher networks
- Advocacy
- Other school-based assistance, as needed

#### V. School Site Councils

Pilot schools have the freedom to create their own governance structure due to increased decision-making powers over budget approval, principal selection and programs and policies, while being mindful of state requirements on school councils.<sup>7</sup> The school's Governing School Council takes on increased governing responsibilities, including the following: principal selection, supervision and evaluation with final approval by the local district superintendent in all cases; setting of school policies; and budget approval. The schools are free from district policies and set their own policies that the school community feels will best help students be successful. This includes protocols in such areas as promotion, graduation, discipline and attendance as long as they are in alignment with state and federal laws.

The pilot model empowers both teachers and the community. Fundamental to the pilot concept is that those who live and work within the school community should decide how a school operates each and every day. Pilot governing boards include representation from administrators, faculty, parents, students and community representatives (i.e. community-based organizations, institutions of higher education and members of the business community). In this way, all school members have a substantial decision-making voice. Pilot schools' governing boards have increased authority over traditional

school councils. They not only set the school's vision, programs and professional development agenda, but also hire and annually evaluate the principal (with the local district superintendent having final authority), determine the annual elect-to-work terms for UTLA members and approve the annual budget.

## VI. School Choice Component

The Belmont Zone of Choice is part of a Local District 4 (a sub-district of Los Angeles Unified) neighborhood controlled choice plan. As of the 2009-2010 school year students in the geographic area for Belmont High School, Miguel Contreras Learning Complex, Edward Roybal Learning Complex and Central LA High School #9 can select between 19 small learning communities, high-tech high schools and pilot schools.<sup>8</sup> The Belmont Zone of Choice has created a school brochure highlighting the choices and will conduct several informative meetings and school fairs throughout the spring of 2009.

## VII. Accountability

All pilot schools participate in an accountability process that has three components, the first two of which are based on a set of benchmarks that articulate the criteria for a high-performing pilot school.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Half-Day or One-Day Walk-Through

In the spring of 2008 and thereafter in every year in which there is not a school quality review scheduled, a walk-through will be conducted in order to provide the school with an assessment of its progress.

A team of internal and external members will sit in on classrooms, observe teachers and conduct focus groups with teachers and students. Feedback will be provided by the team at the conclusion of the walk-through.

### 2. School Quality Review

All schools are required to engage in a "school quality review" (SQR) after the first three years of operation (school self-study in the spring of the third year and external review in the fall of the fourth year) and then every five years thereafter. This review involves all school community members in conducting a self-study process, which entails collecting evidence in the form of a school portfolio, to document progress toward attaining the pilot schools' benchmarks. Once completed, an external team conducts a comprehensive three-day school visit. The external team submits a final report to the school including findings and recommendations and then, along with a response letter from the school, to the local district.

### 3. Pilot School Steering Committee for Review

Based on this review and other considerations, the general superintendent may renew the school's pilot status for an additional five years.

### 4. Data Monitoring

The progress of every pilot school will be tracked longitudinally on, at minimum, the following indicators: attendance, suspensions, transfers, grade retentions, graduation, college-enrollment rates and CST/CAHSEE exams. With autonomy, flexibility over resources and small size, it is LAUSD's expectation that every pilot school will exceed the district school averages on these indicators.

### Belmont Pilot School Case Study: Los Angeles High School for the Arts

Los Angeles High School for the Arts (LAHSA) became a pilot school in September of 2007.<sup>10</sup> Previously LAHSA operated as a small learning community within Belmont High School. The pilot school model enables a district school generally no larger than 400 students to have autonomy from certain district policies (curriculum, assessment, budgeting, staffing, calendar/scheduling)—while adhering to state educational code—in order to tailor its educational program to the needs of the students. Pilot schools are often formed around a mission and theme; LAHSA focuses its curriculum around the performing and technical theater arts.

LAHSA infuses the arts into the curriculum in a number of ways. For example, at LAHSA every ninth grader takes a yearlong theater appreciation course that explores the different forms and types of performance in cultures around the world. The students use beginning voice, movement and acting skills to explore and practice the content they cover. In this model of interdisciplinary curriculum, the units covered in students' ninth grade English and geography courses share the cultural and geographic areas covered in their theater appreciation courses. The ninth grade teams of teachers collaborate, plan and implement thematic units. A similar model is used in the 10th grade. All 10th graders take "Theater Workshop" where they learn the basic principles of stagecraft and are introduced to set, sound, lighting and costume design. Twice a semester the 10th graders form "production crews" to develop a design plan and budget for the plays they are reading in their 10th grade English course—plays that connect in thematic units to the studies in their world history course. Additionally, the math and science faculty have begun to use elements of performance, design and technology from

stage productions to demonstrate and have students participate in real-life applications of the academic content. LAHSA 11th and 12th graders take theater history alongside their U.S. History and English classes and some elect to take Advanced Acting and dance classes as well. Besides participating in productions, a number of LAHSA students have worked with community theater organizations.

While only awarded pilot school status for a little over a year, LAHSA students display the same high achievement that Boston Pilot Schools have proven possible. The average attendance rate for LAHSA in 2007-2008 hovered around 94 percent, often more than a 10 percent lead over the local comprehensive high school with which it shares a campus. In terms of passing the exit exam, 73 percent of LAHSA 10th graders passed the High School Exit Exam on their first attempt, compared to 37 percent at the local comprehensive Belmont High School and the overall 69 percent of LAUSD. Finally, 66 percent of LAHSA students took at least one AP test compared to 20 percent at Belmont comprehensive and 26 percent overall in LAUSD.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, LAHSA does not "cherry-pick" its students: On average, LAHSA incoming ninth graders scored lower on their eighth grade English and Math California Standards tests than did the students entering Belmont comprehensive. On average, LAHSA has higher percentages than Belmont comprehensive in the following "at-risk" categories: Latino students, students who qualify for free or reduced lunches, limited English proficient students, parents without a high school diploma and special education students. LAHSA is a solid example of how pilot school status allows principals the autonomy to better control resources to fit the individual needs of the students and the mission of the school.

Percentage of LAHSA 10th grade students who passed the California High School Exit Exam 2008			
CA	LAHSA	LAUSD	Belmont
78%	73%	69%	37%

Source: Los Angeles High School of the Arts, <http://www.lahsa.net/>

## VIII. Performance Outcomes

The performance data is not yet available on the first few pilot schools. Full implementation of the pilot schools will be complete in 2009 and more data about individual schools will be available.

## IX. Lessons Learned

1. The most important lesson from the Belmont Pilot schools is that, through community engagement, local schools can negotiate with unions for more flexibility and thus obtain superior results. The Belmont pilot schools demonstrate the benefit of a flat contract where teachers are free to negotiate with individual schools. In the Belmont pilot district the principal has discretion over staffing choices and can choose staff from within or outside of the school district. This also provides an example of a cooperative agreement with the teachers union through collaboration.
2. The Belmont Pilot Network also demonstrates that it is possible to develop school empowerment programs from the bottom up. This was a true community-driven demand for higher quality schools involving multiple stakeholders in a negotiating a process that has led to a robust program of local autonomy over school decision-making from resources to staffing.

## Resources

Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Request for Proposals for the Establishment of Two Small Autonomous K-12 Pilot Schools at Central L.A. Learning Center #1 (Ambassador Hotel Site), For School-Year 2009-2010, May 2008. [http://www.lausd.net/District\\_4/documents/AmbassadorRFP.pdf](http://www.lausd.net/District_4/documents/AmbassadorRFP.pdf)

Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District 4, Belmont Zone of Choice, [http://www.lausd.net/District\\_4/BelmontZone.htm](http://www.lausd.net/District_4/BelmontZone.htm).

Los Ositos/Bruin Community School, K-12 Belmont Pilot School Proposal, August 31, 2007. [http://bruincommunityschool.gseis.ucla.edu/BCS\\_Pilot\\_Schools\\_files/BCS%20pilot%20school%20proposal-8-31-07.pdf](http://bruincommunityschool.gseis.ucla.edu/BCS_Pilot_Schools_files/BCS%20pilot%20school%20proposal-8-31-07.pdf). This is a comprehensive description of UCLA's pilot school partnership.

Jeremy Nesoff, "The Belmont Zone of Choice: Community-Driven Action for School Change," Coalition of Essential Schools, Horace, Winter 2007, Vol. 23 No. 4, [http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/421](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/421). This describes in great detail the community collaboration and grassroots efforts between multiple organizations.

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[http://www.lausd.net/District\\_4/News.htm](http://www.lausd.net/District_4/News.htm)

## Endnotes

1. Jeremy Nesoff, "The Belmont Zone of Choice: Community-Driven Action for School Change," Coalition of Essential Schools, *Horace*, Winter 2007, Vol. 23 No. 4, [http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/421](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/421). This describes in great detail the community collaboration and grassroots efforts between multiple organizations.
2. Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, "Boston's Small Pilot Schools Found to Outperform Others," *Education Week*, January 25, 2006; "Students in Boston's Pilot Schools Outpacing Others," *Education Week*, November 14, 2007.
3. Memorandum of Understanding Between Los Angeles Unified School District and United Teachers Los Angeles, Belmont Pilot Schools Agreement, February 22, 2007, <http://soe.lmu.edu/Assets/Colleges+Schools/SOE/SOE++FOS/Belmont+Zone+of+Choice+Agreement.pdf>.
4. Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Request for Proposals for the Establishment of Two Small Autonomous K-12 Pilot Schools at Central L.A. Learning Center #1 (Ambassador Hotel Site), For School-Year 2009-2010, May 2008. [http://www.lausd.net/District\\_4/documents/AmbassadorRFP.pdf](http://www.lausd.net/District_4/documents/AmbassadorRFP.pdf)
5. Ibid.
6. Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Request for Proposals.
7. Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Request for Proposals.7. School enrollment information at Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District 4, Belmont Zone of Choice, [http://www.lausd.net/District\\_4/BelmontZone.htm](http://www.lausd.net/District_4/BelmontZone.htm).
8. Belmont Pilot Schools Network, Request for Proposals
9. The case study is derived from a rebuttal of an *LA Weekly* article by LAHSA teachers in October 2008. Darren Schroeder, "Los Angeles High School of the Arts Faculty Responds to *LA Weekly*," LA Stage Blog, October 30, 2008, <http://www.lastageblog.com/2008/10/30/los-angeles-high-school-of-the-arts-faculty-responds-to-la-weekly/#more-723>.
- 10 Ibid.