

Building Local Capacity to Bring Arts Education to All Children: Lessons Learned from the First Half of the Ford Foundation's National Demonstration

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ABSTRACT

Interested in bringing the benefits of the arts as integral to quality education for all children, in 2004 the Ford Foundation launched the National Arts Education Initiative, a seven-year demonstration in nine communities across the United States. Building from arts education programs that serve "pockets" of children, Ford investments aim to leverage these arts programs to reach all children through increased public will, supportive policy systems, and community partnerships. The ultimate aim is to build sustainable, coordinated arts education delivery systems for all children as part of a quality education. This article presents some of the lessons from the internal evaluation of the first half of the initiative conducted by the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.

Introduction

In 2004, the Ford Foundation launched the National Arts Education Initiative, a bold and forward-looking effort to address issues of equity and access in arts education. The initiative advances a new and significant framework for achieving the goal of increasing access to quality integrated arts education for all children.

In its underlying strategic approach, the Ford initiative charts important new ground. It proposes that to bring arts education to scale in urban school districts, as educators and community-based arts providers build strong programs, they must also develop related political-advocacy, partnership-building, and strategic-communication skills. Through this supporting work, educators and arts providers are able to catalyze public demand and policy momentum for the kinds of systemic changes that are essential if arts education is to flourish broadly and equitably across communities and across the nation.

This article shares more broadly with the field—including educators, funders, policymakers, artists, arts educators, and others—important lessons emerging from the National Arts Edu-

cation Initiative. Based on an internal evaluation of the initiative's first phase, conducted from Spring 2004 through Spring 2008 by OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, this article will be of interest to those invested in issues of educational quality, arts learning, equity considerations, and systems change. It includes a brief overview of the state of the field of arts education and its link to urban education, a discussion of the context for change and the philosophical and strategic underpinnings of the Ford initiative, and a discussion of various successes and challenges faced by initiative participants as they work to strengthen programs and mobilize constituencies to bring arts education to all students in urban schools. Throughout the article we have also included several grantee-specific stories that illustrate the efforts of practitioners to reform education within their local communities.

THE STATE OF ARTS EDUCATION AND THE LINK TO URBAN EDUCATION

Overburdened school budgets and high-stakes accountability policies have nearly obliterated arts education from American public schools over the past two decades. A study in Califor-

nia by Stites and Malin (2008) found that 61% of schools do not have even one full-time arts teacher, and similar trends can be seen across the country. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2008 noted that less than 47% of tested eighth-graders attended schools with visual arts instruction and 57% attended schools with music instruction (Keiper 2009). This is particularly the case in poorer, urban school districts. In not offering these students the opportunity to learn in and through the arts, students, school districts and communities are foregoing the benefits that a high quality arts education can provide.

Research shows that students who are involved in the arts in and out of school have higher levels of academic achievement as indicated by grades and standardized test scores; they stay in school longer; and they have better attitudes about self, school, and community (Catterall, 1998; Catterall et al, 1999). These outcomes are supported by studies in neuroscience that demonstrate positive relationships between participation in the arts, cognitive development, and learning (Begley, 1996; Shreeve, 1996). While high quality arts education can lead to increased academic performance, it can be employed

to facilitate teaching about issues that pertain to social responsibility and social change (Holloway and Krensky, 2001). John Dewey (1934) presented the theory that arts should be a central component of education because the development of the imagination is the impetus for social change. Providing urban youth the space and resources to learn through the arts enables them to envision and create a positive future for themselves and their communities.

However, more importantly, and perhaps most compelling and least surprising to educators, students report that the arts “help us explore our own and others’ thoughts and feelings, critique ourselves and our worlds, express our voices, and influence our social contexts by using nonviolent means” (Walker, 1999). These outcomes are particularly important in urban settings, where today’s diverse urban students are more likely to struggle with issues of identity, voice, and their role in the community. A recent literature review by Mary Stone Hanley and George Noblit (2009) unequivocally emphasizes the importance of the arts as a strategy for culturally responsive education that help strengthen racial identity, resilience, and achievement.

THE IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

Educating the Whole Child

In the last decade, as high-stakes testing in math and reading have dominated national educational improvement efforts under the No Child Left Behind act, the Ford Foundation has remained steadfast in its belief that quality education ought to develop the whole child, cultivating knowledge in a range of disciplines and through multiple learning modalities. The National Arts Education Initiative intends to reintroduce education of the whole child into national discussions about quality education. The central longer term aim of the initiative is to increase access to quality integrated arts education for all K-8 students.

From Fragmentation to Coordination

As has been recently observed

(Bodilly, 2008), few cities have well-developed and coordinated arts and education delivery systems. Rather, communities more typically are characterized as having arts education programs that are fragmented, uncoordinated pilots, targeted to a subset of schools. The pilots are usually supported by soft dollars and run by an array of private, nonprofit brokers and arts and culture organizations in partnership with public school districts. In its underlying approach, the Ford Foundation’s National Arts Education Initiative recognizes that the long-term building of coordinated and equitable arts and delivery systems necessitates more resources, both public and private. These resources cannot be leveraged in the absence of building public will and policy commitment for expanded and systemic approaches to arts and education.

Policy and Practice

The planning phase of the initiative coincided with a period when there had been important national progress toward advancing arts education within the public school arena. The enactment in the mid-1990s of Goals 2000, which asserted the arts as core disciplines, propelled many states to adopt or develop their own arts education standards. With this, the arts were educationally validated and the bar was raised for quality pedagogy. Unfortunately, although the formulation of arts education standards was celebrated as a policy victory, practice had yet to catch up. Adequate arts education financing, teaching infrastructure, and effective and appropriate assessments remained to be developed.

Emerging Models

During this same time, there was increased recognition of the functional value of arts partnership programs in developing and delivering high-quality arts instruction. In this widely-heralded partnership model, a lead organization works outside the school district and operates as a bridge and facilitator among the teaching artists, the arts and culture community, and

public schools to deliver arts education in multiple disciplines (i.e. visual arts, music, theater, dance, creative writing, and media arts) during in-school time to public school students. Several cities, including Dallas, Chicago, and New York City have benefited from extraordinary arts partnership programs. In these cases, school penetration of arts programming grew significantly. Nonetheless, even in these cities where public school districts were partners, and at times financial partners, the burden of delivery remained on nonprofit and foundation dollars.

Equity and Access

No matter what their scale, these arts partnerships did not have the resources to reach all children with quality arts education. In many locales, reliant on soft funding, art partnerships remained fragile and provided programming to schools in which champions pursued them. Many schools and many children remained untouched, particularly in lower-income communities. Thus, no matter how the arts partnerships grew, they remained demonstration programs.

THE DESIGN OF THE FORD INITIATIVE

Ford launched the National Arts Education Initiative with the recognition that the long-term building of coordinated arts and education program delivery systems for all children requires significantly more public and private resources. Thus, for this initiative, Ford’s primary intention is to demonstrate how communities build local public will for expanded and systemic approaches to arts and education, with a focus on two key areas: partnership building and strategic communication and advocacy. For it is only through increased public will and market demand that more public and private resources can flow towards arts education. More dollars will allow successful arts and education pilots to scale up and achieve greater reach. In support of public will building and advocacy, the initiative also seeks to help locales learn how to prepare and build their arts and education delivery systems for broader impact.

To begin addressing these barriers, and to demonstrate how different types of organizations take on arts education systems-building and policy-change work, the Ford Foundation selected nine diverse grantees. The selected grantees vary in arts programming experience, arts and education reform know-how, organizational capacity, and geographic location. They range from organizations with multimillion dollar budgets that have been involved with arts-related systems-change work for over a decade, to start-up organizations with limited arts education programming experience. This diversity has led to fruitful dialogue among initiative participants and yielded important lessons about the different ways organizations and leaders mobilize for change in light of local contexts. A summary of each of

the nine grantees' core programs and capacities can be found in Table 1.

In addition to the nine grantees, Ford is supporting three other organizations: the Arts Education Partnership, Douglas Gould and Company, and the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning with expertise in arts education technical assistance, strategic communications, and evaluation and partnership-building. Supports to sites include individualized technical assistance and biannual grantee meetings to foster communication, build networks, and share emerging best practices.

BUILDING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD ARTS EDUCATION SYSTEMS

From the outset of the Ford National Arts Education Initiative, partici-

pants were challenged to translate the initiative's ambitious and far-reaching goals into a clear framework and action steps. While the concepts of working toward partnership-building and advocacy were understood conceptually, not surprisingly, they were also an abstraction for many of the grantees, especially those who had limited experience with policy and advocacy work. In this section we review the framework and in the following section we will highlight some of the key lessons learned in each of the key areas of the presented framework.

As the initiative evaluators, OMG engaged the Ford Foundation staff, its technical advisors, and its grantees to develop a Theory of Change and an implementation plan to build shared understanding for the initiative's agenda. The Theory of Change also articulated clear work areas and progress bench-

TABLE 1

NATIONAL ARTS EDUCATION INITIATIVE GRANTEES

Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership, housed within the Alameda County Office of Education (Alameda County, CA)

Decade-old, county-wide community partnership facilitated by Office of Education leaders. Provides professional development and technical assistance to districts and schools for the development and implementation of district arts plans and makes grants for school-based arts programs. Organizational budget exceeds \$14 million; project budget \$754,000.

Arts Every Day (Baltimore, MD)

Start-up arts education broker. Promotes information sharing and coordination of existing arts education programs and resources for Baltimore public schools. Initial programming focus on piloting middle-school arts-integrated lesson plans through shared teaching artist and classroom teacher sessions in 13 classrooms. Organizational budget \$300,000.

Arts Education Initiative, housed within the University of California-UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education (Berkeley, CA)

Newly formed partnership of six higher education institutions and professional education programs. Piloting arts-integrated curriculum planning and instruction for new teachers and school leaders; limited arts education experience at initiative's commencement. Project budget \$175,000.

Art IS Education, Housed Within Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio (Cleveland, OH)

Arts education broker. Piloting third grade arts integrated literacy curricula and corresponding professional development strategies with the school district. Organizational budget \$1.5 million; project budget \$248,000.

Big Thought (Dallas, TX)

Fifteen-old, city-wide community partnership and arts education broker. Coordinates arts education resources and services across 70 school districts, city libraries, and childcare, recreation, and community centers and provides arts advocacy and research services. Organizational budget \$4.1 million; project budget \$364,000.

Ask for More Arts Collaborative, housed within Parents for Public Schools (Jackson, MS)

Parent organizing and education advocacy organization. Piloting classroom-based arts integrated lesson plans and teacher professional development in Jackson public schools; limited arts education experience at initiative's commencement. Organizational budget \$377,000; project budget \$150,000.

Arts for Academic Achievement, housed within the Minneapolis Public Schools (Minneapolis, MN)

Arts education and teaching artist broker for public schools. Provides professional development institutes; arts integrated coaching for classroom teachers; and links teaching artists to area schools. Organizational budget \$6.2 million; project budget \$1.2 million.

Interchange, housed within Center for Creative Arts (St. Louis, MI)

Start-up arts education provider and broker. Piloting arts integrated classes in five schools, developing teaching artist and teacher professional development, testing early arts education advocacy efforts. Organizational budget \$4.3 million; project budget \$270,000.

D. C. Arts and Humanities Collaborative (Washington, DC)

Membership arts broker organization. Piloting arts integrated lesson plans in six schools and providing related professional development for classroom teachers. Organizational budget \$480,000; project budget \$150,000.

marks. The Theory of Change and implementation plan identified four key areas of activity and indicators of success in each one, as is outlined below.

Grantee Leadership

Increase grantee ability to support the Ford arts and education work, as evidenced by increased organizational capacity and leadership to carry out the arts education partnership and the advocacy and policy-change agenda.

Grantee leadership indicators. Vision and understanding of arts and education reform; respect as community leader in arts and education; designated staff and system-level data collection and use capabilities; and policy entrepreneur skills (including the ability to reframe constantly changing arts and education issues within an educational policy framework and build policy networks).

Partnership Leadership

Build local partnerships to shift lo-

cal policy, as evidenced by the establishment of a sustainable collaboration of educational advocates, arts institutions, and educators, and strengthened school district capacities to support and sustain the integration of the arts.

Partnership leadership indicators. Shared and articulated arts education vision for the partnership; diverse and appropriate membership/community legitimacy (comprised of arts, education, and youth champions); adequate networks; transparent process and structure for operations and decision-making; effective formal and informal communication processes; evaluation mechanisms; and adequate staff and resources.

Advocacy and Strategic Communications

Build public will for arts education for all children through advocacy and communication, as evidenced by greater public understanding and support for integrated arts education.

Advocacy and strategic communications indicators. Existence of arts education advocacy goal and plan; strategic communications plan, including target audiences, specific messaging, and tactics, and assigned responsibilities; impact tracking capabilities; sustainable advocacy infrastructure; school district buy-in, as evidenced by leadership participation and increased budget, staff, and professional development allocations.

Strengthen and Scale Arts Integration Program Models

Demonstrate equitable and quality arts education program models that can be brought to scale, as evidenced by observable, wider-spread integration of the arts into classroom practice in district schools.

Program Impact indicators. Theory-based approach; sufficient infrastructure; curriculum (standards-based, sequential, and tied to other content areas); student art production assessment (performance-based/embedded in curricu-

lum); and professional development.

The OMG Center Evaluation Methodology in Brief

In the first phase of the initiative, the evaluation placed an emphasis on formative progress. Methodologies included document review, annual site visits and phone interviews with grantees and partners in each site using semi-scripted interview guides, and observations during site visits and meetings. In addition, OMG developed a capacity framework for the initiative, and OMG and each site jointly assessed the site against benchmarks along each area defined in the theory of change. We also used a policy and implementation tracking tool to gauge the reach of the grantee programs, shifts in policies, and district and partner practice. As the initiative moves into its second phase, greater emphasis is being placed on outcomes.

EARLY LESSONS

After more than three years, several lessons have emerged. Given the initiative's complex nature and the grantees' diversity, it is important to stress that the findings presented here are not comprehensive. Additionally, there are a number of contextual factors, national and local in scope, that have impacted the work of the grantees that, for the sake of brevity, are not discussed in this article. At the same time, these lessons shed important light on what it really takes to begin shifting policies and practice to bring arts education to scale in urban settings.

GRANTEE CAPACITY

Successful arts education policy influence and change frequently hinges on the leadership and advocacy skills of a small group of champions. They exert pressure by effectively making their case and by mobilizing broader grassroots constituencies to change the opinion of policymakers. The Ford initiative grantees were expected to build their capacity to become arts education policy-change leaders and also to develop and manage partnerships. The experience of the Baltimore site highlights

such skill development. All grantees made advances in these areas, although stumbling blocks were encountered along the way and progress was variable—with the more experienced sites being able to mobilize quickly and work in an accelerated fashion to address initiative goals. In the following section, brief case examples demonstrate and provide support for OMG's findings.

Baltimore: A start-up focuses on developing policy entrepreneurial skills

Soon after taking over the helm of Baltimore's Every Day Arts, its Executive Director began taking courses in nonprofit management and advocacy to better navigate the Baltimore School District. She researched the policy reform agenda of the new district administration and began working closely with a policy-savvy board member to develop an advocacy action plan that specifically aligns with the city and state's broader educational goals. As a start-up organization, this policy entrepreneur skill building has helped the organization position itself as an exclusive arts education broker for the District.

Finding #1: From theory to practice. It took more time than expected for many of the grantees to understand the significant role-shift required for them to carry out advocacy and partnership-building work. For most sites, significant capacity-building was necessary as a prelude to taking on initiative work. At the initiative's inception, many sites focused almost solely on building or refining their arts integration program delivery models to be able to make the case for systemic change. Similar to other initiatives, which encourage grantees to make a major shift in how they do business, many grantees initially focused on doing more of what they do well. In this case, sites focused on program development or providing more programs, and they were slow to take up the arts education advocacy or systems-change roles required for the National Arts Education Initiative. The progress of grantee efforts can be broadly characterized as follows:

Advanced sites—seasoned organizations with existing experience

in advocacy and policy change—were able to work aggressively, systematically, and immediately toward arts advocacy initiative goals.

Developing sites—including community-wide arts education program partnership broker/service providers—found the transition to be more challenging than anticipated. Five of the nine grantees entered this work as direct service providers and/or arts brokers with limited experience with arts and education policy, education system-building, and advocacy work. They had limited or no experience building senior relationships at the district level, broad-based stakeholder partnerships, or larger grassroots constituencies, particularly beyond the arts and culture community; limited experience navigating school district education policy processes; and limited familiarity with education reform issues.

Emerging and start-up sites—these grantees had to start up or build out arts education knowledge or integrate arts education into other core capacities, which required more resources than were initially anticipated (additional allocations were made by Ford). One site was new to the arts education field but had strong, relevant experience in community organizing for education reform. The other had experience in teacher preservice training, but not specifically in integrating the arts. In these cases, it was necessary for them to develop pilot, demonstration programs to make a case in their communities for later going to scale. This early start-up work required nearly two years of conducting research, engaging with stakeholders, and testing arts education start-up models.

Finding #2: Early success indicators. Early success indicators of a site's ability to pursue policy change include the ability to forge and maintain relationships with district leaders, a commitment and capacity to research and navigate the educational policy process, and resourcefulness in leveraging current relationships to build new ones. Midway through the initiative,

all nine grantees had established direct relationships with and access to district superintendents, school boards, district curricula administrators, and other policymakers. For over half of the grantees, these were new relationships.

Multiple strategies have been successfully pursued as part of this relationship-building process, including:

- leveraging existing partnerships with senior community leaders;
- utilizing the Ford Foundation's name and program officer's visit to gain access to the new district leadership;
- recruiting new partner members who have strong relationships with city education policymakers;
- securing a regular meeting time with the superintendent to keep the issue of arts education on the district radar; and
- tapping into their pre-existing parent organizing networks.

The most successful grantees are increasingly aware of how education policy decisions are made, including the timing of the policy process and the level at which it occurs (state, regional, national, etc.). The leaders in the most advanced sites already possessed the necessary policy entrepreneur skills, including the ability to scan the political environment for windows of policy opportunity, make the case for arts integration to broad and diverse audiences, and network in appropriate policy circles to gain support for their agendas. Others have become much more intentional about tracking the policy environment and knowing which issues are most important to policy leaders. Leaders are becoming better at reframing arts education issues for diverse constituents, drawing upon the messaging platforms developed for initiative participants.

Finding #3: Securing staff. Not surprisingly, similar to other intensive efforts, appropriate and stable initiative staffing contributes significantly to grantee progress. Since many of the grantees were new to this kind of work,

identifying, attracting, and retaining the right type of staff was a key challenge. Many of the service-providing grantees found it difficult to articulate what they were looking for in new hires. Initially grantees hired new staff with skills appropriate for the program-level work. However, as grantees began to refocus their work on policy and advocacy, new skills beyond program planning and implementation were necessary. After the departure of first hires, staff positions were more appropriately defined and filled and include individuals with organizing and advocacy skills.

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Partnership-building is a crucial component of the initiative's policy-change agenda. Effective policy- and systems-change efforts require a diverse set of partners and stakeholders with a clear vision and buy-in for the agenda. These efforts also require the ability to mobilize partners and networks as necessary, with the ability to assign roles and responsibilities fitting and of interest to the specific stakeholders. During the initiative's first phase, about a half of the grantees succeeded in establishing strong partnerships with consistent membership that meet regularly to work on shared, clear tasks.

Finding #1: Cultivating and sustaining district support. District buy-in, affirmed through financial support, provides a crucial partnership linchpin, which must be proactively sustained in a constantly shifting local environment. Four sites were able to secure financial support from their school districts by showing administrators how arts integration approaches can be tools to help achieve the rigorous academic goals articulated in the No Child Left Behind act, through standardized testing and other assessments. Districts were willing to provide funding for the arts integration work since it directly served their purpose.

A significant challenge to partnership sustainability is the frequent turnover in school district leadership. Since the Ford initiative began, most of the sites have experienced superin-

tendent change. In three years, these partnership leaders have had to establish school district buy-in, build relationships, and develop a plan with their school district leadership partners in some cases two or three times. The Ford grantees and partners now realize that the constant rebuilding of superintendent relationships is part of ongoing business in education improvement. The more successful sites have developed procedures to quickly approach new district administrators to build new relationships and avoid loss of momentum. In many cases, sites were challenged to ask for more arts support from their district leaders, as in the case of Jackson, below.

Jackson: "Asks for more"

Ask 4 More Arts, established in 2005, grew out of the unique and highly successful Ask 4 More collaborative established in 1999 to strengthen teaching and learning in the Jackson Public School District. The idea of "asking for more"—from teachers, principals, students, parents, and the community—has led to the creation of arts integration and artist-in-residence programs in fifteen elementary schools—over a relatively short time period. Over the next five years, Ask 4 More Arts plans to expand its initiative into most, if not all, of the 38 elementary schools throughout the Jackson Public Schools district, setting clear targets for the "more" it is asking for. By establishing clear expectations of the District, articulating specific requests, and demonstrating public support for these requests, Ask 4 More Arts is cultivating District buy-in and financial support.

Finding #2: Creating tiered, diverse, and defined partnerships. Effective partnerships typically have tiered levels of engagement, with clear accountability guidelines. At the three-year juncture, all of the sites had developed a clear vision for their initiative work among key partners. Most sites have a strong core group of partners with clear roles. These sites also have a reporting structure that allows partners to hold one another accountable

for various aspects of the partnership work. The grantee frequently oversees the day-to-day partnership work plan and is responsible for managing partnership communications, new member recruitment, strategic planning, and conflict resolution. The sites that have more success with partnership-building rely on partners not just for arts education model implementation, but also to plan and carry out other activities, such as communications and advocacy. In the case of Berkeley illustrated below, partnerships included the higher education community – a critical stakeholder in the arts education and teacher preparation system.

Berkeley: Showcasing how the arts can be integrated into the initial preparation of educators

The Arts Education Initiative (AEI), is a professional education initiative based at the Department of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. It partners with Berkeley faculty and those at five other regional higher education institutions to explore effective teacher and administrator preparation models for integrating the arts into the curriculum. Each higher education partner provides lessons about a different model for how arts integrated professional preparation occurs in different academic contexts. Through presentations, publications, and strategic alliances with teacher organizations and institutions, AEI is building a grassroots network of teacher arts education advocates. Also, AEI uses the individual partner models to show how to enhance the quality of learning using the arts for educators and for the K-12 students they will serve.

ADVOCACY AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

At the initiative's outset, it was hypothesized that its overall success would rely on the ability of each of the grantees and partnerships to build top-down (education policymakers) and bottom-up (grassroots and broad organizational) support for arts and education, with targeted, strategic communications playing an essential role in this process.

In some cases, as with St. Louis illustrated below, sites had to build their advocacy and strategic communications capacity by hiring dedicated staff.

St. Louis: Augmenting staff expertise for advocacy and strategic communications

To ensure ongoing support of its arts integration initiatives in St. Louis Public Schools, Interchange adopted a multi-faceted advocacy strategy that includes paid teacher and teaching artist advocates, in-school Family Arts Activity nights, and state-level policy work in partnership with the statewide alliance for arts education. The director expanded his team to include an advocacy consultant who works on communications and coalition-building to complement the in-school collaborative residencies and teacher professional development opportunities. He also hired a parent involvement consultant to assist with advocacy to parents of students in the St. Louis Public Schools. These consultants have increased Interchange's advocacy and public engagement capacity, and they have already identified a concrete set of policy goals and corresponding strategy that they will implement over the next year.

Finding #1: Identifying clear and specific policy-change goals. The identification of a specific and clear arts education policy goal facilitates the development of effective and targeted advocacy and communications strategies. Many of the grantees initially defined their policy-change goals very broadly, without specific objectives and measures—for example, increasing district buy-in for arts education. In such cases, it has been difficult for the grantee to articulate concrete indicators of what such buy-in would look like, or the set of activities necessary to achieve it.

In cases where policy goals are clear—for example, mobilizing the district to pay for teacher professional development in the arts, or making the case for the need to hire more arts teachers to achieve equitable distribution of arts instruction—it has been

possible to develop detailed advocacy and strategic communications implementation plans and to track success.

Finding #2: Developing system-level data. Armed with data about the current state of arts education at the district level, sites can make convincing arguments about existing conditions and what needs to change. However, most sites have been challenged with collecting data about the current state of the policy goal they wish to address. Since they have not yet been able to access system-level information about arts education provisions in their school districts, sites have difficulty determining how much money the school district is currently spending on arts education, how many certified arts teachers are in the system, and which arts providers are working within schools and the extent of their engagement. Because sites do not have a baseline from which to assess their progress in changing these key systems indicators, their advocacy efforts are hampered. The challenges that sites face with regard to data collection are in part the result of lack of grantee and partnership research staffing, and in part a consequence of the general lack of availability of this information at the school district level.

The more advanced sites, which possess research capabilities, have been able to mount compelling and convincing arguments that have swayed local politicians to lobby for more arts in schools in their jurisdictions. Linking program distribution and socioeconomic data has proven to be particularly persuasive.

Finding #3: Parent engagement. To mobilize parents and family members as advocates, the most advanced sites, including Alameda and Dallas illustrated below, are creating hands-on arts engagement opportunities for parents and families. Three sites recognized that developing enduring parent arts advocacy could be facilitated by their direct engagement with the arts: being creators

of art rather than passive observers. This is particularly true for the many parents who did not have arts education when they were in school.

To more successfully engage parents, several of the sites are experimenting with reframing the definition and term “art” to better resonate with parents. One site in particular, in addition to engaging parents in arts immersion experiences, is defining arts more broadly to include a wider range of creative and lifestyle domains: the way people dress, decorate their homes, perform folk songs, and participate in generational story-telling. Making the arts and arts learning more accessible to diverse community members is reportedly beginning to unleash local arts engagement in its emerging community arts hubs and building a cadre of parent advocates.

Alameda: Connecting with existing parent groups

Early on, Alameda successfully mobilized parents to lobby online for the passage of a state mandate for arts education. Alameda has continued to mobilize this group, The Arts Active Parents, and recently developed the Arts Active Parents Leadership Council, a partnership that leverages the membership of existing parent organizations such as the Parent Education Resource Center and the 100 Families Project. These networks provide a membership base and infrastructure that can be tapped for program participation and advocacy. The Council allows Alameda to use its resources more strategically in areas such as communications work and partnership-building, rather than on replicating the efforts of existing parent organizations.

Dallas: Redefining “art” to culturally resonate with communities and families

Building parent support for arts was central to Big Thought’s Ford strategy. Early in the work, project leaders thought that prior to supporting arts as advocates, parents first had to experience and engage in the arts. Preliminary work focused on providing arts experiences to families in downtown and community arts institutions.

After a pilot, and further research, Big Thought realized that the families in their communities already had a wide array of arts talents, and rich cultural arts traditions. Big Thought changed its approach. Rather than define these experiences as arts, which were interpreted as “off putting” and identified with downtown institutions, the Big Thought team reframed these local art assets as community creativity resources. Big Thought began to harness local talents that are more resonant with their local communities’ backgrounds and interests. For example, a local Mariachi musician was tapped to provide music lessons to neighborhood children.

Also, to better understand the “arts” terminology that families preferred and why, Big Thought conducted research in 6 focus groups in 3 communities. There was a strong consensus across the six groups that “creative activities” was the most attractive language for describing the array of cultural activities’ children might do.

INTEGRATED ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

The scaling up of high-quality arts and education models is a hoped for long-term outcome of this initiative. Successful, high-quality arts and education pilots not only provide experiences for children, they also provide communities with a track record, program delivery expertise, and data for making the case to broaden community support for more expansive programming. Over the initiative’s first three years, sites have experienced some success with increasing the scale of their arts integration models. Early conversations about quality programming exist in about half the sites.

Finding #1: Increase of scale. District-level support has allowed all Ford sites to modestly increase the scale of their pilot arts education models. The most rapid expansion and scaling up of arts programs have taken place in the more advanced sites, where district-level leaders, including superintendents and curricu-

lum supervisors, are strong supporters of arts integration programming.

Finding # 2: Theory-based and comprehensive programming. Several sites are grounding their programs in quality, theory-based programming. Applying a theory-based framework (such as multiple intelligences or “habits of mind” theories that explore how children learn and interpret new information) ensures that the implemented arts education programs are based on the best teaching and learning practices. Cleveland provides an interesting example of how one site has worked to embed a theory-based arts education program within the district’s literacy curriculum.

Cleveland: Targeting third grade literacy through the arts

The Cleveland Integrated Arts Collaborative has developed a third grade integrated arts and literacy curriculum called Art Is Education. The curriculum offers a rigorous, standards-based model with the potential of being adopted district-wide. In developing the curriculum, CMSD teachers and teaching artists drew on the work of Project Zero at Harvard University to develop a research-based program that uses arts integration to develop literacy skills. In the spring of 2007, Cleveland successfully piloted the curriculum in nineteen third grade CMSD classrooms in fourteen schools. Prior to piloting, arts specialists, classroom teachers and teaching artists participated in significant professional development. Rather than scale up to all third grade classrooms in the 2007-08 school year as initially planned, the program was maintained at a more modest level due to changing District priorities.

Finding #3: Staffing and resource barriers. Other than will, the biggest factors inhibiting scaling up models continue to be adequate staffing and funding. Most of the sites have some arts specialists in schools who are often supplemented by visiting teaching artists. However, staffing is not suffi-

cient and continues to be stretched as programs are extended to additional classrooms. In some cases, when the model includes one-on-one arts coaches for classroom teachers, coaches are likewise stretched too thin. The Minneapolis example highlighted below showcases one approach to increasing school capacity for arts education.

Minneapolis: Relying on an expanded core of arts education coaches

Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA) was initiated in 1997 in the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) as a joint venture with the Perpich Center for Arts Education (PCAE), a state agency dedicated to excellence in arts education. Since 1997, AAA has facilitated high quality artist-teacher collaborations to create arts rich classrooms for students in MPS. Using a planning process developed from the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005), coaches support work with classroom teachers and artists. This established integrated arts education model promotes quality education through a community arts partnership model. Through the new Arts Reach project, AAA seeks to scale up the number of schools for integrated arts learning by providing increased numbers of coaches, focused resources for underserved schools to expand programming, and an advocacy strategy.

For the majority of the sites, the funding for the model arts integration programs is sufficient at the scale of a few pilot demonstration schools. Currently, it is not sufficient to scale up to schools throughout the districts. The exception, Dallas, is significant, because it shows what may be possible for other communities as they work toward initiative goals. Due to a robust infrastructure at the arts education broker in Dallas, a significant influx of funds from multiple national foundations, and policy-savvy leadership, Dallas has achieved district-wide goals, such as 45 minutes of music and 45 minutes of visual arts weekly for every elementary student.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Given the current state of limited

public commitment to arts education, the National Arts Education Initiative's focus on building public will is appropriate, timely, and very necessary. Supporting the arts education field locally and nationally in order to understand the critical role that communications and advocacy efforts play in influencing public and private policies provides a new and significant direction for the field. If discrete arts and education programs are ever to reach scale, learning how to influence these public and private policy decisions is essential.

As the nine sites continue to work on their advocacy campaigns and develop arts education programs that can be taken to scale, their lessons can inform and deepen the national conversation about what it takes for communities to build arts education systems. At the same time, the Ford-supported national strategic communications research and dissemination tactics can be applied and tested in various locales. As initiative participants and others reach beyond their base constituency to forge partnerships, public support of the arts as an important component of an educational improvement agenda is likely to increase.

The Ford Foundation's National Arts Education Initiative holds out a compelling vision for American education:

Across cities, students will have equitable access to quality arts programs; the majority of schools in the district will have adopted a rigorous arts integration curriculum across all grades; and schools will have the necessary infrastructure to support the implementation of the curriculum, including qualified arts teachers and teaching artists.

To be sure, there is much work to be done to achieve this vision. The National Arts Education Initiative offers a compelling road map for working toward this goal.

Author Note

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