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Extending the Reach of Arts Education

For decades, American children have had few opportunities for arts education in the nation's public schools. A combination of trends—from cuts resulting from state budget crises to changed priorities resulting from No Child Left Behind and other education reforms—has sharply reduced both the number of arts teaching positions and the time available during the school day for arts courses.

Some communities have responded by developing collaborative networks of organizations to pool resources and coordinate activities to make arts learning accessible to more children. A new report describing a recent RAND study commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination*, offers a close look at six sites where such collaborations have taken hold: Alameda County, California (which includes the cities of Oakland and Berkeley), Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles County, and New York City. Rather than evaluating the success of these still-young initiatives, the study concentrated on how they got started, what strategies they used, and what conditions helped (and hindered) them in moving toward their goals.

Patterns of Collaboration

The six communities have much in common. Most are very large urban centers with vibrant arts sectors and school systems serving largely minority students, many eligible for subsidized lunches. There are also wide disparities in access to arts education across schools in these areas. The leaders who initiated the collaborations believed that a network of organizations—such as schools, cultural institutions, community-based organizations, colleges, foundations, businesses, and government agencies—could do what single organizations could not: gain leverage against prevailing trends, improve access to arts education, and effectively advocate for change.

Local conditions and individual actors led to differences in the forms these collaborations

Abstract

For nearly 30 years, arts education has been a low priority in the nation's public schools. This report describes how six of America's urban areas—Alameda County in Northern California, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles County, and New York City—have attempted to create collaborative networks across schools, arts organizations, community-based organizations, government agencies, and funders to expand access to arts learning for children in and outside of school. Some of these efforts have made notable progress.

took—who assumed the lead, who became involved, and what goals they set. The study identified four distinct collaborative patterns among the six communities:

- **Alameda County** and **Los Angeles County** initiated network-building activities from county offices—the Alameda County Department of Education and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. Both sites have highly diverse participation and focus on providing in-school arts education for every child. Alameda primarily integrates arts learning; Los Angeles supports stand-alone and integrated arts learning.
- The **Boston** effort focuses on providing at-risk youth with out-of-school-time (OST) programs, including some arts programs. The emphasis on arts learning has come from local foundations and a mayor's office interested in reducing youth violence.
- The **Chicago** and **New York City** efforts are led or co-led by the local public school system's central office and focus on increasing sequential stand-alone arts courses in schools. A coalition of local foundations spearheaded the Chicago initiative; the schools undertook the work in New York at the urging of a foundation.

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- The **Dallas** effort, led by a community-based organization (Young Audiences, then ArtsPartners, now Big Thought), has the most extensive participation. Its goal has expanded from bringing integrated arts learning into all elementary schools to supporting both stand-alone arts education in those schools and OST arts programs.

Common Strategies

Despite these differences, the six sites adopted many of the same strategies to improve access to arts learning:

Conducting audits of arts education. Five sites conducted audits or surveys to assess the state of arts education in the schools and/or community. In all cases, the audits uncovered inequities, which helped galvanize support for the initiatives.

Setting a goal of access for all. Five sites set the goal of providing access for all within the school day, although some of them initially focused on children in elementary school.

Strategic planning. Five sites were in the midst of strategic planning, some of it funded by foundations.

Attracting and leveraging resources. Five sites developed innovative approaches to funding, including fund leveraging and pooling. In Los Angeles County, for example, 10 to 15 organizations contribute annually to a pooled fund created by Arts for All and meet quarterly to determine spending.

Hiring an arts education coordinator placed within the school district administration. Rather than hiring a teacher to serve as a part-time coordinator (the traditional approach), all sites either had or were attempting to secure a senior, full-time coordinator within the school systems' central offices to advocate for the arts and secure a place for them in the core curriculum.

Building individual and organizational capacity. All six sites were offering professional development to teachers and artists and developing the planning skills of principals and administrators.

Advocating. Because arts education has little policy support and few resources, all six sites supported advocacy with superintendents, principals, teachers, and OST coordinators on one hand and with parents and local and state policymakers on the other.

Although access was site leaders' first priority, they also developed strategies to improve the quality of arts learning—including aligning curriculum with state standards, develop-

ing curriculum supports, building individual and organizational capacity, and developing a process for qualifying external providers.

Also identified in the study were factors that fostered coordination, such as seed money to get community-wide efforts going and to fund the time needed for frequent communications, progress assessment, and planning. The most important of these factors, however, turned out to be strong leaders who have exceptional management skills, welcome participants with different viewpoints and interests, and are committed to staying the course. Factors that impeded coordination were, not surprisingly, lack of resources for planning, turnover of key leaders, and policies prioritizing subjects other than the arts.

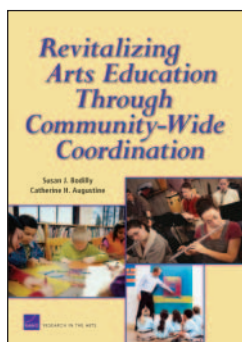
Progress to Date

Three of the sites, Alameda and Los Angeles counties and Dallas, had functioning collaborative networks within five years of launch. In Alameda County, after eight years, over 70 percent of the school districts are involved in the Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership. In Los Angeles County, after six years, over one-third of the 80 school districts are in Arts for All. In Dallas, after 10 years, all elementary students are experiencing integrated arts learning, and there are plans to hire 140 new arts specialists in elementary schools.

In Boston, where citywide coordination is still lacking, slots in OST programs have doubled in the last several years, and some of the slots are dedicated to arts learning.

The Chicago and New York City collaborations are nascent and have made less headway. In Chicago, a consortium of foundations helped fund the appointment of a Chief of the Fine Arts in 2006. During the study, little citywide collaboration among diverse stakeholders had yet developed. In New York City, collaborative efforts begun in 2005 had stalled, partly because of a decision to shift from more-centralized to site-based management and remove funding intended exclusively for arts education.

All of these collaborations are relatively fragile—vulnerable to changes in policy, politics, and leadership, and hampered by persistent shortages of resources and time in the school day. But the study shows that despite these obstacles, communities able to achieve sustained coordination across diverse organizations can make notable progress in improving access to arts learning. ■



This research brief describes work done for RAND Education and documented in *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination*, by Susan J. Bodilly and Catherine H. Augustine with Laura Zakaras, MG-702-WF, 2008, 108 pp., \$20, ISBN: 978-0-8330-4306-1 (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG702/>). The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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