

MAY 1999

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS

MONOGRAPHS

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1

ALLIES, ARGUMENTS AND ACTIONS

MAKING A CASE FOR ARTS EDUCATION ADVOCACY

Edited by Benjamin Davidson
Information Services Coordinator, Americans for the Arts

This special double-issue of Monographs begins with an overview of the state of arts education advocacy—the issues, challenges and opportunities—and is followed by three case studies on effective advocacy strategies for affecting arts education policy.

In recent years, significant progress has been made in the areas of research, programming and policy development that helps us to make the case for restoring and strengthening arts education in schools across America. To realize the goal of an arts education for every American child, broad segments of the community—parents, civic and business leaders, elected officials, funders, educators and others—must be mobilized into action.

INTRODUCTION

By Dick Deasy
Director, Arts Education Partnership

It's a good time to be an advocate for arts education. Our allies are increasing, our arguments are getting stronger and there are hopeful signs that the public is realizing the benefits of arts learning for children and students. We can capitalize on these opportunities with a clear and compelling message that defines what students learn when they learn the arts and how that form of literacy is crucial to their success in school, life and work. We need to communicate our message to key audiences, including policy makers at the local, state and national levels. Coordinated efforts among influential segments of the education, arts, business and civic communities are essential. Partnership is our pathway to success.

ALLIES

Most prominent among our allies is First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. At a White House ceremony in September 1998 recognizing and honoring the crucial role of partnerships, Mrs. Clinton issued a

This special double-issue of *Monographs* is made possible in part by a grant from The Gund Foundation.

call to action to restore arts education in every school in America. She speaks eloquently of the role of the arts in the lives of young children and students and stresses in particular the benefits of arts education for children at risk. Mrs. Clinton chose personally to release the new report produced by the Arts Education Partnership in conjunction with the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities called *Gaining the Arts Advantage: Lessons from School Districts that Value the Arts*. In releasing the report at a national press event in New York City in March 1999,

New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani created a \$75 million line item in the city budget to support the hiring of arts teachers in schools. This is one of the most dramatic signs of awareness by local leaders that the arts have multiple values for their children and their communities.

the First Lady challenged the nation's school boards and school administrators to use its lessons to strengthen arts education throughout the country.

Both U. S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman William Ivey are equally supportive. Secretary Riley has called the lack of adequate arts education in the nation's schools "inexcusable". Chairman Ivey has made arts education one of the major goals of the NEA's new strategic plan. In his "Challenge America" proposal to Congress for increasing the NEA budget, he makes arts education one of the key targets for the new money.

National education associations are promoting the importance of the arts to their members:

- ★ The National Association of Elementary School Principals made arts education one of the major strands of its recent annual convention and devoted an issue of *Principal* magazine to the topic in 1998.
- ★ Its counterpart, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, made education in the arts one of the core components in the recommenda-

tions for *Breaking Ranks*, its blueprint for the high schools of the future.

- ★ The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is devoting an upcoming issue of its magazine to the alternate forms of literacy that should be taught to all students, including arts literacy.
- ★ The National School Boards Association has actively promoted the importance of the arts assessment results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

All of these organizations—including the two national teachers' unions—are active in the Arts Education Partnership, which itself is housed at the Council of Chief State School Officers, the association of the heads of state departments of education.

This support at the federal and national level is a strong sign that interest in arts education is alive among education policy makers and administrators—the key partners that advocates must have if we are to restore the arts to schools. Positive signs also can be seen at the state level. Forty-seven states have adopted curriculum frameworks or standards for the arts, and those adding the arts as a graduation requirement for high school are growing. New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani created a \$75 million line item in the city budget to support the hiring of arts teachers in schools. This is one of the most dramatic signs of awareness by local leaders that the arts have multiple values for their children and their communities.

ARGUMENTS

At the same time that we take delight in these national commitments and movements, we see the enormous pressures placed on school leaders by legislative bodies and the media to demonstrate improvement in student performance with accountability systems and assessments that focus primarily on reading and math achievement. Advocates need to empathize with these pressures on school leaders and recognize that verbal and mathematical knowledge and skills are important forms of literacy. There are good examples of well-conceived and implemented interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate arts learning in schools where student

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achievement in reading and mathematics is better than counterpart schools lacking a strong arts component. But we should not justify arts education only as it contributes to student learning in these other areas. We need to argue forcefully for the unique and critical role the arts play in the learning and development of every student.

Therefore, in making their case, advocates need continually to reflect on, and develop compelling answers to, two fundamental questions:

1. What do students learn when they learn the arts?
2. Why is this important?

Valuable work is being done to give us the concepts and language to answer the first question. We are helped by the media attention on research into the development of the brain, coupled with popular discussions of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, that have made the public as well as policy makers increasingly aware that we learn and communicate in a variety of modes and forms. Both the public and policy makers are receptive to the idea that there are various forms of literacy that enable us to comprehend and manage the world around us. The forms of representation and production found in the arts constitute one such form of literacy.

Advocates should focus on this unique literacy and develop a vocabulary for discussing it with parents and policy makers. A solid place to begin is with the arts education documents and reports developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This report was designed to measure students' ability to "respond to, perform and create original works of art." Responding competently requires the student to use the specific knowledge and skills of each art form to analyze and interpret the meaning found in visual images, music, dance and drama. Creating requires bringing this competence as well as the skills of production to bear in imagining and making an original work that communicates complex ideas and feelings. In performing, the student must comprehend the intentions of the original composer or dramatist, empathize with their intentions and recreate the work they designed. Discussing these



Kelvin Vargus from PS 20 in New York City plays the recorder.

processes in the language developed by arts educators for the NAEP assessments clarifies for the public "what students learn when they learn the arts." The straightforward terms can be used to make clear the intellectual depth, rigor and challenge of arts learning. These terms help us to say what we mean by "arts literacy."

Another set of descriptions for this learning is being developed by the researchers whose work has been supported by the GE Fund and The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and that will be published in 1999 under the title *"Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning."* In this work, one team of researchers at Columbia University has developed an analysis of arts learning and its relationship to learning in other areas that will be very helpful in demonstrating the need for arts in the core curriculum. Already available is a wonderful article in the January 1997 issue of the *Kappan* magazine in which the well-known Stanford scholar Elliot Eisner discusses the different forms of representation found in the arts and their role in the development of the mind.

Advocates need to study these formulations of the unique learning in the arts so that they see the relationship between this specific learning and the more general habits of mind called "problem solving," "higher order thinking" and the like, that are nurtured by the arts but are not unique to them. We are then on more solid ground in arguing for the unique importance of arts learning and literacy for every student, as well as for the interrelationship of this learning to other important subjects in the curriculum.

But the job is not done with that. We still need to argue that what students learn in the arts is important in ways that are valued by the public, parents and policy makers. Though we might wish it otherwise, subjects taught in American schools are there because the public thinks they are useful in addressing social purposes rather than because they are intrinsically worthwhile.

Again, we have made good progress in clarifying our message on this front:

- ★ We have argued that arts learning is important for student success in school. As noted above, we need to make this argument in a more complex and careful manner than is sometimes done. But we need to make it.
- ★ In addition to academic success, we can point to evidence that the arts engage and motivate students and that arts participation correlates with higher attendance rates. These are not minor matters to parents who look to schools to help them in raising children with discipline and stick-to-itiveness.

We should continue to demonstrate that careers in today's economy call on the specific skills learned in the arts and the habits and dispositions that the arts foster. Secretary Riley often quotes Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, who says that we now have "an economy of ideas." Riley points out that ideas are fostered by an imaginative and bold approach to challenging problems and conditions—dispositions certainly nurtured by the arts.

A key social value that we need to address more often is the role of the arts in building and sustaining communities. The crucial finding in *Gaining the Arts Advantage*, the report of the Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee mentioned earlier, is that arts education only thrives when influential segments of the community agree that it is an essential ingredient in their schools. But the reason the community comes to this view is not only because of the academic value to students. It is because the community knows from experience that the arts are crucial forms of bonding and communication among students, faculty, parents, administrators and institutions of the community. They are the forms in which a community understands and

celebrates itself, and in so doing deepens its communal values and beliefs. Advocates should not be shy in making this argument, nor in embracing it as a tactic in dealing with schools and policy makers.

ACTIONS

This issue of *Monographs* looks at several communities where advocacy for arts education has succeeded in affecting educational policy. Central to success in each case is a collaborative effort. This should come as no surprise. Partnerships and collaborations are essential if we are to signal to school decision-makers that the *community* wants arts education for its children. Otherwise school leaders will adopt narrower definitions of the school curriculum, narrower definitions of student learning and more narrowly focused systems of accountability in order to respond to those voices that demand only the so-called "basic" approaches. Arts advocates must function in partnerships and collaborative efforts and seek to encompass multiple segments of the community so that they can both represent and argue the value of the arts in their communities and in their schools.

TEN STEPS TO DEVELOP YOUR ADVOCACY HABIT

1. **Be informed.** Get information on the issues (even the name and number of the legislation). Join your state's arts advocacy group or national service organizations to become informed about the issues.
2. **Find out who your representatives are at the federal, state and local levels.** Your state League of Women Voters can provide you with their contact information. Maintain a contact log so you can document your progress with them.
3. **Put your legislators on your mailing lists; ask to be put on theirs.** Mutual awareness of what you each care about is essential to building a strong relationship.
4. **Share your success stories.** Ask them to distribute brochures about your program at their office. Let them be active in helping to promote you.
5. **Send a poster or photograph for their office.** Visual reminders help reinforce their awareness—especially if the picture is of them at one of your events. (Always check with the office manager first because there may be legal limitations or ethical issues involved in accepting gifts).
6. **Openly credit your public funding sources.** Placards in the lobby, credits in programs and press

For more information about the Arts Education Partnership, contact Dick Deasy (202.336.7065) or Sara Goldhawk (202.336.7028); <http://aep-arts.org>.

MODELS OF EFFECTIVELY ADVOCATING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The following are descriptions of three arts education advocacy efforts. In Sarasota, Florida, the local arts agency has partnered with the business community, the school board and others to reinstate arts teachers and recreate their role in the schools. The Annenberg Arts Challenge, taking place in several communities across the country, is effectively engaging once disinterested students in the study of not only the arts and culture, but in math and science as well. Finally, in Oklahoma over 35 business leaders have partnered with the state arts council and the state chamber of commerce to raise awareness of the importance of the arts in the core curriculum. All three have succeeded in promoting the arts as a critical component in any education.

releases in newspapers are all tools that take little time to create, but make an enormous impact.

7. Say thank you—a lot! If you don't have time to write, make a call. Never let them forget that you are out there.

8. Create visibility for your legislator. Explore creative options for your legislator to get positive exposure in his/her district through your venue.

9. Act regularly and promptly. Make a commitment to do what you are able to do, no matter how small it may seem. Start believing that a single voice can make a difference.

10. Activate. Find others to join you in delivering your message. A school principal brings additional credibility to the case for arts in the schools. Make advocacy part of everyone's job description (board, staff, and volunteers) because everyone has a role to play.

Do you need a more complete guide to making advocacy a habit? Americans for the Arts devoted an entire monograph to the topic in February 1997.

Making Advocacy a Habit is available for purchase by contacting Americans for the Arts' publications office (800.321.4510, ext. 241).

REVERSING THE FLOW: SARASOTA GOES FROM CUTS TO COMMITMENT IN ARTS EDUCATION

By Bruce E. Rodgers
Associate Artistic Director, Asolo Theatre Company

The Sarasota County (FL) school district, like many across America, found itself struggling to balance its budget. Their solution, again like many districts, was to cut costs by eliminating staff positions in the arts.

One year later, through the community's well-planned efforts and without any new funding, a successful advocacy campaign had reversed the draining of music and visual art education from the elementary and middle schools. In light of so many American school districts

People move to Sarasota for the abundance of cultural activities. Indeed, on a per capita basis, it is one of the most culturally active communities in the country. How could our educational system be so out of line with the community's values?

headed in the wrong direction with arts education, the Sarasota County Arts Council has isolated the key factors to their success:

- ★ They shifted from a negative, defensive posture to a positive, creative point of view.
- ★ They articulated a clear, consistent, well-considered "message" that showed the relationship of arts education to community values and student learning.
- ★ They expanded the issue beyond the arts community to the community at large. They made it a community issue, not an arts issue.
- ★ Sarasota's professional arts organizations used their full power to gather community support.
- ★ They worked continuously for media coverage.
- ★ From the beginning, the arts council offered a "partnering" relationship, not an adversarial relationship with the school board.
- ★ They had good luck (an important component of just about any "success").

As events began proceeding down this all-too-familiar path, the Arts Education Task Force of the Sarasota County Arts Council (consisting of the education directors of the county's visual and performing arts institutions) launched into a textbook example of advocacy. The Task Force organized workshops for the school board, lobbied one-on-one with the superintendent and others from the district administration, assembled large delegations of citizens to speak at school board meetings, ran a full-page newspaper ad and generally gathered as many arts education advocates as possible.

In one early summer meeting of the Task Force, the defensive battle was declared lost as it was reported that the school board had voted to eliminate music and visual arts specialists from elementary and middle schools (except, of course, for band). In their place, classroom teachers were to be responsible for teaching the arts curriculum with the aid of eight "consultants," music and visual arts specialists who were to somehow help the classroom teachers with their additional assignment.

As we sat in this meeting, those of us in the professional arts community in Sarasota were incredulous. This county of a little over a quarter-million people is home to a major professional theater and three other Equity theatres; the state museum of Florida; a major opera company; a professional symphony; a professional ballet company; a world class chamber music festival; a nationally-significant summer music festival and a very active performing arts hall. People move here for the abundance of cultural activities. Indeed, on a per capita basis, it is one of the most culturally active communities in the country. How could our educational system be so out of line with the community's values?

Then, as we sat in the meeting, from the despair at our seemingly ineffectual defensive campaign to stem the loss, came a series of new thoughts.

- ★ What do we want to make?
- ★ How can we take more control of our future, instead of reacting to the decisions of others?

It was time to re-frame our thinking from "how to stop a loss" to "how to initiate a gain?" In a matter of minutes, the arts council's Task Force began to envision

an advocacy plan to create a new arts education program, not reinstate the old one. It was this subtle shift in point of view and attitude which, in retrospect, formed the pivotal moment.

As we turned our thinking from a negative defensive posture to a positive creative posture, new energy and ideas swept through the meeting. We, the professional arts organizations, had enormous untapped resources. We had access to audiences (voters) in huge numbers, an army of volunteers (workers/ proselytizers) and trustees (power and influence). In addition, we had access to media with whom we had regular interaction.

We began by asking some important questions:

- ★ Who would the school board listen to?
- ★ Who could they not ignore?
- ★ Who would impress them?
- ★ What would it take to get the school board to see the advantage of a world class arts education program that they could afford?

We decided to focus on three specific groups: parents, the business community and the education community.

We developed a clear message. "Our Message" was an articulation of our beliefs regarding arts education and its place in the complete education of our students. Another version of the message was titled "To the Business Community." We also agreed that as arts organizations we would each repeat the mantra that community arts education programs supplemented but did not provide the sequential curriculum that is the basis for student learning in the arts.

This became a very important component of our success because it created a clear message to the school district that it was their responsibility to provide qualified, certified teachers to deliver sequential curriculum. The arts organizations were willing to help the district find a solution, but not to be the solution.

To reach both parents and the business leaders, the arts council organized a campaign to have the message "ratified" by as many significant community groups and organizations as possible.

Arts council spokespeople fanned out to board meetings and the "rubber chicken service organization circuit" to

express our message and develop enthusiasm for our vision of arts education. The arts council also organized a group of prominent business, civic, social service and arts leaders into a coalition that endorsed our message. Participants included the chambers of commerce and a powerful local business group.

To keep awareness before the public, an effective poster was developed by a parent group and drawn by a child. Organizations donated space in their programs and hung it in lobbies. Local movie theatres agreed to project a slide-version of the poster between showings. And volunteers placed the poster in store windows throughout the community.

Every arts group signed up to do something on their site. In an effective demonstration, the Florida West Coast Symphony began a concert by inviting any musician who had begun his musical training through the public school system to leave the stage. The three musicians remaining on the stage spoke volumes about the problem. The music director's plea for his audience's support generated many letters to school board members. In general, our strategy was to educate our target groups through a variety of opportunities, and then enlist their support.

As we worked on consolidating our message and approaching our broader community to share our vision of arts education, a new group of concerned parents formed a citizen's action committee dedicated to returning the music and visual arts teachers to the classroom. This committee was highly effective at reaching parents willing to stage vocal demonstrations at school board meetings, create rallies downtown and generally create enough noise to get significant media coverage. They even printed bumper stickers that the council helped distribute.

By strategy, the arts council chose to offer this group background moral support and share information, but decided to not join with them publicly. We felt that the district might view us as the more "reasonable" alternative, and we later learned that in fact this became a real factor in our success. When the school board did finally decide it wanted to make a change, the parents committee almost literally "herded" them into our more calm and comfortable arms.

Complementing all this community education and awareness work were a series of meetings with each member of the school board plus the assistant superintendents. As part of our positive focus-on-the-future strategy we assiduously avoided criticism or blame for the board's actions for eliminating the arts. One particular meeting brought about a dramatic turnabout of a school board member who had been quite comfortable with the action to remove the specialist teachers.

Set in the office of Arts Council Executive Director Patricia Caswell, the board member was gently surrounded by two other representatives from the arts council. Discussion proceeded with polite pressure from the arts representatives until our member admitted that he just didn't believe that arts education was as important as math or reading.

The Florida West Coast Symphony began a concert by inviting any musician who had begun his musical training through the public school system to leave the stage. The three musicians who remained spoke volumes about the problem.

"Why?" we asked. "Because," he replied, "it doesn't help our students get a job when they get out of school. I enjoy playing music when I come home from work, it helps me relax, but it isn't the same as math or reading."

Bingo! We had him. At that moment we realized that his image of arts education was vastly different than ours.

"Ah, when we're talking about arts education, we don't mean just reinstating teachers and a return to the old programs. We're talking about creating something new and better for the future." We played a video of Dr. Arnold Packer who headed the SCANS commission dealing with employability skills in the 21st century.

In the tape Dr. Packer states that the arts are one of the most important exposures students may have for employability and suggests that in fact they are perhaps more relevant than trigonometry. He explains that business people attest that they are called upon to make aesthetic judgments almost every day but rarely use trigonometry.

After the video, we pulled out our research correlating arts education with student performance, with reading skills, with SAT scores, and we watched the light go on. Finally, we made it clear that the arts community was looking to partner with the school district. We were willing to help solve the problem—not just talk about it from the outside. To our amazement he asked how he could help. A few days later he signed up for the coalition.

The final pieces of the puzzle came together simply through luck. Three new players came into the mix, which helped facilitate the next steps. First, disconnected from all this controversy, the superintendent of schools left the district for another position. Second, the presidency of the school board changed. And third, a new superintendent, Dr. Thomas Gaul was hired.

With the departure of the previous superintendent and the appointment of an interim superintendent came the first approach by the school district to the arts council. The pressure from the community and the general failure of the “consultant” plan stimulated the change of heart. A small representative committee from the community met with the interim superintendent and discussed the possibility of putting music and art teachers back into the middle schools.

However, the final piece fell into place with the appointment of Dr. Gaul as the new superintendent. As he explained it, it was clear that a community as committed to the arts and culture as is Sarasota, must reflect those values in its schools. And perhaps this was our strongest asset all along.

A strong arts education program is consistent with our community identity. It is most particularly the right thing in our community. And it was extraordinarily rewarding to see Dr. Gaul stand up before an audience of thousands on Sarasota’s Arts Day and pledge publicly to bring a world class arts education program to Sarasota County schools. Interestingly, we had contended all along that this was first and foremost an issue of priorities and only secondly a budget issue. With new leadership whose priorities were different a way was found to return art and music teachers to each school.

THE SEQUEL: ARTS COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT CREATE A NEW WORKING RELATIONSHIP

By Bruce E. Rodgers, Associate Artistic Director, Asolo Theatre Company and Ann Wykell, Assistant Director, Sarasota County Arts Council

There are more art, music, drama and dance teachers in the Sarasota school system today than before the cuts. There are more course offerings in the arts in middle and high schools than before. All with a lack of any new funding (which has created a new set of difficulties). How did this happen?

VISION

Be careful what you ask for; you may get it. We got it. The arts community based its advocacy on our desire to be *part* of the solution, not *the* solution. The superintendent formalized our ad hoc group as a joint committee to envision, plan and implement the development of arts education in our district. We named it the Community/Schools Partnership for the Arts (C/SPA). And the meetings began. We were invited to use our creativity and resources as a community to go into new and uncharted territory. Now we found ourselves working as partners with the school district, having to adapt to their environment and culture. We had to learn to work with and through them, rather than advocate (and agitate) from the outside.

We felt like an expeditionary party about to trek across an unexplored continent without maps and with teammates who we did not really know or fully trust. However, the undeniable fact was—we were setting off together.

During C/SPA’s first “*Getting To Know You*” year we developed our shared vision for the “world class” arts education program we wanted to create. This visioning process was key to the development of our working relationships. Not only did it define an exciting educational universe we all wanted to see happen, but by making something together, by sharing our own concepts and dreams, we began understanding and respecting the challenges and agendas of working within a school system. And the school district began discovering that we

were a fun group of people to work with. Because the community members had worked so closely in the advocacy, we brought a collaborative spirit to the process that the district found refreshing and exciting.

LEADERSHIP

During the first year, we realized that our goal was to change the perception of arts education in the district at all levels through leadership. We attacked this on two levels: at central administration with the re-establishment of a fine arts coordinator and in the schools with a concerted educational/advocacy effort for principals.

It was clear to the community that one of the reasons our arts programs could be cut was because there was no leader-advocate working within the school administration. Therefore, re-establishing a fine arts coordinator position became a priority. The district found they needed this position since it was clear that C/SPA was generating more work than the curriculum department could handle with present staff. How to pay for it?

This was one of the first opportunities to demonstrate the power of our partnership. In the spirit of the community/school collaboration we had created, the Community Foundation of Sarasota and the school district agreed to joint funding of this position over three years. Without C/SPA this would never have happened.

Since our district runs with a fairly high degree of decentralization, the continuous development we were envisioning could not happen without the commitment of the principals. We asked what would it take to convince these school leaders to listen—their boss. We made (and continue to make) a series of presentations to the principals *with the superintendent and/or assistant superintendent of instruction* (with direct supervision over principals) present. The message was clearly coming from the top.

Contrary to the impression we may have created, the stated priorities of the Sarasota County School District are reading and math. But Sarasota is a community that identifies itself by the intensity of its cultural life. C/SPA affords the district the opportunity to align the cultural values of the community with the programs it offers in the schools. And it gives them a way to envision and



create something better because they now have access to the creative thinking and knowledge base of the community people working with them on a regular basis.

RELATIONSHIP

Relationship, relationship, relationship. The positive, trusting affiliation that has evolved throughout this process is the engine of change and will power us through the inevitable ups and downs of funding. This, we believe, is the key to continuity and influence in a community. It does not come without a price. It asks for a long-term commitment from the community, patience to work at the bureaucratic pace of a school district and a willingness to postpone short-term, individual agendas for long-term, big picture success.

This poster—designed by parents and drawn by a child—was hung in lobbies and store windows. In addition, movie theaters projected a slide version of the poster between showings.

Sarasota's arts organizations included this notice in programs and brochures for their educational programs.

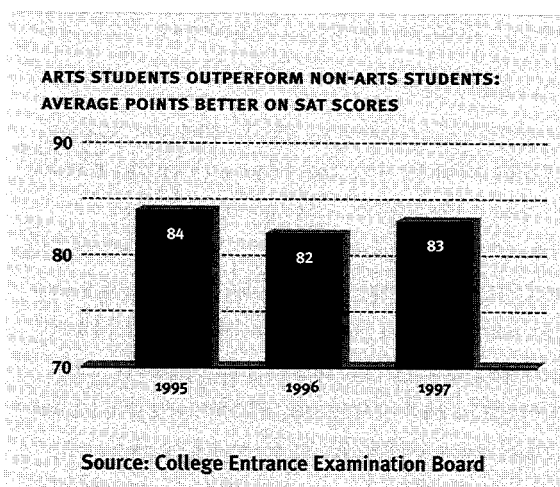
Parents Please Note!

This is an enrichment program provided by your local community arts organization. It does not replace sequential, hands-on arts classes taught by certified arts teachers. These classes are the foundation of a complete education that includes the arts.

CONCLUSION

In January of this year the superintendent who had been instrumental in establishing the C/SPA partnership left our district. Despite this loss, our plans continue to move forward. The transition has afforded us more opportunities to communicate directly with the school board. C/SPA completed its Long-Range Plan for Arts Education and presented it to the school board, which endorsed its goals. Subcommittees of C/SPA and working groups are beginning to implement pieces of the long-range plan. There will be more opportunities for students to learn and experience the arts in Sarasota as early as next year. The arts community has been invited to participate in the superintendent search process, along with other key community constituents. Arts groups are more focused on the needs of the school district and the objectives of the C/SPA Plan as they develop their own programs.

Data from the College Entrance Examination Board show that students who take four years or more of arts and music classes while in high school score better on their SAT than students who took only one-half year or less.



For more information about the efforts of the Community/Schools Partnership for the Arts, contact Ann Wykell, Assistant Director, Sarasota County Arts Council (941-365-5118); www.sarasota-arts.org.

CAN THE ARTS HELP CHANGE THE SYSTEM? ANNEBERG'S CHALLENGE SAYS "YES"

By Kathleen Cushman
Senior Associate, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Can schools, like people, transform themselves through the arts? This question goes to the heart of the three broad-based arts projects funded by the Annenberg Arts Challenge: one in New York City, one in Minneapolis and one that links six sites nationwide in a consortium jointly funded by Annenberg and the Getty Education Institute for the Arts.

With a combined total of \$20 million in funds from Ambassador Walter Annenberg, each project approaches the question differently. Yet they all share the philosophy that the arts in particular can act as a special kind of change agent for a community's schools, crossing organizational boundaries and intervening at critical points both up and down the educational system.

★ In New York City, 61 schools in all five boroughs—bolstered by a hefty boost in city funding that arose from the Annenberg gift—have partnered with arts organizations to help bring students closer to the learning outcomes they hold dear. “First we ask what makes a good education,” says director Hollis Headrick. “Then we ask how our city, this motherlode of culture in which we sit, can help us get there.”

★ In Minnesota, a state agency has teamed up with a major urban district's reform effort to create a coherent policy environment, which treats the arts as not only a vital part of other academic subjects but a core learning area itself, complete with standards-based assessments. “We know we can do this at the classroom level,” says David O'Fallon, who directs the state effort. “Now we aim

to learn from Minneapolis how to align our whole system so it connects the arts with academic achievement.”

★ The third project, known as the Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC), has grown out of a decade of Getty-funded “discipline-based arts education.” It asks 36 demonstration schools from six regions to infuse arts appreciation, history, analysis and creation into the broader curriculum, as a means to change the whole school’s way of teaching and learning.

When a school takes the arts seriously as a lever for change, the ground may shift beneath some of its long-held institutional stances. Schools that have used Annenberg Arts Challenge funds specifically to spark improvement in reading, writing and math swear by the approach, saying that students’ skills and motivation make observable leaps, sometimes corroborated and rarely contradicted by their standardized test scores. But just as significant, Arts Challenge schools immersed in the arts are beginning to experience powerful outcomes perhaps possible only through this path:

- ★ Teachers of every subject are learning to identify and nurture the artistic potential of students they once regarded as without much aptitude for learning.
- ★ By working directly with local artists, students and teachers both are awakening to a new sense of the vital shared purposes of schools and their communities.
- ★ In the classroom, teachers can now describe and assess the expressive sand paintings of third graders inspired by Picasso’s work in the museum down the street.
- ★ Teachers are registering the intellectual excitement of once bored high school students as they translate great themes from literature or central concepts of physics into dance, drama, music or art.

Whatever their affiliation or philosophy, the Annenberg Arts Challenge projects have had to ground their work in a firm understanding of why their schools teach the arts and to whom. Where once the arts were seen as a frill or specialty for those with special talents, cognitive research has now called national attention to the power of music, visual art, dance and drama to help all children make sense of ideas and of their world.

The \$20 million dedicated to the Annenberg Arts Challenge is part of Ambassador Walter Annenberg’s \$500 million challenge to the nation. Founded in 1994, the national Challenge combined Annenberg’s idealistic belief in America’s democratic obligation to educate all children well with a practical plan that would galvanize communities to take the necessary tough political steps to do so. The Annenberg Challenge proposes that change works best when it grows out of local needs, with local solutions and local partnerships to carry it out.

ARTS INVOLVEMENT = SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Longitudinal data of 25,000 students reveal how involvement in the arts is linked to higher academic performance, increased standardized test scores, more community service and lower drop-out rates. These cognitive and developmental benefits are reaped by students regardless of their socioeconomic status (SES).

Want more detail about this research study? Americans for the Arts devoted an entire monograph to this topic. Involvement in *The Arts and Success in Secondary School* is available by contacting Americans for the Arts’ publications office (800.321.4510, ext. 241).

| | ALL STUDENTS | | STUDENTS IN LOWEST AES QUARTILE | |
|---|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| | ARTS INVOLVEMENT High | Low | ARTS INVOLVEMENT High | Low |
| Earn mostly As and Bs in English | 79.2% | 64.2% | 64.5% | 56.4% |
| Score in top 2 quartiles on standardized tests | 66.8% | 42.7% | 29.5% | 24.5% |
| Score in top 2 quartiles in reading proficiency | 66.5% | 43.1% | 43.8% | 28.4% |
| Drop out of school by grade 10 | 1.4% | 4.8% | 6.5% | 9.4% |
| Rarely perform community service | 65.2% | 86.0% | 65.2% | 86.0% |
| Watch 1 hour or less TV on weekdays | 28.2% | 15.1% | 16.4% | 13.3% |
| Watch 2 hours or more TV on weekdays | 20.6% | 34.9% | 33.6% | 42.0% |

Source: Dr. James S. Catterall, Graduate School of Graduate Education and Information Studies, UCLA

Andreina Alvaraz paints a watercolor picture at PS 20 in New York City.



The arts are equally powerful in drawing a school together to reshape its learning goals and strategies. Most Arts Challenge schools identified early on how the arts can help meet the needs of the diverse student populations they serve. When large numbers of students come from homes where English is not spoken, music, dance, visual art and theater can break through that barrier to expression and nurture language acquisition as well.

Rather than casting the arts as elective “extras,” Arts Challenge schools aim to infuse them into the general curriculum, coaching teachers in all subject areas to ask different kinds of questions and expect different kinds of products. In summer institutes and special workshops, teachers across all three projects have teamed with outside artists and with arts specialists in their schools, developing new ways to explore the ideas at the heart of their disciplines.

Physics teacher Kim McGreevy at Woodland High School in California’s Sacramento Valley, for instance, used the painting “Crucifixion (Hypercube)” by Salvador Dali in a unit called “Disrupting Reality,” about the history and development of theories of gravity. Since she started bringing in ideas from TETAC’s summer institutes at the nearby Crocker Art Museum, McGreevy notices that enrollment and engagement in her classes has gone up among students whose “ways of knowing” did not fit neatly into the verbal and mathematical domains that dominate schools.

Brooklyn’s Waverly School for the Arts saturates its curriculum for kindergarten through fifth grade with dance, movement and visual arts through four Annenberg-funded partnerships with arts organizations. With a cross-disciplinary focus on many world cultures, children (and often their parents) visited museums, attended performances, created original pieces, read related materials and wrote continuously.

“This was a 100 percent increase in the amount of arts instruction,” observed principal Martha Rodriguez Torres; “at the same time we reduced time spent on test sophistication.” Yet scores increased across the board on reading, writing, listening, speaking and literacy skills, as measured by school, district and citywide tests.

Reading specialist Ginni Grossenbacher at the Smedberg Middle and Sheldon High Schools in California saw ninth- and tenth-graders’ reading comprehension and vocabulary scores rise an average of five to eight percentile points after she began using visual art as a focal point. “It hooks them,” she declares, “especially the students who have not succeeded with other approaches.”

Although results like these are showing up in a growing body of research on the effects of arts in education, they don’t happen without tremendous effort on the part of classroom teachers to re-orient their attitudes and their habits of teaching.

Just as artists do in their own work, these teachers are taking new risks—using time and grouping students differently, trying new approaches—to discover and use the artistic skills and abilities within students. And though that may feel awkward at first, it ties right in with the kinds of inquiring, student-centered, collaborative learning the Arts Challenge intends to provoke across the spectrum of public schools.

By opening their classrooms to the arts, teachers stretch their capacity to connect with every student and expand their collaborations with the world outside the school. The Arts Challenge rests on the theory that if schools succeed in making such fundamental improvements, all the other aspects of schooling will shift for the better as a result.

As classroom teachers in almost all the Arts Challenge schools begin to work more with outside artists and cultural organizations, they must also find ways to bridge what are often very different worlds. This entails both sides learning to trust and respect each other's contribution, as well as a clear understanding of each partner's different role.

One successful technique gets artists and teachers together early in any collaboration to go over their hopes and goals for student learning, identify common areas and make a joint plan for achieving them. "Music and storytelling tie in beautifully with the first grade curriculum," said one New York teacher after one such session. Teachers get the chance to try out arts activities themselves, experiencing how it feels to learn in different artistic "languages."

Joint planning beforehand also helps teachers know how they can maximize students' learning through arts activities that partnerships bring to the school. At PS 144 in Queens, New York, a monthly review and planning session takes place in the school library, including three teachers who coordinate the arts project, all five partner cultural organizations, the principal and rotating groups of other teachers. "These meetings generated new ideas from everyone," the group reported. "Teachers felt a real sense of ownership as they were consulted on choices affecting their students."

For more information on the Annenberg Challenge, contact Lisa Rowley, Annenberg Institute for School Reform (401-863-3220); www.aisr.brown.edu/challenge.

**OKLAHOMA BUSINESS CIRCLE FOR
ARTS EDUCATION
ARTS AT THE CORE OF LEARNING
1999 INITIATIVE**

**By Ken Ferguson, Chairman, Oklahoma Business Circle
for Arts Education and Paulette Black, Arts Education
Director, Oklahoma Arts Council**

In 1990, the Oklahoma Legislature added the arts to the core curriculum in landmark education reform legislation. In subsequent legislation, the arts were

added to the Oklahoma Testing Program, and all students in grades 5, 8 and 11 were to be assessed in both visual art and general music beginning in the spring of 1999. Schools have struggled to implement arts instruction for all students—citing limited resources, funding, staffing and class time as primary obstacles.

An early observation made by arts and education leaders in the state is that public perception at least partially keeps the arts in an "elective" position. This approach to the arts is typically limited to exposure only when convenient or as an optional class for talented students, but not as an essential component in the educational process for all.

Articulation of specific reasons to make the arts "core" to learning was clearly needed with the business sector being a logical voice. The educational community, with its mission to prepare students for post secondary education or immediate job force entry, often looks to the business sector regarding employment trends or desired employee qualities. With this insight, it was felt that arts advocacy efforts from the business sector might aid in strengthening the state's progress toward arts education for all students at all levels—elementary, middle and high school.

The Business Circle for Arts Education—a statewide initiative to support the arts in the core curriculum in Oklahoma—began formal discussions in 1996 and established a board of directors in 1998. Over 35 business leaders agreed to serve, representing various concerns, including banking, telecommunications, broadcasting and retail. We published a brochure to announce our formation and joined with the Oklahoma Arts Council and The State Chamber to declare 1999 "The Year of Arts Education." The purpose of this designation is to launch an intensive promotional and public awareness campaign to educate our employees and others about the benefits of an education that includes the arts for all students. We held an official "kick-off" board luncheon in December and invited schools around the state to join in by hosting a "simultaneous kick-off" at their school sites. Eighty-seven schools participated and many have used our "Arts at the Core of Learning" logo in printed material and for their own promotions at the local level.

Ken Ferguson is Chairman, National Bank of Commerce, Chairman, Oklahoma Business Circle for Arts Education and is a member of both Americans for the Arts' National Policy Board and Governing Board.

A marketing plan, outlining strategies for board members to help carry the message to educational administrators, school board members, legislators and parents, was developed and presented by a "Loaned Executive" sub-committee. These strategies range from verbalizing the importance of arts education in conversation with key policy makers to payroll check stuffers, employee newsletters and customer billings. Additional strategies include participating in a "Speakers Bureau," hosting a legislative reception carrying the "Arts at the Core of Learning" theme or hosting an arts education forum in their part of the state. Board members are encouraged to ensure that each effort has a distinctly business perspective. They are also encouraged to use personal testimonials about their own experience with arts education. Many activities have already begun and will continue throughout the year.

"To me it is intuitively clear that the arts are essential in our public education process. The State Chamber has had a long history of fighting for improved, quality public education in Oklahoma—I call this enlightened self-interest. We are the consumers of our public schools, and we have long realized that without our involvement public education could become very mediocre. I can't afford mediocre. I'm a small bank trying to compete with large banks that have dropped their efficiency rates so low that I can't match their prices. Instead I must offer my customers better service. Better service means better employees. Better employees means better public education. And a better public education includes the arts!" – Ken Ferguson

We have developed a "tip sheet" of activities that schools can host during the year. We have also created a poster explaining "Why Oklahomans Should Care About Arts Education." The poster points out several key facts, all of which the business sector agrees increase the value of potential employees:

- ★ Strong arts education builds a school climate of high expectation, discipline and academic rigor that attracts businesses considering relocation to Oklahoma.
- ★ Arts education strengthens student problem solving and critical thinking skills, adding to overall academic achievement and school success.
- ★ Arts education helps students to develop a sense of craftsmanship, quality task performance and goal setting—all skills needed to succeed in the classroom and beyond.
- ★ Arts education can help troubled youth, providing an alternative to destructive behavior and providing another way for students to approach learning.
- ★ Arts education provides another opportunity for parental, community and business involvement with schools, including arts and humanities organizations.
- ★ Arts education helps all students develop more appreciation and understanding of the world around them.
- ★ Arts education can have a positive impact on academic achievement, including an increase in standardized test scores.
- ★ Arts education helps students develop a positive work ethic and pride in a job well done!

For more information on the efforts of the Business Circle for Arts Education in Oklahoma, contact any of the following: The State Chamber (405-235-3669), the Oklahoma Arts Council (405-521-2931), or Ken Ferguson (580-477-1100).

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Note: This special double-issue of *MONOGRAPHS* is paid for entirely by private contributions. No public money was used in the production of this publication.

Americans for the Arts is the national organization for groups and individuals dedicated to advancing the arts and culture in communities across the country. To this end, Americans for the Arts works with cultural organizations, arts, business and government leaders and individuals to provide leadership, education and information to advance support for the arts and culture in America.

Americans
for the Arts
MONOGRAPHS

DESIGN
KINETIK
Communication
Graphics Inc.

MONOGRAPHS is produced bimonthly for the membership of Americans for the Arts. For more information, please call 202.371.2830.

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Printed in the
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