Revitalization of Arts Education Through Community-wide Coordination

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Proponents of Arts Education Argue That It Is Critical to American Youth

They argue that arts education (music, dance theater, visual arts) can:

- Generate new artists
- Develop creativity, confidence, work skills as demanded by businesses
- Motivate and engage students affecting retention and graduation rates
- Increase demand for arts ensuring future vitality of sector
Across the Country, Access to Arts Learning Opportunities Is Idiosyncratic

• Governments recognize arts education as a core subject and require it, but
  – Place accountability on other subjects
  – Do not enforce or fund requirements

• Test-based accountability in other subjects has reduced arts in the school day

• Districts and schools provide as they can, but significant variation exists
  – Arts are not consistently valued
  – Resources are not consistently provided
How Did We Get to This Point?

Two providers exist

- Schools (major)
- Cultural and community organizations (minor)
Fiscal Crises Led to Cuts and Growth

1970s  1980s  1990s  2000s

Fiscal crises
- Districts cut arts
- New arts organizations emerge as a response
We Have Seen Recent Positive Developments

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

Some steps forward

• States adopt arts education standards

• After-school programming grows to include arts

• Arts education becomes school reform platform
As Well As Serious Steps Backward

1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

Some steps backward
- High-stakes testing focuses on other subjects
- Educators disagree about purpose and methods
The Current Ecology Is Complex

Federal, state, and local education agencies

K-12 schools

Community-based arts education organizations

Cultural organizations

After-school organizations

City government, state and local arts agencies

Private funders and philanthropists

Colleges and universities
Some Communities Are Responding by Coordinating Efforts to Increase Access

- Coordination involves shared goals, joint plans and actions, and routine communication to drive improvement
- Undertaken in resource constrained environments to
  - Leverage resources in pursuit of goals
  - Strategically address gaps and reduce inefficiencies
- Quality of programming may also improve, given shared constructs and strategies
RAND Studied Communities Attempting to Improve Arts Learning

- How do local communities coordinate to support arts learning opportunities?
- What are their strategies to improve access and quality?
- What factors support or impede their efforts?
- What can other communities learn from their efforts?
We Used Several Data Sources

• Conducted literature review and expert interviews
• Performed comparative case studies of six urban communities
  – Alameda County, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles County, New York City
• Used non-longitudinal descriptive analysis
We Interviewed Both Direct Providers and Those Who Influence Provision

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**We Selected a Collaborative Focus Within Each Community**

- Alameda County: Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership
- Boston: Boston out of school time efforts
- Chicago: Local funding collaborative spearheading hire of new Chief for Arts Education
- Dallas: Big Thought and the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative
- Los Angeles County: Arts for All
- New York: “Step Up” plan to provide arts for all in the city’s schools
## Sites Made Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Where provided?</th>
<th>Who teaches?</th>
<th>What type of content?</th>
<th>Partners involved?</th>
<th>Who leads?</th>
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<td><strong>Chicago</strong></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Art teacher</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>District</td>
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<td><strong>New York</strong></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Art teacher</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>District</td>
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<td><strong>Alameda</strong></td>
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<td>Both</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Broader</td>
<td>County</td>
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<td>Expansive</td>
<td>CBO</td>
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**New York: City Efforts to Coordinate Stymied by Policy Changes**

- Coordination efforts were led by the NYC DoE’s Office of Arts and Special Projects.
- Goal was to improve access to in-school arts education, provided primarily in stand-alone courses.
- Elimination of Project Arts funding and policy change to site-based management shifted course of coordination work.
- New plans to hold schools accountable for arts education and evaluate its quality.
**Dallas: Small Start Built to a City-wide Effort**

- 10 years of coordination efforts now led by community-based non-profit organization: *Big Thought*
- Three-part focus
  - Providing integration experiences in schools
  - Increasing number of stand-alone courses
  - Creating out-of-school opportunities in communities
- Coordination key in conducting audit, qualifying providers, providing training, leveraging funding
- Now providing stand-alone courses, integration, and neighborhood based OST opportunities through out elementary levels
Communities Use Multiple Strategies to Improve Access

- Conduct audits and use information to develop plans with goals for access for all
- Appoint arts education leaders in prominent positions within district or county headquarters
- Build capacities in and out of schools through professional development, technical assistance, coaching
- Expand and leverage scarce resources
- Develop cases for and advocate for state and local policy and funding changes
Communities Use Multiple Strategies to Improve Quality

- Create standards and provide curriculum support
- Qualify or recommend providers
- Provide incentives and support for district- or city-wide planning and implementation
- Provide coaching, professional development, technical assistance
- Coordinate peer review, peer ranking of providers and curricular units
Coordination May Strengthen Key Strategies

- Incentivize districts and schools to hire key staff, develop plans, allocate resources
- Build capacity of artists and teachers
- Advocate for arts education
- Leverage scarce resources
- Facilitate peer review and modeling
Key Conditions Enable Coordination

• Capable, unifying leadership
• Early and ongoing funding for collaboration and positions
• Regular convening of stakeholders
• Dedicated time for reflection and mid-course adjustments
Some Conditions Impede Coordination

- Shifts in policies and the political landscape
- Arguments over teaching methods
- Staff turnover and organizational change
- Lack of dedicated funding for “overhead” work of collaboration
Coordination Is Working in Several Sites

- In communities with sustained and ongoing coordination, access to arts learning has improved

- There is no “right” way to coordinate improvement efforts
  - Dependent on community assets and needs
  - Important to recognize and involve assets across a community

- Wise to invest in people, structures, and strategies
  - Leaders may need to be sought out / invested in
  - Strategies may be more powerful in combination

Practitioners would also benefit from more detailed information on implementation exemplars
Even With Coordination, Serious Obstacles Remain

- Test-based accountability emphasizes other subjects, resulting in stiff competition for time and space
  - Integration may be more feasible than introducing new stand-alone courses
  - Field could be advanced by positively supporting state and federal policies
- Parents do not make arts education a priority
  - Sites note need for ongoing advocacy
- Schools struggle to build arts education capacity
  - Demand for ongoing hires, coaching, professional development has exceeded expectations