

KNOWLEDGE IN BRIEF

Findings You Can Use from New Wallace Research

INCREASING ARTS DEMAND THROUGH BETTER ARTS LEARNING

“All the benefits of the arts begin with individual captivation and intense absorption.” So wrote the authors of *Gifts of the Muse*, a landmark report by RAND that describes the benefits people and communities can gain from participation in the arts. The report reached another conclusion: individuals who experience and learn about the arts at a young age are likelier to reap those benefits over their lifetimes. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: there are troubling signs that demand for the arts is becoming less and less widely shared. And a likely explanation is that arts learning opportunities have been dwindling over the last 30 years, both in school and outside.

While perhaps not at a crisis stage – eight out of 10 Americans say they participate in the arts in some form – rates of participation in nearly all art forms tracked by the National Endowment for the Arts have eroded¹, according to a new RAND analysis commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement and State Arts Policy*. Most troubling is that the declines are most apparent among those aged 30 and under – the audiences of the future.

A range of factors are typically blamed for this slippage in demand. There is growing competition for leisure time. And while the federal No Child Left Behind Law ratcheted up accountability for academic achievement across the country since its enactment in 2002, that accountability has centered largely on reading and math often at the expense of other subjects, including arts. A 2008 survey by the Center on Education Policy found that since the 2001-02 school year, 16% of a nationally representative sample of 349 districts had cut the average amount of time elementary pupils spend per week on art and music by 35 percent – from 154 minutes to 100.²

So while it remains important for arts providers to work at building new audiences through better marketing campaigns, or more attractive program offerings, or by making attendance more convenient or affordable, *Cultivating Demand* argues that increasing the quality and access of arts learning opportunities deserves much more attention as a way of lifting arts demand in the long run:

SUMMARY

The key to lifting demand for the arts may well lie in reversing the 30-year-long decline in arts learning, both in and out of schools. A number of cities have been tackling that challenge by using “coordinated approaches” that seek to have schools and other providers join forces in expanding access to arts learning. Two reports produced by the RAND Corporation and commissioned by The Wallace Foundation – *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy*, and *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination* – explore the challenges and identify the policy implications.

“Investment in demand, by which we mean developing the capacity of individuals to engage in aesthetic experiences, has been neglected in both arts and education policy over several decades,” the report says. “It is our view that without this investment, audiences for the arts will continue to diminish despite heavy investments in supply and access.”

Specifically, building arts appreciation involves giving people the skills and knowledge they need to have rich encounters with art that keep them coming back for more: the ability to see, hear and feel what art has to offer; to create within an art form; to understand the historical and cultural context of works of art; and to interpret and draw deeper meaning from works of art as

appreciation grows. “Unless the young develop an interest in the arts and learn to respond to the ‘language’ of different artistic disciplines,” the RAND report continues, “they are not likely to become members of the adult arts audience.”

EXTENDING THE REACH OF ARTS EDUCATION: WHAT CITIES ARE LEARNING

New approaches to expanding access to and the quality of arts learning have been taking root in a number of cities. They are based on the idea that while schools are the place where children are likeliest to get arts education, other community institutions have much to contribute as well. This can happen by forming networks across schools, arts organizations, community-based organizations, government agencies and funders to improve arts learning opportunities for all children. *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination*, also by RAND, offers detailed descriptions of six sites where such “coordinated approaches” are taking hold: Alameda County, CA (which includes Oakland and Berkeley); Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Los Angeles County; and New York City.

The coordination efforts in these sites go well beyond establishing partnerships between an arts provider and a school, or even a number of schools. Effective coordinated approaches typically include committed public and private leadership, a set of shared goals and clear outcomes, a feasible plan based on data and progress benchmarks, and clear, consistent communication to develop and sustain public support. (see text box)

While the six efforts profiled by RAND share some basic elements, they vary with respect to who assumed the lead, who was involved and the goals set:

- **Alameda County’s Alliance for Learning Leadership** has sought to develop arts education leaders at multiple levels in districts and schools and to build a highly-inclusive advocacy campaign to expand the visibility and support of arts education.
- **Arts for All: Los Angeles County Regional Blueprint for Arts Education**, also a county-led effort, seeks to address the wide variation in arts offerings among the county’s 80 school districts. Arts for All has emphasized creating a countywide infrastructure including planning, fund-raising, data collection and multi-year technical assistance to help districts support “comprehensive, standards-based, sequential arts education offered within the school day.”
- In **Boston**, the widely varying support within the public schools led the mayor’s office, local foundations and others to look beyond the classroom for

WHAT IT TAKES TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF ARTS LEARNING

RAND’s *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination* identifies eight strategies commonly found in the six sites it studied for improving access to and quality of arts learning:

- **Conduct audits of arts education** – to gather information on how many students are served by arts learning programs by school, neighborhood or region. In all six cases, the audits revealed inequities and helped rally support for initiatives;
- **Set a goal of equitable access to arts learning** – to help counteract the emphasis on test scores, lack of time for arts learning during the school day, and uneven participation in out-of-school time arts programs;
- **Strategic planning** – to set citywide plans and strategies for expanding access;
- **Construct a case** – to build a compelling argument for devoting scarce public or private resources to arts education;
- **Attract and leverage resources** – to develop creative approaches, such as fund pooling, so that organizations can set realistic plans and have confidence in them;
- **Hire an “arts education coordinator” highly-placed within the school district administration** – to advocate for the arts and secure their place in the core curriculum (in contrast to the more usual approach of hiring a teacher to serve as a part-time arts coordinator);
- **Build individual and organizational capacity** – to ensure that arts teachers, classroom teachers and teaching artists understand the value of arts education and are trained to teach it;
- **Ongoing advocacy** – to generate needed policy and funding changes and to spur students, parents, teachers, principals and others to request arts learning of their community leaders.

ways to improve arts learning. The focus of the city’s efforts is on providing at-risk youth with out-of-school time programs, including but not limited to arts programs.

- In **Chicago** and **New York City**, the RAND researchers found that arts learning efforts are led or co-led by the public schools’ central offices and focus on increasing grade-appropriate, “sequential” arts instruction.

- In **Dallas**, the coordination effort has been led by a community-based organization, Big Thought, with support from The Wallace Foundation. The goals have been to provide standards-based instruction in all of the city’s public elementary schools, along with enhanced out-of-school time arts learning opportunities for youth and families in parks, libraries and other neighborhood facilities. (*For a more detailed look at Dallas’s arts learning initiative, see “From Hip-Hop to Shakespeare: Dallas Blazes ‘Coordinated’ Trail in Arts Education for City Young People” at www.wallacefoundation.org*).

COORDINATED APPROACHES: PROMISING, BUT FRAGILE

Many of the sites studied “appear to be making headway” in reversing the long-standing erosion of arts education in those communities, according to RAND. For example, Alameda County, Los Angeles County and Dallas have established functioning collaborative arts learning networks, including 70 percent of school districts in Alameda and more than one-third of the 80 districts in Los Angeles County. Since the 2005-06 school year, Dallas has hired over 140 arts specialists and has met its goal of having enough qualified staff to provide both visual art and music each week for every elementary student in the district. The city has also increased out-of-school arts learning opportunities: for example, nearly 3,000 students participated in summer arts programming in 2008, up from 1,700 a year earlier.

WALLACE’S RESPONSE

The goal of The Wallace Foundation’s Arts for Young People initiative is to help selected cities develop effective approaches for expanding high-quality arts learning opportunities both inside and outside of school, and to capture and share lessons that can benefit many other cities and arts organizations. Given these research findings and the encouraging results from Dallas, our original Arts for Young People site, Wallace decided in 2008 to support four additional coordinated arts learning efforts: the Minneapolis Public Schools; Los Angeles County; Los Angeles Unified School District; and the Philadelphia Education Fund. We expect to add a few more sites in the future.

At the same time, the RAND researchers caution that coordinated arts learning efforts are “fragile, vulnerable not only to policy and political changes, but also to blows such as test-based assessments of non-arts subjects and the related lack of time and space in the school day for other than tested subjects.” In particular, RAND identi-

fies a number of conditions that can impede coordinated approaches to improved arts learning:

- Changing policy contexts – for example, a decline in funding or a shift toward site-based school management that can make citywide coordination more challenging;
- Conflict among providers and ideas – such as disagreements about the merits of different approaches to arts instruction. Conflicts tend to be most pronounced in sites where coordination efforts are least advanced and are further exacerbated when resources are tight;
- Leadership turnover – that can disrupt delicate shared understandings or disrupt the momentum of initiatives.

RAND also cites potential disincentives to participating in coordination efforts: the time spent in meetings, real or perceived threats to the finances of individual organizations when the focus shifts to pooled funding, the exclusion of some organizations for personal or political reasons, and “artificial buy-in” by schools and districts in the pursuit of temporary funding.

Overall, however, those interviewed by RAND said the advantages of coordination outweigh such concerns. Some community and cultural organizations reported an increase in grant funding when they developed partnerships with schools. In the sites where coordination is more advanced, stakeholders feel engaged and funding, training programs and public support have increased.

In summary: reversing the decline in arts learning and making high-quality opportunities accessible to many more children through a coordinated approach is a promising but highly challenging ambition for any city. “Respondents who described their work in the coordination efforts in such terms as ‘never-ending’ may be right,” RAND’s researchers conclude. “The histories of these sites provide evidence that arts education remains at best a stepchild in the curriculum and sometimes requires extraordinary efforts just to be kept in the family.”

¹ The NEA tracks seven “benchmark” art forms: ballet, classical music, jazz, musical theater, opera, theater and the visual arts. The RAND study cites several analyses showing that when growth in population and education levels are held constant, participation rates have been declining in all seven arts forms.

² Center on Education Policy, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes in Specific Subjects*, February 2008, pp. 2 & 4. To read the report, visit www.cep-dc.org.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination, by Susan J. Bodilly and Catherine H. Augustine (2008), commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, analyzes how local arts education initiatives across multiple organizations were started, how they evolved, what kinds of organizations became involved, what conditions fostered or impeded coordination among those organizations, and what strategies were developed to improve access to and quality of arts education.

Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy, by Laura Zakaras and Julia F. Lowell (2008), also commissioned by Wallace, is the third in a series of reports by RAND describing a multiyear initiative by The Wallace Foundation centering on the roles and missions of state arts agencies and related topics, including arts education.

Both reports, as well as this Knowledge in Brief, can be downloaded for free at Wallace's online Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

RELATED KNOWLEDGE

The following related publications may also be downloaded for free at Wallace's website:

Arts for All: Connecting to New Audiences, The Wallace Foundation, 2008

State Arts Policy: Trends and Future Prospects, RAND Corporation, 2008

From Hip-Hop to Shakespeare: Dallas Blazes "Coordinated" Trail in Arts Education for City Young People, The Wallace Foundation, 2008

Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts, RAND Corporation, 2005

Arts and Non-arts Partnerships: Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategies, Urban Institute, 2004

ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

The mission of The Wallace Foundation is to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. It does this by supporting and sharing effective ideas and practices. To achieve its mission, the Foundation has three objectives:

- Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement,
- Improve out-of-school time learning opportunities, and
- Build appreciation and demand for the arts.

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