

## **Summary Report**

### **Arts Education Collaborative Baseline Survey on the State of Arts Education in Southwestern Pennsylvania**

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## INTRODUCTION

This document reports the findings from a survey designed to provide a snapshot of the state of K-12 arts education in Western Pennsylvania, including Allegheny, Fayette, Greene and Washington counties. Using other large-scale surveys in arts education as a guide we covered topics including: arts curriculum and requirements, professional development, student participation, critical needs, supervision and leadership, teacher beliefs and activity in the arts. The survey was designed to provide the Arts Education Collaborative with a means to establish some key benchmarks and a means by which to begin longitudinal tracking of arts education in the region.

This report compares Allegheny County with the amalgamated results from the three counties of Fayette, Greene, and Washington (FGW). The survey includes responses from 178 teachers, 19 curriculum coordinators, and 25 superintendents, and addresses visual arts, music, dance, and drama.

In recent years, the status of arts education in the United States has been assessed through multiple state and national level research projects. National research from the U.S. Department of Education (2002) document that arts education is offered as "an integral part of many primary and secondary schools in 1999-2000" and affirms the importance of quality arts education programs. However statewide surveys have noted that all students across the United States do not have similar arts education experiences. For example, recent survey research from the Ohio Arts Council (2001) and the Illinois Arts Education Initiative (2005) document a wide variety in the level of arts education provided to primary and secondary school students across districts in their respective states. This research suggests that a comprehensive examination of arts education for school districts in each state is necessary to provide a full picture of what arts education programs are offering to students.

Pennsylvania has taken up the challenge to ensure quality arts education for primary and secondary school students by creating and implementing Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities. However, at this point, no state-level research in Pennsylvania has considered how schools and school districts have responded to these standards in regard to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. This survey addresses that gap by considering arts programs from the perspectives of both administrators and teachers in Western Pennsylvania.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **HEALTHY INFRASTRUCTURE**

The survey suggests that in many ways the region has been successful in building a healthy infrastructure for the arts in schools. However, findings also suggest that the region has work to do in making the most successful use of this infrastructure. Primarily, findings suggest that continued professional development and the fostering of leadership for arts education is a top priority for continued improvement in arts education.

Findings suggest that there is a healthy infrastructure for arts education in the region. Over 80% of teachers indicated that written curriculum exists for visual arts and music at the elementary, middle, and high school level. If teachers indicated that curriculum exists, they were very likely to also have indicated that it is articulated sequentially and aligned to curriculum standards.

Almost two-thirds of teachers use cultural resources to supplement their instruction and one-third of all teachers have engaged in a partnership with an arts organization. Artists-in-residence or art museums were the most frequently cited cultural resources that are used to supplement instruction. Almost all schools hold an average of 4 special arts events during the year. Music events are most common, followed by arts exhibitions and musicals or plays.

More than 50% of teachers have memberships to professional arts organizations. Over 70% consider themselves to be artists. Music teachers are more likely than visual arts teachers to be members of a professional arts organization and to regard themselves as artists. Allegheny County teachers are also a bit more likely than Fayette, Greene, and Washington County teachers to be involved in professional arts activities.

### **ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Our findings also reveal areas where there may be room for improvement. These survey findings point out aspects of arts education in the region that should be studied in more depth, or areas where remedial actions might be considered to improve the quality of arts education in the region.

For example, while it is a sign of strength that written curricula do often exist, over 20% of teachers responded that there is no mechanism in place for arts curriculum review and only 14% indicated that curriculum is reviewed annually.

Furthermore, arts requirements are highly variable across districts and across visual arts, music, dance, and drama. Advanced placement or honors classes in the arts are rarely offered.

Another key area of concern is the need to expand and enrich teacher professional development in the arts. Teachers, curriculum coordinators, and superintendents all indicated that professional development is the highest critical need in arts education. Generally, teachers are dissatisfied with both the number and variety of arts-related professional development offered to them. This is especially true for Fayette, Greene, and Washington County teachers who do not participate in as many professional development opportunities as Allegheny teachers and who expressed higher dissatisfaction with the number and variety of professional development opportunities that are available to them.

Our findings show that when teachers have been active in professional development, and in professional arts activities, the benefits extend to the students. The number of arts activities provided to students (which includes the number of arts-related field trips and arts events in school) is significantly correlated with teacher professional and recreational activity in the arts (which includes participation in arts professional development opportunities, among participation in other activities) and the number of arts resources provided by school district.

Finally, findings that suggest the need for continued professional development are supplemented by a perceived lack of leadership for arts educators in some of the region's schools. One third of respondents said that no leadership is provided for teachers in arts disciplines, while both supervision and leadership appear to be lacking for dance and drama teachers. Teachers, curriculum coordinators, and superintendents indicated that principals provide supervision for arts teachers. There was much less agreement among teachers, curriculum coordinators, and superintendents about the primary person who provides leadership to arts teachers. Further, teachers were rarely cited as providing leadership for the arts (outside of those teachers who are the heads or chairs of arts departments).

While the region has a strong history of quality arts education and a solid infrastructure in place to support arts education, these findings suggest that further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the region's K-12 students have access to an exemplary, high quality arts education program.