Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Wendy Liscow (3 of 5)

Wendy Liscow: Good morning. I'm Wendy Liscow. I'm the Education Program Director at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in New Jersey and I'm feeling really privileged to have the opportunity to talk about some of the work we've been doing in New Jersey along these indicators that Lizzie talked about and I think, Neric, you'd be happy, I think I should've-- if I had more time, I think I would've created some sort of Venn diagram--

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Wendy Liscow: -- that showed how these were all overlapping, because they really do overlap. Some were reliant on one thing happening before we could do the other, but most of them were happening parallel. And I have to say, I think SP3 was really a funder's dream, because I think funders tend to-- as you all know, we're looking for data and we like issues that are being attacked through partnerships and that are trying to change systems. So, this was really a perfect opportunity to really advance some of the work that we've been doing in New Jersey. New Jersey has sort of been at this for about 15 years-- well, many years. There are many iterations of our arts education work, but about 15 years ago, we started to collect this data to really implement-- to be able to address some of the issues we knew in our hearts, we saw with our eyes, but we couldn’t really prove. So, we started our first arts education census and during SP3, we revealed our third iteration of it. So, every five years, we were taking a look back at our baseline and, for us, it was important for us to really continue the work and so, in this third instalment, we found out that 99.4 percent of students have access to arts education. That means we're short 26 schools and 9,000 students away from universal access, but through this work we also realized that access wasn’t enough. Participation was different. We have more like 80,000 students who aren't participating. We saw in key measures of participation and funding and teachers, those indicators were less favorable in schools that had high free and reduced lunch populations. So, there were some disparities there. We also saw that we found out early on that theater and dance were underrepresented. We haven't really moved, maybe one percent. It wasn’t enough, so we still have a lot more work to do and we also saw a little bit of a strange slipping of our non-profit connections to schools. So, data is really great. It sort of tells you where your gaps are, but we still have to do the work now to figure out the why behind it and that's some of the work that we will be doing sort of sparked by SP3 and as we all know, data begets more data, so we’ll have to be doing more of that. <laughs> Why is that? So, a second element, going back to those 15 years ago, once we had that data, and this is why I bring it up, because I think all the states realize that in order to develop that partnership and to really have the gas and the tank to move it forward, if you have the data you can bring people together around solving that issue and so, we did create the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, now called Arts Ed New Jersey and I'll explain why later. It's part of SP3 and it started under the wing or the fiscal sponsorship of our state arts advocacy, ArtPride New Jersey. Ann Marie is here representing ArtPride and she’s part of our team. So, I really just underscore what Lana was saying, without that coalition, it’s really hard to advance this and I’d say that art coalition right now is mostly education-related. You know, we’re getting some commerce folks onto this committee but it’s mostly officials around education. This also led to summits. I think other people have said that bringing people together, our summits have been really critical in New Jersey. We had one 10 years ago where we had governors and everybody sort of rallying around our first data report and we’ve had two summits since we’ve joined SP3 where we’ve had past governors come in, declare their love of the arts, legislators
and very importantly we had a whole bunch of panels that had our union reps, leaders, our state school board, our superintendents, our administrators, all be on a panel and literally be on tape and confess their love for arts education and their commitment to advancing it and it’s all on tape.

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Wendy Liscow: Ready to play back for them at any moment. We also have used our knowledge from our colleagues for Title I work, which will be a topic of another presentation. So, I won't go into it, but also we were able to advance some grave-waiving and as our previous panel talked about, we really work bipartisan across the aisle and work with a Republican senator, state senator <inaudible 00:06:20>. He presented a grade weighting. So, now if you’re in an APR course or any art course, it now counts at the end of your graduation in your score. In the past in New Jersey it wasn’t part of it, so there was no encouragement to take advanced arts courses in New Jersey. Now, they count. Major change for us. So, I’d say one of the most exciting things I’m so proud to talk about is the campaign that came out of SP3. You know, we all talk about wanting to have a campaign. I think we’ve been talking about it for 10, 20 years. We’ve had some arts campaigns but we did not have an Arts Ed campaign targeted to that. So, through SP3 we were really able to hire a movement builder. We didn't really focus on somebody who was going to do branding. We found someone. Her name is Ennis Carter. Her name sort of says it all. She’s with Social Impact Studios. The idea is to build movements that are flexible and responsive and agile and so, I wish I had created more materials on my PowerPoint here, but she was able to take some of the stacks that are ours from New Jersey and/or across the country and create talking point sheets. We have developed an amazing website that’s really flexible. You can build your own campaign toolkit. We had focus groups and what I’ve been very excited about is that we’ve also been able to make it grassroots. We have adapted it through some support from the National Endowment on the Arts to Newark. So, engaging Newark citizens and getting a very grassroots campaign, working with teachers in a grassroots campaign and one of my favorite-- I have a lot of favorite parts of this. I get very excited about it. We created this campaign called ‘Yesterday an Arts Student Today A’ and then you fill in the blank, or the reverse, ‘Today An Arts Student, Tomorrow A’ and it was really an opportunity for us to walk up to anybody across non-educators, farmers, legislators, education people and just say, you know, think about your arts background and we all have done that, right, and you take them back and they're there in the moment and they write it down and we’ve been able to create massive collages with this. We go to conferences, not just education conferences. We infiltrate and have people doing the signage and it’s been a very effective piece of our campaign. Also through our work with SP3, this was one of our goals, was to do a school board candidate survey. So, it’s been mentioned, we have an election in four days and so, over the three years we’ve implemented this survey. At first, we didn’t have many school boards tell their Arts Ed platform, but now you can see all of the school board members who are up for election or re-election are putting their platform for arts, which has allowed us to also-- I think this is all about infiltration. I don’t know why I think I have this war mentality around this--

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Wendy Liscow: -- but the School Boards Association now is training school boards in arts education and its importance. That's huge for us, to be able to move there and part of that was that our key leader of
Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Wendy Liscow (3 of 5)

Arts Education Partnership, Arts Ed Now, Bob Morrison, many of you know him from his census work, joined his school board and was able to get on the school board’s board and then every meeting, it’s like, where’s art? Where’s art? So, I encourage everyone, if you have the stomach for it, to join a school board and do that and the third piece was this public opinion and this is sort of a segue to our next speaker. We did several public opinion survey polls and just recently, prior to the election, we found out that 90 percent of New Jersey residents believe arts education is important for all students in school, before school, after and through cultural organizations. Most feel that districts aren’t doing enough to support their arts education programs. A significant majority of residents believe that arts help in the development of essential skills, such as creativity and imagination. That was 87 percent. Eighty-one percent believe it helps with confidence, communication skills 74 percent, tolerance of other cultures 73, and discipline and perseverance, they were bundled, were 69 percent and I think that’s very helpful for us to begin to figure out our messaging. What we have not yet done, I know some of the other states in the room have, is sort of test these messages, which ones will relate more to different audiences and I feel like that is sort of the next step. But I should just sort of end with-- that’s a perfect segue to you, but I also just want to end up with my gratitude for this project and the fact that Americans for the Arts put it together, but also for the generosity of all of the states. You know, I think we’ve laughed a lot together, we’ve cried together, we’ve been stunned at some of the things that have happened to our states, and yet everybody persevered. I guess our grit metric would be 100 percent.

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Wendy Liscow: Thank you.