**HOT TOPIC**

**Arts Education After NCLB: Partnerships Between Schools and Arts Organizations**

There are signs that the emphasis on test-based accountability in the United States has weakened arts education and the amount of time being devoted to it in K-12 schools. A growing body of research on arts education suggests that school partnerships with arts organizations can help address this problem. Schools benefit from such partnerships by taking advantage of programming and expertise they cannot afford to provide; arts organizations benefit by gaining visibility in their communities, earning needed income, making themselves more attractive to donors, and building future audiences for the arts.

A new RAND Report – *Arts Education Partnerships: Lessons Learned from One School District’s Experience* – examines these relationships and makes recommendations for improving outcomes. The study focuses on a new arts education plan initiated by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). This may be the most ambitious arts education program in the nation, a 10-year, multi-million-dollar program to implement a substantive, sequential curriculum in arts education in four major disciplines—dance, music, theater, and the visual arts for all public school children in kindergarten through 12th grade. The study looked at a sample of schools and arts organizations working in the same community in this large urban school district. Arts education partnerships are generally of two major types: simple transactions, in which an artist or arts organization offers an arts program for a school's students, and a school purchases the arts program; or joint ventures, in which a school and arts organization work together to define the students' needs and to design the arts education enrichment program. Often, because of its simplicity and lower demand on resources and time, the simple transaction type is a more practical, feasible approach for many school districts and arts organizations.

This was true of most partnerships between schools and arts organizations within LAUSD. However, schools and arts organizations still faced multiple challenges in working together, including funding shortages, time constraints, and communication problems.

Rather than institute a whole new system on educators and arts organizations, RAND researchers identified several ways to enhance the effectiveness of partnerships:

- Improve communication among participants by designating a point of contact in the organization and facilitating access to organization staff.
- Define goals and establish partnerships that address the goals of schools and arts organizations; understand how these goals interconnect.
- Focus more on training teachers because their support is critical to the success of arts partnerships.
- Arts organizations should provide comprehensive and user-friendly information.
- Schools must adopt a coherent, standards-based arts program and become proactive consumers of arts programs that promote curriculum.
- Improve outreach to key stakeholders in the arts and the community at large.
- Enhance the role of local district arts advisors who can be an invaluable link between schools and arts organizations.

**Read more:** [Improving Arts Education Partnerships](http://www.rand.org/child/about.html)

For a hard copy of the report, please contact Wendy Moltrup Pape with RAND Washington External Affairs at 703-413-1100 ext. 5938 or moltrup@rand.org.

**PROJECT UNDER WAY**

Initiated in 2000, the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A.FANS) was designed to understand how neighborhoods affect the health, development, and well-being of children and families. L.A.FANS is a panel study of households and neighborhoods in Los Angeles County in which longitudinal data on neighborhoods, families, adults and children are being collected in two waves, with possible additional data collection in the future.

The first wave, completed in 2002, interviewed over 3,000 adults and families living in 65 neighborhoods in Los Angeles County on household economic status, health matters, use of social support systems, and education. Extensive information was obtained on neighborhood social and physical conditions.

In the second wave, data are being collected over a two-year period, 2005-2006. Researchers will reinterview all children and adults in the first-wave sample, even those who moved out of the area, and will supplement these data by interviewing a sample of new entrants into the 65 neighborhoods. This second wave will be expanded to include the collection of biomarkers of stress, general health, and chronic conditions in adults and children, an important new resource for researchers and policymakers interested in the effects of social factors on children's stress, disease, health, and overall well-being.

**Read more:** [L.A.FANS project Web site](http://www.rand.org/child/about.html)

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