How to Support More and Stronger Arts Education Partnerships in Allegheny County

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Key findings

- Student benefits are a motivating factor to fostering or engaging in arts education partnerships, including academic reinforcement, career readiness, and social and emotional growth.

- Arts partnerships expand teacher practices.

- Partnerships can have a school-level benefit when the learning inside the classroom is shared outside the classroom with the broader school community.

- It is important to have a range of supports in place to ensure that partnerships are formed and implemented successfully.

- Engaging schools in partnerships provided specific benefits to their organizations, including the development of future audiences for the arts and professional development for teaching artists.

- Barriers to establishing arts partnerships include competition with higher-priority school needs, lack of awareness of and access to information about partnerships, difficulty with gaining multilevel buy-in, and capacity constraints.

- Barriers to implementing and sustaining regional arts partnerships include lack of funding for ongoing collaboration and for multiyear commitments, lack of time and capacity for regular check-ins, lack of transportation, inflexible schedules, and staff turnover.

For decades, public schools have engaged arts and cultural organizations in a variety of partnerships to enhance learning opportunities for students and teachers (Americans for the Arts, 2015), both *through* the arts, in connection with non-arts disciplines, and *in* the arts (Ellis, 2009). A growing body of research has examined how these partnerships are formed and the associated facilitators, barriers, and potential benefits.

Arts partnerships vary in structure and intensity, from simple and transactional in nature to more-complex collaborations that are tailored to the needs and strengths of the partners (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999; Rowe et al., 2004; Burnaford, 2006). Given that partnerships, by definition, involve multiple stakeholders and that schools are complex working environments, forming and implementing arts partnerships require a range of professional practices, such as setting common goals, securing funding, ongoing planning, documenting, and improving practice throughout the duration of the partnership (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999; Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008; Ellis, 2009). Several conditions facilitate arts partnerships, including access to professionals in the system who have the expertise and capacity to serve as intermediaries or liaisons between arts partners (and sometimes funders) and schools (Rowe et al., 2004; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008), buy-in from strong leaders and broad-based support (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Americans for the Arts, 2015), and ongoing advocacy (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008). Limited time (Rowe et al., 2004; Americans for the Arts, 2015), competing school and district priorities (Woodworth et al., 2009), and a lack of funding (Rowe et al., 2004) are all key barriers that can make initiating, implementing, and sustaining arts partnerships more challenging.

The combined findings of these referenced studies served as our framework for examining arts partnerships in Allegheny County, the second most populous county in Pennsylvania, after Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania Arts and Humanities Standards require instruction in dance, music, theater, and visual arts by certified art and music educators (Pennsylvania Department of Education, undated)—the only two arts disciplines that the state certifies. Dance may be taught by teachers certified in health and physical education, and theater may be taught by teachers certified in communications or English (Pennsylvania Department of Education, undated). Although Pennsylvania Department of Education teacher assignment and course-offering data, as well as anecdotal evidence, indicate that public schools in Allegheny County follow national trends and typically have a certified music or visual arts teacher on staff (Parsad, Spiegelman, and Coopersmith, 2012), this does not always translate to all students receiving regular, sequential, standards-based instruction in these disciplines (Kaufman et al., 2005). Additionally, it is atypical for elementary schools to have teachers on staff with the knowledge and skills required to teach dance and theater. While middle and high schools are more likely to offer dance and theater instruction, these opportunities are available less frequently than music and visual arts classes are (Arts Education Collaborative [AEC], 2016). It is currently difficult to determine the extent to which schools and districts are meeting arts education requirements because there is no statewide arts education data system (Pennsylvania Arts Education Network, 2017). To date, Pennsylvania has not inventoried its arts education course offerings in schools, making it difficult to understand arts learning opportunities in Allegheny County in greater detail (Americans for the Arts, 2015).

Regional arts and cultural partners can support arts education in schools by providing instruction to students in arts disciplines where teachers are not available, deepening arts learning opportunities offered in schools, and integrating the arts with other content areas. Pittsburgh, the county seat, has a vibrant and collaborative arts and cultural sector made up of many community-based organizations that devote considerable resources to arts education. These organizations strive to promote the arts by partnering with regional educators who value the arts and arts education. However, these organizations, and those that fund them, would like to improve and expand these opportunities beyond those educators who already value the arts and arts education.

STUDY OVERVIEW

The purposes of this exploratory study, sponsored by the Jack Buncher Foundation, are threefold: (1) to gain an understanding of the motivations for and approaches to partnerships among Allegheny County arts partners; (2) to identify regional facilitators and barriers to creating, implementing, and sustaining arts education partnerships; and (3) to recommend effective strategies to expand access to arts partnerships and to strengthen existing ones. We began by reviewing current literature on this subject to help inform our research questions, interview protocol, and analysis framework.

Our research questions are as follows:
- Why are schools and districts and cultural organizations in Allegheny County creating arts partnerships?
- What do partners understand to be the best ways to implement these partnerships?
- What factors appear to facilitate effective partnerships in the county?
- What are the regional barriers to forming and implementing successful partnerships?
- What can funders do to support and expand arts partnerships?

Definition of Arts Partnerships

The arts partnership research describes different types of partnerships, ranging from simple to complex (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999). In more-basic partnerships, the arts partner and the school take on provider and consumer roles, respectively, while more-intense partnerships resemble joint ventures (Rowe et al., 2004). Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) developed multiyear arts partnerships, called *veteran partnerships*, that emphasize the importance of documenting the learning that results from the partnerships in addition to delivering instruction (Burnaford, 2006).

For this study, we initially defined *arts partnerships* as any interaction between a school or district and an arts or cultural organization intended to deliver arts learning opportunities to students or teachers (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000). These opportunities could range from simple to complex and might include field trips, student matinee performances, professional development workshops, in-school artist residencies, afterschool programs, and summer enrichment.

After we read this definition to our interviewees at the beginning of each interview, they began to describe what they

called their *more-authentic partnerships*. These were the result of school and arts organization staff coming together to create something new or to adapt an existing program to fit a specific context or need. This approach is a departure from the more transactional model of arts partnerships, where an arts organization simply offers a catalog, and schools select off-the-shelf programs for students (Rowe et al., 2004). Transactional arts partnerships occur in Allegheny County, but interviewees consistently discussed what they called *more-authentic* or *long-term* partnerships. Their descriptions resemble Rowe et al.'s *joint venture* and CAPE's *veteran partnership* definitions (Rowe et al., 2004; Burnaford, 2006).

These types of partnerships typically allow for multiple touch points with the same students over the course of one or more school years or a variety of program components in the same school or district (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999). An example of the latter might include a workshop for classroom teachers, followed by multiple lessons taught by an artist, referred to in these cases as a *teaching artist*, culminating in a student performance for the school and parents at the end of the academic year. Partners involved in these long-term partnerships tend to base them on an assessment of school needs, rather than the specialty of the arts organization (Bodilly and Augustine, 2008).

Data and Analyses

To answer our research questions, we analyzed the extant research on arts education partnerships and conducted interviews, from August through November 2016, with more than 25 staff members from 14 organizations in Allegheny County. To select our interview sample, we first identified well-known regional stakeholders who have engaged in multiple arts partnerships. We received initial recommendations from the Jack Buncher Foundation, sought input from three arts education intermediaries, and asked initial interviewees to suggest additional interviewees to ensure that we gathered a broad perspective on partnerships in the region. Interviewees represented public schools, school district offices, arts and cultural organizations, and arts intermediaries. In addition to these interviews, we also conducted a focus group with participants during an arts education network meeting. The school and district personnel included urban, suburban, and rural public school settings across the K–12 range. Arts and cultural organizations covered dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts disciplines.

Examples of arts partnerships in Allegheny County from our interviews include the following:

- In a school, three artists working in different disciplines are assigned to three sequential grade levels for eight sessions each over the school year. These artists continue to work in this way at the same school for more than ten years. Over the course of this partnership, students build on their arts learning from the previous year by repeated exposure to the arts process as it is applied in the three different disciplines. The artists teach their disciplines while making explicit connections to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) curricular areas. For example, woodworking projects incorporate knowledge of tree species and the density of various wood types; jewelry-making engages students in issues around material reuse and environmental impact. Students and their families also develop relationships with these professional artists and learn about career opportunities in the arts.
- Artists conduct an educator professional development (PD) session with physical education teachers from across a district on how to incorporate dance into their instructional practice. Additionally, district leaders simultaneously work with an intermediary to establish two annual arts programs for students in two grade levels across elementary schools. The first provides a ten-day artist residency for students in the two grade levels; the second gives the students in the higher grade level an immersive week of only arts programming, in all arts disciplines. Through the connections made with the physical education teachers, the teaching artists who conducted the teacher PD go on to participate in both the artist residency and the week-long intensive programming over multiple years.

The interview protocol expanded on the research questions, including items that explored motivations to form arts partnerships, partnership design and implementation, identification and establishment of partnerships, facilitators and barriers, funding and evaluation, and additional potential study participants. We conducted the interviews most frequently in pairs. During the interviews, one team member took notes, and, with interviewee permission, we also recorded the conversation.

Interviews typically lasted an hour, and participants understood that their responses would be kept confidential.

We then reviewed notes from interviews and focus groups to identify facilitators, barriers, and potential investments for creating new and strengthening existing arts education partnerships. For each category of facilitator and barrier identified, we noted the number of interviewees or focus group members who mentioned various items or factors, to determine which items had the greatest relevance among partner organizations in Allegheny County. We also compared these most-mentioned items with the facilitators and barriers for long-term partnerships identified in our literature review to detect which, if any, items had particular regional significance.

Limitations

Our interviewees represent key players in the local arts education field, based on repeated referrals from multiple sources. Nonetheless, we did not interview every arts or cultural organization providing educational opportunities in the county. It is likely that other interviewees would have had different perspectives to share. It is important to underscore both the limited sample size and the intrinsic bias in the sample given that we interviewed organizations and schools with reputations as strong arts partners. This study is therefore exploratory in nature, generating ideas about partnerships in the county but not attempting to represent all possible perspectives on the topic.

Neither do we analyze the existing quantity or quality of arts education partnerships. We do not, for example, analyze disparities in Allegheny County in arts education partnerships. Nor do we assess the outcomes of such partnerships. We assume, based on our interviewees and the literature, that there are local disparities in access and that there can be positive outcomes from arts education partnerships.

The next four sections present our findings. A final section presents conclusions and recommendations.

MOTIVATIONS FOR CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Early on in each interview, we asked study participants to articulate their motivations to engage in arts education partnerships. Their responses fell into three primary categories: benefits to students, to schools and districts, and to arts and cultural

organizations. Regional motivations do not differ from those of other partnering organizations found in the literature.

While all interviewees put student benefits first in importance, schools and arts organizations then described different benefits, most of which can only be produced through longer-term engagement with the arts. The findings in each category outlined below reflect motivations that received at least two mentions among our interviewees.

Student Benefits

Interviewees from all types of partner organizations described student benefits as a motivating factor to foster or engage in arts education partnerships. Exposure to the arts is a benefit of *any* arts partnership that offers arts experiences to students, no matter how brief, but the rest of the benefits accrue from longer engagement (McCarthy et al., 2004; Zakaras and Lowell, 2008; Americans for the Arts, 2015). Indeed, one interviewee opined that it takes about four years for arts partnerships to deepen and develop to the point at which they result in these outcomes.

- **Exposure to the arts:** In many cases, arts partnerships offer students first-time exposure to an art form (most commonly theater or dance) or engagement with a professional artist, exhibit, or performance.
- **Engaging experiences:** Arts partnerships provide innovative experiences for students—such as learning opportunities that are student-driven, focus on process over product, and are project-based—in turn, increasing student engagement.
- **Academic reinforcement:** The arts can reinforce learning in other content areas, specifically when the partnership is designed to offer integrated instruction.
- **Career readiness:** Arts partnerships provide schools with opportunities for students to learn from professional artists and discover possible career paths in the arts, such as in creating and performing, producing, or administering.
- **Developing arts expertise:** Ongoing, sequential instruction with a skilled artist provides students with opportunities to develop competencies in a discipline's specific skills set.
- **Social and emotional growth:** For some students, the artistic process itself can support emotional growth (e.g., the draft-critique-revision cycle can develop persistence). Also, the arts offer learners who struggle in other subjects but thrive in an arts lesson an opportunity to feel successful, thus enhancing their self-efficacy.

School and District Benefits

School and district leaders talked about the value of arts partnerships in expanding teacher practices. There was also discussion about how partnerships can have a school-level benefit when the learning inside the classroom is shared outside the classroom with the broader school community.

- **Enhancing classroom teacher practice:** Arts partnerships can provide participating teachers with a range of formal and informal professional learning opportunities. Through attending PD workshops, lesson-planning with teaching artists, and observing and co-teaching while teaching artists work with students, educators can learn to integrate the arts into their instruction and incorporate arts instructional strategies into their classroom practice. There is a growing practice of arts partners engaging participating teachers in documentation and reflection practices to capture changes in instructional choices and student learning as a result of the arts partnership (Burnaford, 2006). Participating classroom teachers may benefit from hands-on experiences in different art forms, helping to identify a range of possibilities for how they can bring the arts into their classrooms—from using music as cues during transition time to fully integrating digital media into a history lesson. School and district leaders entered into arts partnerships partly because of the knowledge and skills they impart to the teacher-participants; changing classroom teacher practice to incorporate arts content, skills, and instructional strategies was described as having an impact on teachers' successive student cohorts. In some cases, these teachers become peer leaders, sharing their developing arts education expertise with other teachers.

  > I see how powerful they can be in instructing teacher practice. Arts integration methods provide cross-curricular, project-based approaches to instruction.
  > —*School district administrator*

- **Improving school culture:** It is common practice for partners in sustained arts partnerships to share the student learning and student work with the wider school community by hanging exhibits in the hallway and putting on performances for other classes, families, and community members. Walking through a school where student work is exhibited can change the feel of the building, and student performances are opportunities to engage families and build enthusiasm for the school community. Additionally, in some arts partnerships that are able to engage multiple

classroom teachers across a range of grades, there are opportunities for the benefits to extend beyond individual classrooms. These partnerships can support school-wide goals by exploring a theme, inquiry question, or big idea identified by the teaching staff. For example, one interviewee described a school-wide project telling the history of the school, which incorporated multiple art forms—including mural-making, model-building, quilting, photography and videography, and computer programming—engaging students across grade levels by providing grade-appropriate activities. While different grades approached the work through a different arts lens, the common focus on the school's history provided an opportunity for a collective, school-wide learning opportunity for the teachers, students, and local community.

Arts and Cultural Organization Benefits

In addition to acknowledging the above-mentioned benefits for students and schools, arts partners discussed how engaging schools in partnerships provided specific benefits to their organizations.

- **Development of future audiences for the arts:** Offering compelling exposure to professional arts experiences and engaging learning opportunities can instill an increased appreciation for the arts. Interviewees talked about the importance of making the arts available to all students so they can access them throughout their lives. Exposure to the arts in childhood (e.g., a museum field trip) is a stronger predictor of arts participation as an adult than is education, gender, age, or income (National Endowment for the Arts, 2014).
- **PD for teaching artists:** Arts organization interviewees said that their teaching artists have shared anecdotes of learning about public school culture, child development, and classroom management strategies by observing the classroom teachers and by reflecting together on program implementation and student learning throughout the partnership.

INITIATING AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

Once motivations to partner and student-centered goals are established (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004; Ellis, 2009), the next step is to identify

potential partners and find a viable match. This matching is supported when there is access to clear information about partnership opportunities and adequate funding available (Rowe et al., 2004). Knowledgeable intermediaries, such as district arts coordinators, can play an important role in connecting schools and arts partners (Rowe et al., 2004; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008).

After partners find one another, critical communication begins. Early planning meetings support partnership design, and ongoing check-ins ensure opportunities for coordination, reflection, and course correction (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004). It cannot be assumed that all partners have the knowledge and skill necessary for successful implementation; therefore, strong arts partnerships include professional development that supports classroom teachers (Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004) and teaching artists (Silverstein, 2003).

Strong arts partnerships develop or adapt lesson plans that uniquely support the partnership goals and are appropriate for the specific schools or schools in question (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999; Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008). Instructional time with students can be artist-driven and teacher-supported or more of a co-teaching model (Rich, Polin, and Marcus, 2003; Americans for the Arts, 2015). The literature highlights the importance of making visible the arts partnership learning (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999; Silverstein, 2003). This can be done informally by exhibiting student work. More formally, formative and summative evaluations are important to help partners find matches, improve program quality, demonstrate student impact, share the work beyond immediate partners, and secure sustained future funding (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy, 1999; Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004, Americans for the Arts, 2015).

We asked interviewees to identify key steps to effective partnerships—in an *ideal* state—with the understanding that *actual* current partnerships might engage in only a subset of these steps. Their responses aligned with the best practices identified in the literature presented above and summarized in the figure. The process depicted in the figure represents an ideal state where all steps are part of the partnership practice. In practice, partners might not engage in all of these steps and may sequence them differently.

Interviewees reported having the most difficulty implementing three of these best practices in particular: early planning meetings, ongoing check-ins, and evaluation. Interviewees noted that, in any partnership, early planning meetings are a crucial

An Ideal Arts Partnership Process
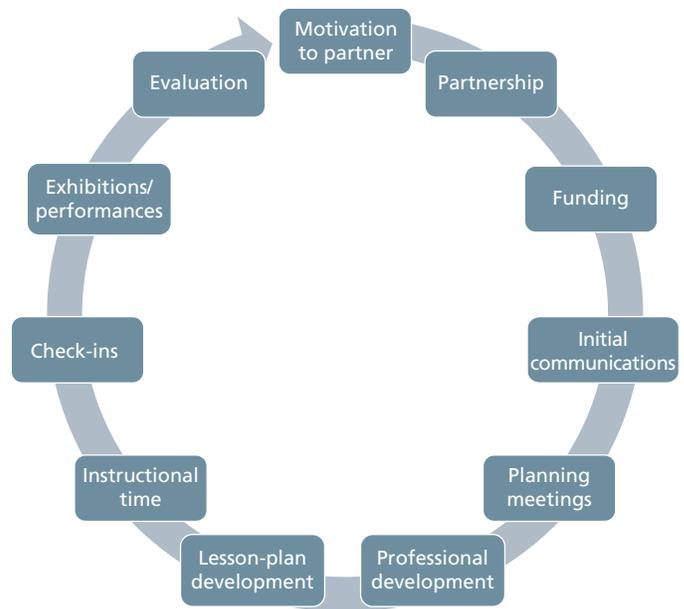
piece of the process to identify shared goals and ensure the appropriate matching of teaching artist and program components well before implementation. Early planning meetings are also important to gain buy-in from all parties as the specific details of the programming are further developed. Ongoing check-ins between the classroom teacher and teaching artist throughout the program enable partners to make course corrections as needed. Evaluation efforts are important to ensure that programs are implemented effectively and achieve desired outcomes.

FACILITATORS OF REGIONAL ARTS PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with a school or district means working within a complex and multilayered environment. Both the literature review and our interviewees emphasized the importance of having a range of supports in place to ensure that partnerships are formed and implemented successfully. We asked interviewees what, specifically, facilitated the creation, implementation, and sustainment of their existing arts education partnerships.

Interviewees described more than 20 factors that facilitate arts partnerships in Allegheny County. We have grouped these factors into six facilitators based on their prevalence in the interview data and interviewees' descriptions of how the factors work in combination. We describe these six facilitators, present examples, and explain their importance in the following

sections. The facilitators are listed in an order corresponding to the steps that partners follow in establishing and implementing partnerships, described in the prior section.

These key regional facilitators, with the exception of proximity to and diversity of cultural assets, have also been cited in the reviewed literature. These include intermediaries, such as district arts coordinators, who can connect arts partners and schools (Rowe et al., 2004; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008); adequate funding (Rowe et al., 2004); support from multiple stakeholders (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Americans for the Arts, 2015); shared vision and goals (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004; Ellis, 2009); and developing successful working relationships (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Silverstein, 2003; Rowe et al., 2004).

Proximity to and Diversity of Cultural Assets

The Pittsburgh region has a thriving arts and culture sector that includes large, anchor institutions; small- to medium-sized organizations; and individual artists (Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, 2016). Indeed, the city was recently ranked in the top 20 out of more than 900 regions on a list of the most "vibrant arts communities" (National Center for Arts Research, 2017). Communities were ranked based on the total number of arts providers, the total nonprofit arts dollars in the community, and the level of government support for the arts. In the Pittsburgh region, the large number of cultural assets densely located in a relatively small geographic area means that the availability of potential arts partners is high. Having densely located cultural assets means that teaching artists are concentrated around the city center and are available to travel to Pittsburgh-area schools. Interviewees from arts organizations stressed this facilitator as one that is not necessarily present in other counties throughout the state.

Intermediaries Serving as Brokers

Intermediaries strive to raise awareness of regional arts partnership opportunities and broker matches between schools with specific arts organizations or teaching artists. We briefly describe the three most-mentioned intermediary organizations in Allegheny County—interviewees in schools and districts in particular stressed the benefits of working with these intermediaries. Interviewed administrators described their organizations as follows:

- **Pittsburgh Center for the Arts (PCA):** The Pittsburgh Center for the Arts is the local affiliate of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. The council provides PCA with state funding to deliver artist residencies in schools. As part of its role as the council's local affiliate, the PCA maintains a roster of teaching artists. The combination of the artist roster and available funding makes the PCA a popular resource for school personnel to contact when interested in starting or expanding an arts partnership.
- **Gateway to the Arts (Gateway):** This organization, now part of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Education Department, also maintains a teaching artist roster. Gateway's emphasis is on developing teaching artists through a range of PD activities and partnering with schools across Allegheny County and in adjacent counties, as well as to increase student access to arts education, build arts integration skills among classroom teachers, and support arts specialists who may already working in schools.
- **Arts Education Collaborative (AEC):** While the PCA and Gateway primarily connect districts and schools with teaching artists, the AEC works closely with school- and district-level administrators, in addition to certified arts teachers. The AEC's work supports professional learning communities, curriculum development in various arts disciplines, and the holistic assessment of a school district's arts education offerings. Current and past PD participants rely on AEC staff to help identify arts partners when participants are ready to expand or deepen arts education offerings, such as adding dance instruction to physical education or developing teaching staff capacity to integrate the arts.

Arts organizations and school and district staff summed up the benefits of working with an intermediary as a kind of one-stop-shop experience for arts partnerships. These partnering organizations can rely on an intermediary's broad knowledge of available partners and opportunities. Allegheny County is unique in that there are two separate teaching artist rosters, one managed by the PCA and the other by Gateway. The former includes practicing artists who have demonstrated teaching skills. The latter roster supports a broader range of teaching artists, including novices.

In addition to the three most-mentioned intermediaries (the PCA, Gateway, and the AEC), interviewees credited several other organizations with helping regional arts partners find each another:

- Pittsburgh Public Schools is the largest district in the county. This district established a **central office arts education department**, including a senior program officer, a music coordinator, and a visual arts coordinator.
- **The Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council** has partnered with the PCA and Gateway over the past several years to provide PD opportunities for teaching artists.
- Partners working in the afterschool space mentioned **Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST)** and the **Pittsburgh Public Schools Out-of-School Time Office**. These intermediaries publicize arts organizations and opportunities to contract with schools and districts. In some cases, they also broker the provision of basic data (e.g., academic, attendance, and discipline) about participating students.
- Additionally, interviewees mentioned making connections that led to arts partnerships through networking opportunities hosted by the **Allegheny Intermediate Unit**, as well as the **Remake Learning Network**.

Funding

Typically, regional arts organizations or intermediaries secure funding and then manage the payments to the teaching artist(s). Having funding in place at the onset makes it easier to engage schools in a partnership. Interviewees from arts organizations discussed, in particular, current grant opportunities as an important facilitator of ongoing partnerships. We also heard a few examples of successful efforts by school and district administrators—albeit with unusually strong arts experience or connections—to secure funding for arts partnerships. In some cases, foundations influenced partnership design by providing funding based on an interest in supporting a specific arts program, a preferred school partner, or an underserved neighborhood. Across the board, interviewed partners described funding sources as primarily covering direct contact time with students for one school year.

Multiple Champions for Arts Education

All arts partnerships are predicated on the support of an individual or individuals inside the school or district. Both arts organizations and school administrators frequently described the importance of having both teacher and administrator support for arts partnerships—if not at the onset, then early on in the planning process:

> You must believe that the arts partnership will be an important part of a child's school experience. And that belief has to be at the highest level: among school board members and superintendents and building principals.
> —*Superintendent*

The impetus for an arts partnership might also come from parents or other community members.

While support from each of these stakeholder groups is important, respondents stressed that, ultimately, having support from a variety of stakeholders ensures successful partnership implementation and lays the foundation for a sustained partnership. Having just one champion for an arts partnership is insufficient to ensure successful, sustained implementation. A partnership that begins with an enthusiastic teacher can falter when that teacher needs scheduling support from the main office. A partnership championed by a school leader may face resistance from teachers who are supposed to participate but whose ideas and needs were not considered in the program's design. The literature also emphasizes the importance of these supporters actively advocating for the partnership throughout its duration, although this was not emphasized during the interviews (Seidel, Eppel, and Martiniello, 2000; Bodilly and Augustine, 2008).

Shared Vision and Goals

Staffs from both schools and arts organizations predominantly described student-centered goals for the arts partnerships they engage in and worked to create a mutual understanding of student needs in specific educational environments. Partners tailored programs to each unique context rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all package:

> We use an iterative process to respond to a school's initial request to partner. We ask a series of questions to better determine what their needs are, brainstorm possibilities together, then design or match the school with a teaching artist and a program based on our shared understanding of the program's goals. Sometimes we have to rein in the school's vision, given various constraints, and other times, we encourage schools to push their thinking further out than their initial conception.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

According to the arts organizations in particular, a partnership that leverages the strengths of both partners to most effectively address the particular needs of a school, its teachers,

and its students is likely to meet the needs of the partners and, therefore, be sustained.

Collaborative Effort

Arts organizations in particular described their successful partnerships as relationships that require regular communication (in person, via phone, and via email) and are grounded in mutual respect. Such communication is critical early on in the engagement process and ideally incorporates advance planning and the development of shared goals. Early communication is also important for relationship-building. Early, mutual understanding makes it easier for partners to be flexible and responsive when needs change or initial plans do not achieve desired results.

BARRIERS TO ESTABLISHING, IMPLEMENTING, AND SUSTAINING REGIONAL ARTS PARTNERSHIPS

Partners reported facing challenges uniquely associated with *establishing* arts partnerships, which differed from barriers partners faced while *implementing* or trying to *sustain* arts partnerships. These barriers echoed the primary challenges found in the literature. These include limited time for planning and arts instruction (Rowe et al., 2004; Americans for the Arts, 2015); competing school and district priorities (Woodworth et al., 2009), such as an emphasis on tested subjects versus arts standards (Rich, Polin, and Marcus, 2003; Woodworth et al., 2009) or changing education policy contexts (Bodilly and Augustine, 2008); and a lack of funding (Rowe et al., 2004).

Among the more than 20 factors that interviewees identified as barriers, most (but not all) exist on the school side of the partnership. And many of them are barriers to becoming involved in a partnership at all. We have grouped these factors into nine barriers based on their prevalence in the interview data and interviewees' descriptions of how the factors work in combination. We discuss the nine barriers below, ordering them to align to the steps that partners take when entering into and implementing a partnership.

Barriers to Establishing Regional Arts Partnerships

- **Competition with higher-priority school needs:** Schools face a myriad of external pressures stemming from state

mandates, district offices, and their own local communities, including accountability systems and communitywide poverty. Not all principals will prioritize the arts. In particular, high-needs schools must dedicate most, if not all, of their available resources (e.g., time and staff) to addressing basic student needs, including ensuring student safety. Most of the interviewed arts partners expressed the desire to create equitable access to the arts as part of their motivation for reaching out to high-needs schools; however, these arts partners recognized that students who might benefit most from arts partnerships often attend schools that are least ready to partner:

> [The school] can't start to focus on arts education until more pressing needs are met. If they're still dealing with issues of safety [see Maslow's hierarchy of need], it's hard to come in and expect to have meaningful interactions with [the students]. Any partnership will continue to limp along until those root issues are addressed.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

- **Lack of awareness of and access to information about past, current, and potential partnerships throughout Allegheny County:** While Allegheny County is rich with cultural assets, discoverability of these assets is currently low. Information about various arts education partnership opportunities is dispersed across individual organization websites, and opportunities are not shared explicitly and broadly with educators. At the school level, administrators and teachers are not always aware of the range of arts partnership opportunities available to them and, therefore, do not pursue them. From the individual artist's and arts organization's perspective, it is not always clear how best to access funding for arts partnerships, as well as potential school partners. Although intermediaries often leverage their professional relationships to establish and support arts partnerships in schools, they also may inadvertently overlook potential partners. And both school and arts partners most frequently mentioned word-of-mouth as their go-to method for identifying and matching with a partner. This person-to-person approach to forming arts partnerships lacks transparency, can be inefficient, and might exclude viable partners not yet connected to an existing informal network.

- **Difficulty of gaining multilevel buy-in (e.g., principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders) for arts partnerships:** If school or district leaders and staff do not

value arts experiences, they will not seek or be receptive to partners. One strategy to strengthen buy-in throughout the county is the AEC's arts education Leadership Academy, offered to principals and administrators for required continuing education credit. This PD helps convert leaders into arts education advocates. But it only reaches a limited cohort each year. Additional methods of reaching a broader group of leaders are likely necessary. Interviewees noted that developing and sustaining this kind of support has been a challenge in the region. Unfamiliarity with the benefits of arts partnerships can be at fault. Interviewees relayed that the benefits of arts partnerships are not always easy to describe. They do not necessarily lead to higher scores on state assessments, for example. The benefits to students may accrue primarily in social-emotional domains and may unfold slowly. Similarly, the benefits for teachers may emerge over time as classroom teachers continue to interact with teaching artists. As one interviewee described it:

> People [seem to] have to experience [arts partnerships] for themselves to see how arts partnerships succeed, or you have to make the experience so explicit to help others see its worth.
> —*Principal*

Buy-in for education partnerships can also vary among arts and culture organizations. For this study, we interviewed the staff directly involved in administering arts partnerships and, therefore, few commented on a lack of buy-in within their own organizations. However, some interviewees suggested that other arts and culture organizations differ in how they prioritize education programming and in turn support their designated education staff.

- **Capacity constraints among school and arts organizations:** As noted, some schools do not prioritize arts education. But even those principals who value it might not have the capacity to partner. The importance of preparing educators for and then supporting them as they implement arts partnerships came through clearly in our interviews. Providing PD to classroom teachers participating in arts partnerships can be challenging, however. In many districts, there is fierce competition among departments for the limited time allocated to PD for teachers. Administration time for intermediary personnel from both schools and arts and culture organizations to facilitate partnership formation is also limited, and arts administrators are reporting that residencies are not as straightforward as they used to be. Arts and culture interviewees reported operat-

ing with very limited direct support staff and few resources to grow in that area, as well as having to delay projects because of insufficient staffing. And while there are some PD opportunities for teaching artists in Allegheny County designed specifically to prepare them to work in public school settings, offerings are limited. Interviewees stressed a need for additional training for teaching artists on responding to students' mental and physical health needs, including interacting with students who have experienced trauma.

Barriers to Implementing and Sustaining Regional Arts Partnerships

Once a partnership is established, a new set of barriers emerges.

- **Lack of funding for ongoing collaboration and for multiyear commitments:** Lack of funding for ongoing collaboration makes it hard to adopt a continuous improvement model, which can contribute to a successful partnership. Also, current program funding seldom supports multiyear partnerships:

> A lot of good programs go "poof!" and that's a threat to the sustainability of partnerships. . . . We're basically having to tell our board that 66 percent of our anticipated income will happen, but we can't tell them how and with whom because it develops over the course of the year. That level of hustle is crazy for both partners [arts organization and school]; it's almost frenetic, and unpredictable. It's better to know what's going to happen and when [with multiyear funding] so we can count on that partnership continuing from year to year.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

- **Lack of time and capacity for regular check-ins:** Ongoing planning, relationship-building, and communication—characterized by consistency and flexibility to reflect on the implementation process, identify areas for improvement, and correct courses of action—are not only stymied by a lack of funding. This kind of ongoing communication requires consistent support for the partnership from school and arts organization staff. Identifying areas for improvement and midcourse corrections requires flexibility on both sides as well, while maintaining a dedication to the overall project goals. However, in addition to funding, these three steps require resources that partners found hard to come by: additional time (particularly during the school day for in-school partnerships) and evaluation know-how:

> PA Council for the Arts is awesome but only pays for contact time with students in a classroom, none for the planning time—[that leaves out] all the conversations and meetings, and research to develop that residency. . . . Many funders don't consider that part when allocating funds.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

- **Transportation:** With limited resources for transportation, Pittsburgh-area students are often unable to take advantage of the various cultural institutions in the city, and Allegheny County school districts outside the Pittsburgh metropolitan area have difficulty finding arts organizations that can affordably send them their teaching artists. These engagements can require more travel time (e.g., three hours round-trip) than instructional time with students (typically an hour).

- **Inflexible schedules:** Another critical barrier to effective implementation identified by interviewees is the inflexibility of school or performance schedules. Many schools in Allegheny County operate on a six-day schedule (meaning that students have an art class every sixth day of school). This makes it difficult to plan consistent visits by teaching artists who follow a traditional workweek. In other words, if students participate in an art class every sixth school day, that would require the teaching artist to visit the school on a different workday each week, which in turn compromises the artist's ability to accept other professional engagements that follow a regular schedule. Also, standardized testing administration often creates blackout periods for arts programming in schools. It is noteworthy, however, that some of the school administrators who participated in this study sought out arts opportunities during testing periods to help mitigate student and teacher stress by engaging students in what they considered to be enjoyable activities. There are also times when an arts partner has limited schedule flexibility—for example, a Shakespeare performance might be set based on a number of factors and the resulting dates might not align to the Shakespeare unit in the English department at the partnering high school.

- **Staff turnover:** Interviewees reported staff turnover in the school or in the arts organization as the reason most partnerships are not sustained. All too often, partnerships rely on a single school champion, with partnerships following educators when they move to a new school setting. The unpredictability of where arts partnerships will take hold year after year creates administrative hurdles for arts partner administrators:

> Relationships with schools often hinge on one teacher or person; that person leaves, that entire relationship with the school is back to square one.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

In addition to staff turnover within schools, arts organizations and intermediaries reported difficulties with retaining teaching artists in whom they have invested considerable time and resources to partner effectively with schools:

> I had six artists leave whom I trained last year. Some do artists fellowships and others take full-time arts education jobs. Our teaching artists are independent contractors. We're trying to get at least a year commitment from artists.
> —*Arts organization administrator*

According to our interviewees, annual funding cycles expose teaching artists to uncertainty about the duration of any given partnership. Teaching artists are unable to plan beyond a school year, increasing the likelihood that they will search for longer-term positions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arts partnerships have a respectable history in Allegheny County. Our interviewees confirmed that partners from regional arts and cultural organizations and schools have engaged in and continue to build on long-term partnerships, forming shared goals and creating customized arts programs to benefit students—the acknowledged primary beneficiaries of this work. Interviewees also expressed their growing awareness of the professional learning opportunities that arts partnerships offer to both participating teachers and artists. In initiating and implementing these partnerships, schools and arts organizations strive to follow best practices from the literature. The facilitators that support this work echo those found in the literature, although the prevalence in the region of arts and cultural organizations and intermediaries skilled at brokering relationships is not common.

It is also worth noting that interviewees rarely complained of insufficient funding in general, which is a barrier cited in the literature (Rowe et al., 2004). Their discussions of funding were more nuanced. And when asked if more funding would be beneficial, they often stressed the time and capacity barriers described above. The problems related to funding were that it tends to support contact with students but not the "overhead"

work associated with building and sustaining the longer-term partnerships we explored in this study: the planning, coordination, reflecting, and improving. And most grants were dispersed over a school year, which contributes to challenges in sustaining partnerships in general and to important aspects of partnering, such as retaining teaching artists. Another barrier that tended to stymy the work was gaining and maintaining buy-in from multiple actors, particularly within a school.

The recommendations that follow address identified barriers and partner needs. Our intention here is to suggest strategies that might increase the quantity and sustainability of arts partnerships in Allegheny County. Our recommendations should be of interest to current or potential funders of arts partnerships and others both in Allegheny County and elsewhere who play a role in matching schools and arts partners.

Strategies for Creating More Partnerships

- **Fund pilot partnerships within underserved districts or schools as a "first taste" to establish relationships.** According to our interviewees, arts organizations have focused on partnering with schools that are most capable of partnering. If there are many more students who would benefit from these partnerships but attend schools where the challenge may be greater when it comes to developing successful partnerships, additional resources and different engagement strategies might be necessary. For example, arts organizations could be funded as part of larger neighborhood or school reform initiatives. Several schools in the Pittsburgh Public School district have become community schools, for example, which might open access for additional partners. And there are currently efforts under way to focus on underserved neighborhoods, such as the Homewood Children's Village. Funders could support arts organizations to engage in these broader efforts to support high-needs schools.

- **Create a centralized repository to identify arts resources, match partners based on educational and partnership needs, and illuminate which arts partnerships are active in which schools.** As an example, Chicago's Artlook Map serves as both a searchable database of potential arts partners and a map of active partnerships in schools for any given school year (Ingenuity and Chicago Public Schools, undated). Another example is Los Angeles County's online searchable database of arts partner programs (Los Angeles County Arts Ed Collective, undated).

Arts partners who apply for inclusion in these databases must have their programs vetted annually by a panel of arts education experts. In both of these cases, the centralized repository is not a stand-alone asset but a component of a larger initiative. In Chicago, schools and arts partners that participate in the surveys that populate the Artlook Map can unlock available funds to support partnerships and other arts education needs. In Los Angeles County, school districts that develop board-adopted arts education strategic plans and policies can access a pool of funds to support arts partnerships with organizations identified from the vetted list. These funds, and the funds to support the repositories, come from groups of funders in each locale that have decided to pool their funding to support these systematic efforts to improve arts education in schools. While a centralized repository for Allegheny County would provide awareness of and access to information about past, current, and potential partnerships throughout Allegheny County, an effort like this would likely require a broader strategy with clear incentives for arts organizations and schools to participate. Although a repository may be easy to create (students in the arts management program at Carnegie Mellon University might take on such a project, for example), the broader strategy encompassing a repository might take strategic thinking and funding from the foundation community in the region.

- **Host showcase events to expose school staff, parents, and the community to the potential benefits of arts opportunities for students.** This idea of showcasing is meant to serve as a proxy for experiencing the arts partnership firsthand. While some local arts and cultural organizations already hold events to promote their partnership offerings, we recommend that local organizations collaborate to hold a single event that offers opportunities for educators to learn about the range of arts partnership opportunities across partner organizations. Artists should be compensated for their time, guests would likely need incentives to attend, and such an event would need to be hosted during nonschool hours.

- **Support educator professional development.** Funders might strengthen arts partnerships by making arts learning opportunities for adults more readily available. This might mean financing educators and teaching artists (and substitute teachers in their classrooms) to attend workshops and conferences, as well as to visit schools to observe successful arts education partnerships as they are implemented.

Strategies for Strengthening Existing Partnerships

- **Restructure funding opportunities.** The local funding community has broadly and generously supported arts partnerships across Allegheny County. However, grants that support planning time, transportation, and multiple years are rare. Exploring funding commitments in these areas may result in more sustainable partnerships.

- **Build the capacity of current programs to expand access and to help sustain them.** There are arts partners that show promise based on their ability to enact the partnership process articulated in the figure on page 6.

Additional vetting of and concomitant funding for these programs might enable them to reach more students, offer more-consistent work to teaching artists, and manage more-sustainable programs.

- **Improve the program evaluation capacity of arts partnership participants.** Investing in evaluation support for arts partnerships might create a continuous quality-improvement culture. Evaluation data can in turn inform future partnerships, improving their impact over time, and funding decisions. Resulting evaluation reports could be shared broadly to demonstrate impacts from arts partnerships.

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About This Report

Partnerships between schools and arts organizations can benefit students, educators, and artists, as well as contribute to a community's valuing of and participation in the arts. The Jack Buncher Foundation supports such partnerships in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and engaged the RAND Corporation to ask regional partners how funders could more effectively leverage their support to expand access to arts partnerships and to deepen existing ones. Launching and sustaining arts partnerships is challenging, particularly when funders and arts organizations wish to partner with high-needs schools or districts. This report presents findings from an exploratory study on arts partnerships in Allegheny County and identifies regional facilitators and barriers to forming, implementing, and sustaining them. It should interest funders, intermediaries, and others who play pivotal roles in establishing, improving, and expanding arts partnerships both within and outside of Allegheny County.

This study was sponsored by the Jack Buncher Foundation, a family foundation in Pennsylvania, and conducted by RAND Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on prekindergarten, K–12, and higher-education issues, such as preschool quality rating systems, assessment and accountability, teacher and leader effectiveness, school improvement, out-of-school time, educational technology, and higher-education cost and completion.

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