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Arts and Education Thought Leader Forum **Assuring Equitable Arts Learning in Urban** **K-12 Schools**

in partnership with Grantmakers for Education

John McCann

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Arts and Education Thought Leader Forum

Assuring Equitable Arts Learning in Urban K–12 Public Schools

John McCann

The first in a series of Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA) Arts and Education Thought Leader Forums was held on June 24, 2010, at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore in partnership with Grantmakers for Education (GFE).

The theme of the forum — “Assuring Equitable Arts Learning in Urban K–12 Public Schools” — was jointly determined by GIA and GFE. GIA and GFE hosted a total of thirty funders representing private foundations, corporations, and public agencies that support the arts, education, or both, through arts education funding initiatives. Context and provocation were provided by Cyrus Driver, director of Program Learning and Innovation at the Ford Foundation; Nick Rabkin, research associate at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago; David Sherman, consultant to the American Federation of Teachers; and Richard Kessler, executive director of the Center for Arts Education. John McCann, president of Partners in Performance, Inc., facilitated the meeting.

Arts Education and the Purposes of Schooling

Cyrus Driver set a context for the day by sharing three observations informed by his twenty-five-year career in public education reform. First, strengthening the arts in public schools is a cultural problem that will be solved not through more research and data but through a change in beliefs and norms, basically a change in the public’s consciousness about the arts and their value to education. Second, with the central priorities of education in the United States being social reproduction and economic prosperity, Driver advised the group to recognize that through economic ups and downs since 1980, the access to arts in education has been in continual decline, again reinforcing the lack of the arts being embedded as a core cultural value.

Driver’s third point was that he did not see this decline as all gloom and doom, and he urged the group to view the current redefinition of public education as an opportunity to get in on the “ground floor,” since so many frameworks and structures are being examined, including extending the school day and expanding the school year. He also emphasized that new technologies and their influence on how learning occurs, the evolving federal role in education, and the fact that assessment is in for a “lot of change” all provide avenues for the arts to enter the discussion. To influence norms and values and engage in the “reset moment” for education, Driver proposed three strategies.

1. Build new coalitions: “powerful people with powerful ideas”;

2. Identify and embrace “unlikely allies” such as labor unions and the business community; and
3. Create a new level of “common cause” beyond the current internal fractures in the arts education community

In response to questions from the group, Driver also suggested that participants:

- Look internationally, especially to Indonesia and Japan, which for different reasons have embraced the arts as vital to education; and
- Take lessons from Big Thought in Dallas on how they have grown “to scale” by utilizing evaluation to advance from a grassroots beginning in seven schools to fifteen schools, and then with Wallace Foundation funding have become recognized as an essential element of the Dallas educational structure.

Following Driver’s introductory presentation, three speakers responded to what GIA and GFE view as critical barriers to achieving equitable arts learning in urban K–12 public schools. Each speaker had prepared and circulated a paper in advance of the session. These papers and audio files of the presentations, including Driver’s introductory remarks, are available at grantmakersinthearts.org.

Barrier: The rationales/arguments in support of arts education are not sufficient to advance equitable access for all urban public school students or to place arts education on the table for major education policy discussion and decision making.

In response to the challenge of achieving equitable arts participation in urban schools, Nick Rabkin identified five key areas in which arts education activity correlates with improved education outcomes in the United States:

- Academic performance; solid research about the positive influence of the arts is currently being drowned out.
- Motivation and discipline; cognitive sciences now show how individual motivation, discipline, and self-regulation improve with the arts. It is discouraging that people think the arts lack discipline.
- Twenty-first-century skills and higher-order thinking; data correlate these essential capabilities with the arts.
- Improving school climate; arts participation improves morale, engages students in active learning, and reduces conflict and violence. While the arts are shown to improve school climate, they are sometimes loud, messy, and disorderly.
- Aspirations for social mobility; although a complex argument supports arts in schools, a majority of parents, administrators, and policy makers see the arts as a pathway to upward mobility.

In spite of the data supporting these beneficial contributions, Rabkin noted that childhood arts education

participation decreased by 25 percent from 1980 to 2008, with greater decreases for Latino and African American children. This followed a steady increase from 1930 to 1980, during which time participation grew by 180 percent to an average rate of 65 percent.

Rabkin offered four practical strategies in response to these declining rates of participation.

1. Build a stronger research-based case for the value of arts learning.

Research the short- and long-term outcomes of arts education — cognitive, academic, social, emotional, and creative — including serious evaluation of promising current programs and retrospective longitudinal studies of students who have been through good programs. Focus on both “twenty-first-century higher-order skills” and dispositions and “the basics,” and look for evidence of the connections between the two.

Research pedagogy, curriculum, and the dose most likely to generate positive outcomes. Why, how, and by how much does arts education deliver good outcomes? Complex questions like these suggest a multidisciplinary approach and scholarly and popular reporting encompassing neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, evolutionary psychology, and scholarship on the arts and cognition by artists and leading arts education practitioners. Philanthropic initiatives could leverage support from federal funding sources like the National Science Foundation. A long-term investment will provide significant validation to the field.

Research cost and efficiency. These are priority concerns for policy makers. How much does arts education cost? Can it be more efficient? Without joining the cult of efficiency in schools, we need to be able to say whether arts education is an efficient strategy for delivering good outcomes.

2. Resolve divisive internal debates.

Research can clarify issues, but there needs to be constructive dialogue among institutional leaders and leading practitioners about the role of teaching artists and arts specialists in schools, and about the relationship of discipline-based and integrated arts education. There’s been good progress on the latter in Chicago, where philanthropic leadership has made a big difference. We need national progress as well.

3. Develop clearer concise messages and employ diverse strategies for delivery.

Reaching hearts is as important as reaching minds, and we need vehicles that are artful, not just scholarly. There are three examples of directions this might take: Dan Meyer’s brilliant TED talk on how to make math education powerful. “Experiential advocacy” — events that are significant enough that key policy makers will attend and *experience* arts education.

And Nilaja Sun’s masterful show *No Child ...*, about the work of a teaching artist in a Bronx high school. One high-octane arts education experience is more potent than five scholarly papers.

A more strategic focus is needed in arts education advocacy and communications. ArtsEd Washington has had great success with a focus on principals as a key constituency. Good arguments can be made for similar focus on parents, superintendents, key legislators, and school board chairs. We need to test diverse strategic initiatives in many states.

For those who doubt the need to be more concise, Rabkin asked the group to consider that the introduction to the national art standards is 8,000 words while the introduction to the math standards is only 700 carefully chosen words

4. Create networks beyond the arts for learning, dissemination, and advocacy.

Arts education is deep in its own silo. There is a need to build meaningful networks and joint work with educators in other subjects who are also committed to a new educational paradigm. This work should be supported in urban districts and networked nationally.

Last, Rabkin addressed the internal arguments about the value of arts integration. “Whatever you may think about arts integration, it is the most significant innovation in the field over the last two decades and a leading example of constructivist education in public schools — perhaps *the* leading example.” Rabkin went on to say that “interviews with key informants in a dozen districts suggest to me that district policy makers may be more open to integration, given their resource constraints.” He added that there have been no nationally coordinated efforts to develop the practice, advocate for it, or design systemic approaches to its implementation. Rabkin suggested support be provided for development of networks (and institutions) to advance arts integration.

Barrier: A lack of knowledge and technical skills related to teaching and learning, including basic data on what children are receiving in the classroom, arts pedagogy, budgeting, scheduling, assessment, and more, inhibits equitable access to arts education.

While reminding participants about the long-standing commitment of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to arts education, David Sherman, now a consultant to AFT and a member of the board of directors of the Center for Arts Education, criticized the federal No Child Left Behind Act (“if it is tested, it counts”) and its successor, Race to the Top (which deals only with the business of public education), as further marginalizing the arts in schools. This has been exacerbated, according to Sherman, by a state-level “data frenzy” and sole focus on “measurable outcomes.” In response Sherman offered a ten-point approach to

achieving higher levels of equitable access to arts education in urban settings:

1. Support the organizations involved in developing the new Common Core standards to make sure they continue to integrate the arts with other subject areas and promote the development of common arts standards on the agenda.
2. Provide grants to organizations to facilitate the placement of stories, op-ed pieces, PSAs, editorials, and so on in the mass media (written by a variety of authors) to educate the public and raise awareness about how we are hurting children by not providing them with a well-rounded education, and how the elimination of the arts in particular is hindering their development as deep and critical thinkers and productive citizens.
3. Assist appropriate nonprofits and others to get on the agendas at the annual conferences of key national, regional, and local organizations to inform their members about the issues at hand and how they relate to the constituencies they represent, for example, the NAACP and other civil rights groups, National School Boards Association, National PTA, La Raza, the Council of the Great City Schools, national associations of principals and teachers, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National Governors Association.
4. Call for a meeting of key foundation, arts, and education representatives with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to discuss the issues at hand and in particular, how we can be helpful in implementing his public commitment to arts education (including its role in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act [ESEA] in spring 2011).
5. Fund organizations to prepare concise materials for parents and school boards to give them the questions they should be asking their districts and schools about the arts education services their students are receiving.
6. Provide a grant to an appropriate organization to assemble a list of highly effective schools across the country that have persevered and thrived by incorporating strong arts education curricula and offerings and use these schools as living case histories of “yes, we can” in points 1–4 above.
7. Support efforts to reach out to arts organizations that work closely with schools across the country to learn how they have been able to continue their work in this challenging economy.
8. Provide funding to produce a DVD (and resource guide) with students, parents, teachers, principals, and others talking about the impact the arts have had on their schools and the quality of the education they provide.
9. Fund an in-depth study of the world of arts and arts-related careers in all walks of life in terms of career

development for students, as well as possible themes for new small schools and those undergoing redesign.

10. Fund a convening of arts organizations, school district representatives, and others to put together a set of recommendations for the reauthorization of ESEA that relates to the role of the arts and arts education in K–12 schooling. Then, meetings and testimony can move ahead with key congressional leaders, particularly those on the education committees in the House and Senate.

It was the final point that prompted the greatest amount of discussion among the participants. With the reauthorization of ESEA scheduled for spring 2011, the group felt it imperative to develop a strategy either by collaborating with the Arts Education Working Group (Americans for the Arts) or by influencing the reauthorization language this fall.

Barrier: A shortage of coordination and a decline in the development of new systems for delivering broad-based resources in urban centers have inhibited access to quality arts education for urban school students and their families. When form doesn’t follow function, the discontinuity between arts standards/traditional instructional design and the reality of arts and education in the twenty-first century becomes even more stark.

A final provocation was offered by Richard Kessler, who began by citing how the arts have been fundamentally redefined — primarily through technology — from the four traditional disciplines around which the existing standards were developed from 1996 to 1999, into a “virtual kaleidoscope” that opens the art-making process to everybody. As an example, he cited how the digital realm can now allow all students in an entire school instantly to become photographers. Additionally, what was once a simple construct of primarily having arts teachers “teach arts classes in schools” now has multiple and ever-increasing dimensions, including online instruction, teaching artists, parent volunteers, after-school programs, and community-based projects. “Just imagine a principal, with little knowledge of the arts, and with little to no budget trying to make sense of this new world, especially with the increasing demand for more standards, benchmarks, and exit requirements.”

In response to this swiftly — and constantly — changing reality, Kessler offered a series of responses for consideration.

1. Invest in research that provides better understanding of the variety of ways in which quality programs are delivered equitably.
2. Further examine how disparate approaches are and can be better coordinated.
3. Invest in a deeper understanding of what quality arts integration looks like.
4. Encourage research and development. (This step could be fertile for arts education as audience development

research has been advantageous for live arts and presenting organizations.)

5. Support overall research and development in arts education.
6. Attempt to balance the natural desire to provide core support with the need to invest in the future.
7. Foster dialogue among teaching artists, teacher and administrator unions, and charter management organizations.
8. Build coalitions — find the common conversations. (This was cited as a long-standing weakness of the field.)
9. Consider what might be learned from the sometimes hard-hitting, proactive approaches to school reform made by some of the nation's largest foundations. Kessler cited the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as an example.
10. Support building relationships between public education grantmakers and arts grantmakers How do we continue building relationships as needed?

Kessler concluded by noting, "The history of arts education has been studded with initiatives by major national foundations that wax and wane. I know the issue of dependency very well — the Dana Foundation was a longtime supporter, but left arts education when Bill Safire died. This creates more issues than people think."

The forum closed with each participant, based on what he or she had heard from the provocateurs and discussed throughout the day, identifying important strategic steps forward.

- There is a need to develop a long-term vision for arts education (in general) and in urban schools in particular:
 - Arts education advocates could develop a comprehensive ten- to twenty-year strategy to change public policy and public perception of the arts in schools.
 - Arts education advocates could look to international models for inspiration and effective practices.
- This vision will need a top-line strategy that:
 - Assures an "integrated" strategy (work together!)
 - Informs reauthorization of ESEA
 - Learns from and links with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)
 - Eliminates internal fractures (e.g., arts integration/discipline based)
 - Identifies and funds capacity-building needs
 - Develops better understanding of costs of arts education (cost analysis)
 - Links arts to "creativity" framework

- Access to relevant, reliable, evidence-based research and data is essential:
 - Gather and curate data on outcomes, effective practice, and other factors
 - Create a central clearinghouse (portal) for unfettered access
- A research agenda is required to fill any existing gaps:
 - Target research initiatives
 - Screen to guarantee high-quality researchers/methodology
- An effective approach to "messaging" that conveys the unifying vision and is supported by the research:
 - Speak with one compelling and clear voice
 - Bring likely (and unlikely) allies to the table
 - Engage directly with multiple stakeholders (students, experts, etc.)
 - Target the message in ways that reduce the "knowledge deficit" (of those who have no experience with arts education)

The meeting concluded with Chris Tebben (GFE) stating, "It was powerful for me to listen to these ideas. This has been a real opportunity to shape and integrate our thinking." Janet Brown (GIA) added, "We will look for the next intersection of GFE and GIA, as I know there is a real push for substantive change at this moment."

John McCann is president of Partners in Performance, Inc.

Addendum to John McCann's Arts and Education Thought Leader Forum Report

Janet Brown

During the daylong discussion with arts and education funders in June 2010, a few issues arose that needed some research and status clarification. I am grateful to Sandra Ruppert (Arts Education Partnership), Narric Rome (Americans for the Arts), and Heather Noonan (League of American Orchestras) for their help in providing this information.

Research Clearinghouse: The Arts Education Partnership is developing the Research and Policy Analysis (RAPA) Database, an online clearinghouse of research and policy related to arts learning. It will provide user-friendly summaries of key research findings, point to areas where additional research is needed, and provide key policy implications based on the existing research. It will communicate research in formats and via strategies that ensure broad use by policy makers, educational leaders, and other stakeholders. The database will be interactive, web-based, and eminently responsive to the dynamic needs of policy makers and publics while respecting the highest standards of educational research. The official launch of the RAPA Database is scheduled for fall 2010. Contact Sandra Ruppert, 202-336-7065, aep-arts.org.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The Arts Working Group, a coalition of national arts organizations established in the 1990s, has developed a 2010 policy statement titled Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work and Life, and ESEA legislative recommendations titled Strengthen Arts Education in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In the past, these documents have been endorsed by more than sixty national organizations, representing a cross section of stakeholders in federal education policy. Contact Narric Rome, Americans for the Arts, nrome@artsusa.org, or Heather Noonan, League of American Orchestras, at hnoonan@americanorchestras.org.

Moving Forward for GFE and GIA Members

Collaboration and Information Exchange: GIA and GFE encourage their members to share information and collaborate whenever possible. The obvious, but not always the most frequent collaborators, are the arts and education areas within the same funder organization. Arts and education program officers and directors can work together to find intersections in their work.

National Policy: At the forum, David Sherman, American Federation of Teachers, stated the following: "Now that

Congress has rejected the administration's blueprint and is working on its own, the time has come to get to work with leaders on the Hill.

"If public education has always been a state and local responsibility, why all the talk about the federal role? First, focus, direction, and priorities always come from the top. Then, the federal government in the last ten years (NCLB [No Child Left Behind] and RTTT [Race to the Top]) has had a stronger than ever influence on what goes on in local public schools. Next, states and districts have gotten caught up in the data frenzy and care less and less about the inputs and quality of public education and more and more about the "measurable outcomes." And finally, money talks — and right now, the federal government is the only place standing that is providing substantive additional funds for public schools."

Possible Action: GIA and GFE members at the forum called for a long-term strategy for embedding arts education in federal education policy. A task force could be developed to put a ten-year strategy in place working with arts and education stakeholders to solidify an arts education "movement" that would positively change public will and policy.

State and Local Policy: Funding collaboratives at the local level, engaged with public education policy and practice, have had success in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles. National, regional, and local funders can seek out or form their own collaboratives on a local level working with education experts and practitioners. Both GIA and GFE are sources for identifying collaborative partners in this work.

Statewide arts education advocacy organizations are mostly undercapitalized and understaffed. Supporting their efforts helps consolidate the state message sent to decision makers. The Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network is a good place to get more information on these organizations.

A General Note: GIA and GFE are working across sector lines to integrate education and the arts into the national conscience. Arts education advocates and funders may find success in working with colleagues with similar goals, such as developing workforces, broadening the curriculum, and educating the "whole child." Whether working on the national, regional, state, or local levels, arts and education development needs coordinated planning, skilled education policy strategists, and strong, outspoken funding advocates who are willing to stay the course to make systemic change.

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