

A Broad Brush:

Access and Arts Education insights from School Districts

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Access to Arts Education Investigation

A NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

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Executive Summary

Where do creativity and the open road meet? In places where young people with various disabilities or disadvantages benefit from a strong public education that includes the arts. Recent studies suggest young people with access to high quality arts education have good things happen, such as higher arts achievement or the potential to critically link to other academic areas. In light of that, questions of access to arts education take on a new relevance.

In this study, we return to school districts nominated for strong arts education in the *Gaining the Arts Advantage: Lessons from School Districts That Value Arts Education* (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership 1999) study. Here, we examine district strengths, challenges, and advice when seeking to provide arts education access. Students with various disabilities, in special education, or considered at high risk of academic failure are of particular interest. Fifty-seven long telephone interviews, stratified across the stakeholders from seven districts provide case-specific insights. The categories arising from the interviews are further illuminated by qualitative and quantitative survey responses from 55 school districts, taken from a national sample and analyzed against national education demographic data.

The study points to **five critical areas** that can either contribute towards or detract from a district's capacity to offer strong arts education:

1. **Context.** The current priorities and challenges in public education affect all educational offerings. Sometimes perceived as an unfunded mandate, districts report special education requires an increasing amount of resources from static or declining budgets. Participating districts take a variety of approaches to providing the least restrictive learning environment for students with disabilities. Some schools and districts provide an inclusive approach, including students with and without disabilities in the same classes. Others offer self-contained classes or schools particularly designed to meet the needs of students with various disabilities. These choices have ramifications for the arts education opportunities provided to students in special education. In addition, districts describe the cultures of special education and arts education as quite different. Yet, many emphasize that the intersection of arts and special education can create important learning opportunities. Music, dance, visual arts, and drama each have their own inherent strengths and challenges when it comes to inclusion. Audition-only opportunities limit access.
2. **Belief.** *Belief* about a child's capacity affects teaching, according to parents and teachers. They suggest the ability to envision success in arts education helps determine whether the child has a positive or negative learning experience in the class. Similarly, various stakeholders report the extent to which a school district and its staff *value* the arts affects how arts are offered, whether inclusively or not at all.

3. **High Quality Educators.** High quality educators do the primary work of providing sequential public school access to arts education. But, there are challenges. Teacher shortages complicate hiring. Arts teachers with knowledge in accommodations are particularly difficult to find. Likewise, surveyed districts rarely consider arts skills when hiring non-arts educators. However, districts identify arts therapists and aides familiar with the arts as part of the access solution. Paraprofessionals may work with particular special education students throughout the day. To the extent they have the content knowledge to assist with arts education, they may help enable the student. *Professional growth* is critical. Respondents recommend creating venues for in-person and e-mail dialogue between arts and special education teachers. Educators recommend providing environments where they can experientially learn to accommodate various levels of students. *Educator leaders* can make the difference in a district, through commitment to continuous improvement and mentoring. District arts coordinators, inclusion coordinators, and experienced teachers are well poised to offer leadership and guidance.
4. **Environment.** Both emotional and physical spaces contribute to the learning environment. Responding districts report few physical barriers in the schools. However, they indicate their performing and exhibition spaces still need work. *Scheduling* can also support or detract from the opportunities. If students in special education are pulled out of arts classes for work in other areas, their arts access is limited. Less tangible, the *climate* of the classroom matters. Some educators recommend creating supportive mixed ability learning communities, so students can learn from each other. If the arts education class adopts a culture of respect and possibility, all students can benefit.
5. **Connecting Strands.** No one person alone makes for strong arts education access. Instead, the school systems describe *levels of communication* which help maximize the collective capacities of educators and students. Formal and informal opportunities for dialogue help educators struggling to offer accommodations to students with disabilities, even as they work with high student: teacher ratios and busy schedules. Like teachers, districts recommend school systems should not go it alone. *Allies* inside and outside the district can help make the case for and enhance access to arts education. Higher education appears as the most frequent educational partner for surveyed districts. Suburban districts indicate the most varied and frequent access to allies. Urban districts report strong connections to arts organizations. Responding rural districts report connecting with individuals much more frequently than organizations. Districts with higher percentages of students in poverty or at risk indicate fewer connections to educational allies than wealthier districts, except in the case of arts organizations. These arts allies may have particular programs or incentives in place to reach out to students in need.

Students with disabilities and lower socioeconomic backgrounds both bring and gain much from a strong arts education. We hope this study helps catalyze the dialogue among communities, districts, partners, and policymakers to help enhance such opportunities and lead to further inquiry and action. ~ Dawn M. Ellis

I. Prelude

Introduction

Values

In our American democracy, we simultaneously cherish the ideals of equal opportunity and individual initiative. We combine those by declaring everyone deserves a chance – a chance at education, a decent life, and the American dream. In this report we take one piece of that ideal - access to a strong education that includes the arts- and examine it through the lens of school districts.

An international nonprofit organization, VSAarts works to create learning opportunities through the arts for people with disabilities (VSAarts 2000a). It asserts “the arts represent a world of resources and opportunities, providing an outlet for creative expression and unlimited possibilities for personal, academic, and professional success.” (VSAarts 2000b) In 2001, VSAarts commissioned an independent research project to study strengths, challenges, and practitioner advice on access to arts education. Such an inquiry presupposes certain values:

- All students deserve access to a high quality public education, including students with various disabilities, in special education, or considered at risk of academic failure.
- A high quality public education incorporates music, visual arts, theatre, dance, and multi-media arts.

Embedded in these values is the belief that public schools have the capacity to provide such a high quality education.

Along the journey of this research, other values emerged from educators, parents, and administrators that resonate with the sponsor’s goal:

- The arts play particularly important roles in the learning processes of students who have difficulty learning in the prevalent educational modes found in public schools.
- The arts increase opportunities for young people to discover and share their individual voices.

This report seeks to offer useful information to public school educators, administrators, and leaders who work to provide all students with an education that includes the arts. In addition, this research can inform service, funding, and professional development organizations about ways to help school districts with this work.

Background and Methods

In 1999, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership's report *Gaining the Arts Advantage: Lessons from Districts That Value Arts Education* (GAA) provided a first national look at the factors and strategies needed for school systems to provide strong arts education. National, state, and local organizations nominated nearly 500 school districts with strong arts education programs for the GAA research. For this follow-up study, VSAarts commissioned GAA principal investigator Dawn M. Ellis to invite these nominated districts to participate in research that more deeply examines "access," one of GAA's original strong arts education criteria. As there was not a new nomination process, districts participating in this study should not be assumed to be exemplary in providing access to arts education, but rather as interested in sharing what they have learned.

The research team for this report - Ellis, Marv Klassen-Landis, and Daniel J. Gottlieb- has broad experience in the field, from teaching students of various disabilities to analyzing education systems. Our composite backgrounds include research, poetry, performance, policy, science, teaching, statistical analysis, arts administration, and personal roles such as parenting and advocacy. Pulling upon this mix of practitioner and research skills, the team seeks to make the findings particularly accessible to those most closely involved with public schools.

In spring of 2001, we invited school districts nominated for GAA[†] to participate in our research in a selection of ways: by shaping the inquiry through short answer questions; volunteering to participate in phone interviews if selected; and/or by completing a survey. Three districts helped shape interview and survey questions by completing three short answer questions, offering preliminary insights into their strengths, challenges, and work in professional development. A focus group and conversations with educators, school district administrators, community members, and VSAarts staff with and without disabilities helped sharpen the research design. Two random samples of districts were selected: one from GAA districts (n=161)[‡] and one as a representative nationwide random sample (n= 161x3 or 483). Each sample was stratified by area and density (urban, suburban, and rural)[§] and country region (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West)^{**} to control for possible population density, metro area, and regional differences. In December 2001, we sent the *Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire*^{††} to a total of 597 districts for completion by February 2002. As participation in this research is not one of a district's many reporting requirements, we offered two resource kits as an incentive to complete surveys. In addition, we followed up the mailing with a phone call. We received a limited response size of 55 completed surveys, representing 53 eligible

[†] For more detailed background and methods, please refer to the Appendix.

[†] There were 467 eligible nominated GAA districts.

[‡] The GAA respondents make up a subset of districts with strong arts inclinations (and are thus not a random, representative sample) while the additional random sample is representative.

[§] Urban, rural and suburban district stratification was performed in an attempt to ensure adequate representation of different areas since there are many fewer urban districts than rural districts (though they account for many more students).

^{**} The response rate from the West was particularly low (n=4), so regional findings from that area should be assumed to be limited in scope.

^{††} See Appendix for full instrument, which was available in paper, online, and large print formats.

districts.* Twenty-eight percent of the completed surveys come from GAA districts. Because of the response rate, the two sample pools are combined for analysis. The quantitative results can be interpreted as falling between representative districts and arts-oriented ones[†].

Of 12 GAA districts volunteering for phone interviews, seven were selected based on interest, background information on their access policies shared as part of this research or the original GAA study, and a variety in population density and region.[‡] A district contact person (usually an arts coordinator) provided researchers a list of potential interviewees. Researchers conducted hour-long phone interviews with seven to nine people per district selected from submitted lists and occasionally further exploration. We sought a variety of perspectives, such as district arts coordinator, district special education coordinator, superintendent, school board member, principal, arts teacher, special education teacher, classroom teacher, educational assistant, parent of a student with disabilities, and key community member. Overall, 57 people participated in interviews, some sending supplementary information. The districts interviewed include districts in the Midwest, Northeast, and South, categorized by the Common Core of Data as a range of urban and suburban districts, but including one that self-identifies as rural.

This research differs from the GAA research in one significant aspect: confidentiality. The original GAA report investigated success factors in numerous districts across the country. Eighty-eight selected districts offered their names and contact information, enhancing the ability of others to network with them.[§] Perhaps because the subject of this research – access to arts education – discusses sensitive arenas, including special education and civil rights, numerous individuals and districts agreed to participate in this research on the condition of full confidentiality. Although others were happy to share their name and contact information, this report refers to all districts and individuals anonymously to keep the research consistent and honor the needs of those participating.

The study provides insights into challenges and solutions some districts experience while attempting to provide quality arts experiences to all of their students. By focusing the interviews and one survey sample on districts that were likely to have devoted more effort than average to the issue of arts access and education, this allowed us to gain relatively large amounts of information about helpful techniques. We assumed we would learn more from the interested, sacrificing a true quantitative picture of the average district experience. However, after doing a comparison between responders and non-responders, results indicate that the two pools are similar on most demographics, so the

* Three different surveys were received from different sub-districts of a large urban district, reducing the effective sample size from 55 to 53.

[†] Twenty-eight percent of responding districts came from the GAA sample, which is nearly the same rate as the random sample.

[‡] The interviewed districts are not designed to be representative of a national sample. Instead, they are pulled from a variety of interested GAA districts that may have particularly helpful strategies in the area of access to arts education.

[§] Selected district contact information from districts included in the *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (1999) publication can be found online at http://www.pcah.gov/gaa/contact_info.html.

quantitative analysis may be seen as fairly representative*. This research raises questions and ideas about practice that other practitioners and researches should continue to explore in future studies.

* A comparison of non-responders to responders indicates they are very similar in demographics (including household income, poverty level, and race), except responders on average come from districts that are about 40 percent larger. As the survey was sent to district arts and special education coordinators, this may also speak to an increased likelihood of their existence and availability in larger districts. With GAA districts responding at the same rate as the random sample and similarity of the responders to non-responders, there is an increase likelihood of the responder sample being representative of the full survey sample.

II. The Findings

Critical Themes

In the survey and interviews, our research team found certain themes emerged as critical components in the work of providing arts education to all students. These include:

1. **Context:** the relationship between the work, challenges, and opportunities in public education and in society as a whole
2. **Belief:** the role of values and assumptions
3. **High Quality Educators:** the importance of hiring qualified professionals, providing them room to grow, and encouraging the emergence of leadership.
4. **Environment:** structures, approaches, and accommodations, in the classroom and educational programs
5. **Connecting Strands:** the need for communication and allies

In each area, certain factors can contribute to the success or failure of arts education access. The work that follows speaks both to these factors – which converged from the various data—and a few divergent issues, where individuals strongly disagreed. Interviewees and survey respondents also offer many strategies gleaned from their work providing an arts education that includes students with disabilities, in special education, or at risk of academic failure. The selection of strategies included in this report do not all arise from the same philosophies. We invite readers to use these ideas from the field as a jumping off point to further explore structures and practices that support inclusive arts education. In this way, the reader can also share their lessons learned with the field to promote a continuing dialogue about what we can learn from both success and failure when trying to provide access to arts education.

1. Context

...in the forces affecting the work.

Public school arts education does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it comprises a small part of a much larger complement of educational priorities. Sometimes that part is small to negligible, other times the arts serve as the central driving force behind a school reform, weaving all disciplines together in a comprehensive learning experience. Likewise, school districts exist within a society. All of their educational programs,

including the arts, are affected by the current social, economic and political climates of their communities.

The Societal Context of Public Schools

Societal factors, for the most part, remain beyond the control of school systems. Nonetheless, they have a huge affect on the ability of school systems to provide access to arts education. These factors include the socioeconomic and demographic status of the communities they serve.

Economic

Many districts distressed by recent economic changes feel a squeeze on their budgets creating competing priorities. As of June 30, 2002, 46 states reported budget gaps, with an aggregate shortfall of \$36.1 billion (National Conference of State Legislatures 2002). In our research, some districts report restrictions now and on the horizon, ranging from a reduction in arts partnerships to charging fees for art materials. Survey respondents rate “budgets” and “space” as some of the most challenging areas to access to arts education. Because many of the districts we interviewed value the arts, most are planning and preparing for ways to deal with cuts without reducing core arts education services, such as staff. Accordingly, “numbers of arts educators” and “numbers of special educators” rated as a lower concern overall in the survey responses^{*}. For interviewed districts, the challenge is not whether the arts will be cut. Rather, it is how to ensure the arts are only cut proportionately, in line with all subject areas, instead of being singled out as a budgetary scapegoat.

As is often the case, wealth and opportunity help with access. Some families who value the arts can afford to enhance their children’s arts education outside the school. Educators and parents of students with and without disabilities indicate that interested, able parents seek out:

- ✓ Private arts lessons (e.g., piano, dance)
- ✓ Arts classes outside of school (e.g., summer arts camps, pottery classes)
- ✓ Private arts therapy (e.g., music therapy, art therapy)

Interviewees maintain that not only do young people with outside access to arts education gain from these learning opportunities, but they also benefit in their in-school arts achievement. They note that students with and without disabilities who have intensive access to outside arts experiences, do better in the arts in school. For instance, interviewees found the top musical seats in school orchestras usually go to students with many years of outside training. Similarly, interviewees talked about students with disabilities who come to school with an artistic voice already developed because of their out-of-school arts opportunities. Parents know their children as artists and advocate for

^{*} In the survey, districts were asked to rate “budgets,” “spaces,” “schedules,” “class sizes,” “teacher/ background experience,” “district priorities,” “community priorities,” “socioeconomic status,” “# of arts educators,” and “# of special educators” as “very challenging,” “somewhat challenging,” “somewhat helpful,” “very helpful,” or “having no effect.”

creative experiences for them in school. Teachers see the students' artistic inclinations more clearly. From the literature, we find linguist Shirley Brice Heath studying the power of external, youth-based arts experiences (Heath 1999). Education and arts consultant Dawn M. Ellis lays out a framework for the young person moving among school, community, and home to construct their own arts learning (Ellis 2001). There is much good in external arts education opportunities.

However, the disparity in access to arts learning creates “haves” and “have-not’s”. Community-based learning takes place beyond the public school day, where there is no public mandate to have universal access. In the public school, some educators and parents of students with disabilities find an increasingly competitive arts education climate. With limited opportunities to perform in a play or music troupe, the system seems to exclude students as they move into higher grades. Inadvertently, one district discovered a school art exhibit held in a local mall was inaccessible to students who lacked transportation.

Suggested Strategies:

Research participants recommend several approaches for combating the socioeconomic disparities within school systems, including:

→**Summer arts programs.** To better utilize the school building in the summer, some districts provide school-based learning over the summer.

→**School-based arts therapy.** By providing individualized therapy for students with disabilities, these students not only access a form of the arts, but may also have a plan for using the arts with their education through the IEP*.

Each of these strategies requires resources. Some districts apportion existing resources differently. Others turn to voters or to grants to help accentuate the budget.

Demographic

Although this study does not directly deal with race, issues of race and ethnicity have quietly risen up as underlying and often unspoken factors that affect school system dynamics, including access to arts education. Racial situations, tensions, and misunderstandings seem to be woven into the factors affecting students at risk of academic failure and into the classification of special education students. A few interviewees and focus group members note the disproportionate ratio of students of color receiving special education. This disparity concurs with the findings of the federal act regarding special education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments

* Read about other scheduling recommendations in the Environment section of this report on pg. 33.

of 1997 (IDEA) (One Hundred Fifth Congress of the United States of America 1997).^{*} More than once, participants mention the stigma of special education as a place to “dump” unwanted students. They also raise questions about classification, behavior, and culture. Further research can help examine the climates, both positive and negative, surrounding public school arts education and inclusion of students of various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Special Education

Interviewed educators describe the growth of special education populations and the associated increasing costs as particular challenges. In addition, the level of litigation associated with special education has some concerned that the focus has become more on law and less on students.

Full Inclusion Compared to Self-Contained Classrooms

While the mandate of the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities encompasses the entire country (One Hundred Fifth Congress of the United States of America 1997), the ways in which students receive special education differ greatly by district region, size, and philosophy. Participants articulate both the strengths and challenges of their range of experiences of arts education – from full inclusion in the arts classroom to self-contained separate classes. There is no **one** way districts approach this concept, as philosophies of special education vary from community to community and within districts themselves. Approaches seem to be a combination of the individual needs of students and a school or district philosophy about special education. We encountered advocates of inclusion and of self-contained classes; both hold strong negative views about the other philosophy. In addition, some interviewees indicate their districts are in transition, as new approaches and philosophies are adopted to serve students with disabilities.

Over 80 percent of survey respondents say they regularly or very often included or “mainstreamed” students with various disabilities into the general education classrooms. Parents of students with disabilities split into different camps in their responses, depending on the experiences their child has had with inclusion. Some have encountered a blossoming growth in their loved one, leading to staunch inclusion advocacy. Other parents decry the movement towards greater inclusion in their districts, whether currently instituted or anticipated. These parents assert their children will be lost in the mix, especially as the focus on standards reduces the emphasis on life skills. One

^{*} The federal act regarding special education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), cautioned the states against inappropriately classifying students of color as needing special education services. Findings of the act include: (8)(A) Greater efforts are needed to prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities. (B) More minority children continue to be served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority students in the general school population. (C) Poor African-American children are 2.3 times more likely to be identified by their teacher as having mental retardation than their white counterparts. (D) Although African-Americans represent 16 percent of elementary and secondary enrollments, they constitute 21 percent of total enrollments in special education. (One Hundred Fifth Congress of the United States of America 1997) In addition, IDEA cites the problematic statistics about the small and decreasing number of teachers and education students who are from minority groups, as well as limited numbers of professors of color who teach in schools of education.

parent fears for her child’s safety in when included in mixed ability classes. She also notes that leaving self-contained schools dilutes the collective power of parents of children with disabilities, as they become a small voice in a larger pool of parents.

Educator viewpoints also varied. One superintendent asserted that kids are kids; every student has different abilities and disabilities, and educators must work hard to educate them all. We found some districts that had many self-contained classes for other subjects, but when it came to art, music, physical education, and library, include all students in the classroom. Yet, numerous music therapists and adaptive arts specialists warn against lumping everyone together, declaring that specialists like themselves can help many students with disabilities best in classrooms with a special education focus, with more adults, fewer students, and individualized plans for each student.

Interviewees across the spectrum of opinion agree that full inclusion, when done badly, becomes a lose-lose situation for both students and educators. Unfortunately, many educators say they have great difficulty teaching to a wide spectrum of abilities without needed support. A strong arts education can be derailed by classes that are too large or by teachers lacking adequate preparation to provide students with appropriate accommodations.

Interviewees thoughts on inclusion and self-contained classrooms are summarized below:

Full Inclusion	
PROS	CONS
Focus on all students.	Harder to provide low student: adult ratios.
Sense of equality, dignity.	Can lose the focus on the individual when teaching to the group.
Students of all abilities can learn from each other.	Loss of the safe haven.
Group work moves everyone forward; pushes students further.	Individuals fall through the cracks when environment, adult/students ratios, and teacher skills are not adequate.

Self-Contained Classrooms	
PROS	CONS
Individualized focus of special education allows teachers to tailor to individual needs.	Students subject to labeling and stereotypes.
Flexible, adaptable.	Can miss out on opportunities and materials available to other classes.
Arts education can be linked to the individualized educational plan (IEP) priorities, becoming a strategic part of a student's educational solution.	Students are not necessarily exposed to or included in the highest level of artistic achievement.
More focused arts therapy approaches used.	Students perceive equity disparity.
Teachers hired with the appropriate backgrounds, readiness, and attitudes to accommodate needs.	Small alternative settings may have fewer per-pupil dollars, fewer teachers, and less access to arts specialists.

The comments above do not distinguished between the benefits received in small, individualized classes and those segregated by ability and disability. In fact, a few district interviewees suggested that all students would benefit from the individualized approach to learning that special educators and self-contained classes offer. Similarly, the size of smaller self-contained classes could also reduce the range of artistic skills available to the group.

Who does what in the districts? Each of the following classroom strategies are rated as being used regularly or more often by one-third of district survey respondents:

- full-time, self-contained classrooms
- pulling students out of general classrooms for specific instruction
- providing students with personal assistance from a special educator or aide during general classes

Very few districts report never using any of these strategies. This indicates self-contained classrooms, pulling out, and in class special education assistance do happen in responding districts, just not all the time. There may be regional variation in how frequently students in special education are removed from general classrooms, as fewer than 20 percent of Northeastern or Western districts report regular pull out, while about 50 percent of the districts in the South and Midwest regularly do so.

Arts Education

Most of the surveyed districts have art and music teachers for all students at the elementary level and art and music elective programs at the secondary level. Dance and

theatre programs that are part of the school day appear as exceptions, not norms. These patterns reflect the findings of a recent National Center for Education Statistics report*.

Approaches to teaching the arts fluctuate from district to district, school to school, and even within schools. Districts offering learning in or through the arts use one or more of the following approaches:

- ✓ **Arts disciplines:** visual art, music, theatre, and dance skills are taught sequentially by teachers versed in these content areas with the purpose of improving arts skills. Among surveyed districts with one or more arts educator, three-quarters indicate having at least one arts specialist in all three levels (elementary, middle, high school).^{†‡} Some districts rely solely on their elementary classroom teachers for teaching the arts as part of their curriculum.
- ✓ **Integrated and interdisciplinary arts:** Sixty percent of districts surveyed indicate they regularly integrate arts into the teaching of other subject areas. For instance, a number of responding districts use learning through the arts to enhance literacy. Or, it might look like a music teacher connecting the piece students are working playing to a historical period being studied throughout the school at that grade level. Sometimes, different arts disciplines are woven together in classroom. Also related to this area, some district and school leaders mention using improvement in standardized test scores as a rationale for the arts.
- ✓ **Multiple intelligences:** Harkening to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences(Gardner 1983), 40 percent of survey respondents indicate their district teaches the arts as part of teaching to multiple intelligences at least regularly. This can include teaching to the visual, musical, interpersonal, or kinesthetic intelligences.[§]
- ✓ **Arts and Humanities:** Some districts combine forces between the arts and humanities to teach a combination of production, history, and criticism, offering both the creative and reflective side of the arts.
- ✓ **Arts Therapies:** Some responding districts offer the arts in individual or small group therapy sessions. The therapy approach uses the arts to allow an individual to express and work through issues that are difficult to express verbally. For some, the arts become part of positive behavioral alternatives. Music and art therapy are used

* Data in a recent National Center for Education Statistics(U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics 2002) report suggests the overall availability of arts education in public schools looks as follows. Elementary Schools: 94 percent provided music, 87 percent provided art, 20 percent provided dance, and 19 percent provided theatre/drama instruction. Secondary Schools: 90 percent provided music, 93 percent provided art, 14 percent provided dance, and 48 percent provided theatre/ drama instruction. These statistics do not speak to the quality of public school arts education or to schools with a special education focus. They do suggest music and visual arts continue to be more available to all students than dance or theatre/ drama.

[†] This does not mean that arts in these districts are taught exclusively by arts teachers. There were no differences by country region or metro status.

[§] This area was used the least regularly of all choices.

more commonly by participating districts than are dance, drama, or other arts therapies.

A majority of survey respondents indicate students in their district regularly learn about the arts through field trips and from parents and/or volunteers.* The survey reveals that some districts are more active in the arts on multiple fronts than others, as different ways of teaching the arts correlate with each other. For instance, districts that tend to integrate art into other subjects also tend to use multiple intelligence theory and field trips.

How might this appear in a particular district? One arts coordinator of a district with many special education schools explains his district's views of roles for the arts as:

One, it's a vehicle for **communication** – verbal or nonverbal...

Two, (it's about) **integrating arts** into instruction. Given the needs of our students, we don't have much of a choice; we have to use many sensory modalities and a great number of teachers are excited about thematic learning;...the information sticks.

Three, (we deal with the) **psychological context**: we have a whole division dedicated to crisis support... Because there are rules to the game and outcomes, the arts serve as a structure; they become a holding environment.

However, challenges exist in the ways arts are taught. Some teachers and principals candidly admit that the arts are perceived primarily as a planning period for general classroom teachers in the elementary grades. Likewise, with so much focus on achievement in reading and math, the arts can be seen as extras competing for limited resources. For instance, one superintendent expresses concern that a new foreign language requirement – while important – might compete with the arts for the same scheduling slots.

The Intersection of the Arts & Special Education

Our interviews reveal a perception that arts and special education departments have different cultures. Some arts educators observe that special educators seem to have less freedom, more rules, and more worries – a difference the arts people say should be respected when collaborating with special educators. At times the arts celebrate freedom of expression and more open-ended processes that can be difficult when students with particular disabilities require more structure to focus. In the interviewed districts, the arts seem to receive less attention than special education. Educators and school leaders suggest there is some tension regarding these mandated services in an environment with much litigation and insufficient funding.

* No survey choice provided for the question "How were the arts taught?" was rated "rarely used" by more than 10% of the districts.

On the other hand, a few interviewees describe the arts as combining both individual and group approaches, which can marry special education's focus on individual needs to the group learning focus of general education. Numerous educators and parents assert that, in a time of limited resources, districts should provide the arts to students in special education first and foremost. In fact, several interviewees in one district report that their students with disabilities may actually have greater access to arts education than do other students. Since a number of educators suggest that the arts are particularly helpful to students in achieving goals in their IEP, students with disabilities in their care are signed up for the arts, particularly the visual arts.

A couple of interviewed art teachers struggle with high student: adult ratios and lack of support, especially for students with disabilities. Other visual art educators mention with pride that guidance counselors steer students with various disabilities to their classes because of their reputation for meeting individual needs. However, one superintendent looks ahead at the economic challenges on the horizon and worries that arts and special education departments could be pitted against each other in a battle for resources.

Inclusive Strengths and Challenges within Arts Disciplines

Educators offer differing perspectives on particular strengths and challenges of the arts when it comes to including students with various abilities and backgrounds. Some of their points about particular disciplines are noted below.

Strengths:

- Groups work together to make a greater artistic product. (music, theatre/ drama, dance)
- Encourages individualized approaches that offer everyone a level of success with no one right answer. (visual arts, dance)
- Students improve motor skills. (visual arts, dance)
- Students with autism offer their highest levels of communication and interaction. (music)
- Students who have difficulty with English language and comprehension can still participate. (music, visual arts, dance)
- Part of everyday life. (music, visual arts, dance)
- Teaches empathy and communication skills. (theatre/ drama)
- Bring words to life; benefit to reading comprehension. (theatre/ drama)

Challenges:

- Audition-only opportunities exclude many students. (music, theatre/ drama, dance)
- Certain literacy in the art form may be required to participate. (music)
- Lack of structure. (visual arts)
- Many schools do not have programs. (theatre/ drama, dance)

Suggested Strategies:

→ Offer “everyone-welcome” performance opportunities, such as:

- Whole school chorus – students with various disabilities participate. Those with less tonality than others blend into the group and grow and learn.

- “No-cuts” high school marching band – One school board president chuckles, “I used to say if you can walk and hold an instrument, you can be in the band. I was proven wrong – a student in a wheelchair with brittle bone disease marches in every parade and plays at every football game.”
- Multiple casting of plays – rather than have one cast for a play, cast each role twice or more, so that more students have the opportunity to perform in a greater variety of roles.
- Inclusive arts schools - Arts-focused or arts magnet schools that do not require an audition.

→ **Incorporate the students’ artistic culture.** One dance teacher who works primarily with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities or multiple disabilities encourages students to bring their own music to be used in class, which gives them more ownership.

→ **Give students opportunities to learn at their own pace.** Schedule longer lead in time before performances for students to prepare. One music teacher recommends taking it slow and offering additional sessions for those who need more time.

One important note about the audition suggestions: students with various disabilities should not be assumed to be less skilled or talented in the arts than their peers. In fact, numerous educators spoke of students who are particularly skilled in the arts who happen to have disabilities. One music teacher at a special education school explains, “There are some kids who are really talented, who pick up the lessons really easily – **they don’t have a disability when it comes to music.**”

2. Belief

... in the individual.

Beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions permeate every aspect of the lives of students with various disabilities. Likewise, the extent to which communities, educators, and parents value the arts shapes the role that arts education plays in the lives of young people.

Power of Positive Thinking

“Do not sell students short,” teachers and parents emphasize in the interviews. Too often, adult advocates for individual students report encountering other adults who fail to see a child’s potential, strengths and capacities. Arts teachers advise their colleagues that success in working with students with various disabilities begins with believing each young person is capable of succeeding in the arts.* A positive, “can do” attitude dramatically influences all parties in the learning process.

*A recent evaluation of A+ schools, an arts-centered education reform movement, found teacher belief systems sharply affected the way they taught students (Wilson, Corbett, and Noblit 2001).

Student Beliefs

- ✓ **Student belief in self:** Young people who believe they can sing, draw, paint, act, perform, play, compose, or create will be able to do so, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, according to parents and educators. These interviewees add that it is the adults' role in part to cultivate such beliefs within students.
- ✓ **Student belief in other students:** People, including young people, are not always kind to each other. Some students taunt classmates with disabilities, emphasizing differences. Students who cannot afford the "in" clothes or who have jobs instead of extracurricular activities may find themselves excluded by other students. Educators say they strive hard to create a climate where students support each other. One arts and humanities teacher in a rural district assigns groups to reduce clique formation. She also teaches students audience skills, so that when they share original creations, they also share a culture of respectful support. Likewise, many teachers and administrators stress the importance of educating the peers of students with disabilities to focus more on the person and less on disability. The hope of one early educator who has been practicing inclusion for the last 12 years is to have students not even notice disability differences when making friends in kindergarten, so "when they get to 2nd grade, when they are getting to the point of making fun of kids, they will remember."

Adult Beliefs

Teachers, administrators, and parents all strongly influence how hard a student is pushed to achieve in the arts or other areas. One parent ruefully notes that belief is key - when it is lacking, it can be destructive. She says funding is not the problem. Rather, it is a lack of educators who understand children with severe disabilities and the benefits they can reap through the arts. The careful combination of nurturing, lifting up, and lighting the fire underneath a student is hard to achieve, especially when there are too many students and not enough time.

Suggested Strategies:

→ **Avoid "can't."** A number of parents express in interviews their dissatisfaction with particular educators not fully knowing their child's artistic capacities. One parent says that a former music teacher had ensured that all students played instruments, regardless of disabilities. The current teacher only provides them listening music. The parent explains how music motivates her son:

My son loves playing piano. He is one hundred percent dependent. (But,) I can see by his expression that he wants to play piano. I need to move him to the piano. His body and face change one hundred percent. . . . If I want him to use art materials and he wants to play piano, we have to make a deal. I tell him he needs to use his special marker first, then he can do piano.

→ **Demonstrate the power of the arts.** Numerous administrators and some teachers speak of transformational moments when another educator brings out capabilities in a student they did not realize were there. Two different districts shared stories of teachers crying with joy when a student who seemed to be non-verbal surprised everyone and sang a song during an artist residency. One principal of a school serving students with disabilities recounts how she became an avid arts advocate, when she witnessed a collaboration between a new teacher and a poet:

...to see these children, who would never possibly be able to memorize the times table... writing a poem about a merry-go-round! *Remembering* that poem because they had *lived* that poem! All of a sudden they had words. They knew “round,” “merry,” “go” in a really creative, creative way. To teach them words! And, out of that work, came published poetry books from their class that we were able to share with their parents. And, that students were writing poetry we could share at PTA meetings! To walk down the hall, and say “Hi, Mary. I saw your poem.” It was a high level literacy skill.

→ **Avoid stereotypes.** People with disabilities frequently encounter a public all-too-ready to associate their whole person with their disability. A director of an inclusion advocacy organization explains that we need to combat longstanding attitudes that people with disabilities are “*less than*” other people. The disability becomes the defining characteristic of who a person is, rather than just one of their characteristics. An aide who is also a parent of a student with disabilities asserts, “...they are a lot more *people* than we are giving them credit for – they are able to make decisions and troubleshoot.” She finds that parents in her suburban district can become overprotective of their children with disabilities.

→ **Put the young person first.** A number of experienced educators and parents state that people working in the district need to love children. One teacher advises, “Adapt to the child, not vice versa.” Several recommend, “Envision success.” One educator asks, “Can you see the child with severe disabilities succeeding in the mainstreamed classroom?” Many underscore the virtues of patience and flexibility.

Very few survey respondents indicate they have written policies on access to arts education. A couple questions to consider when examining district policy on arts education include:

- Does it include all children in the district, specifically those with various disabilities or considered at risk of academic failure?
- Do scheduling conflicts, pull-outs, tracking systems, or other factors inadvertently exclude some children from opportunities to learn the arts?

Arts Value

That which is valued is taught. Even in districts that have a tremendous capacity to serve students with various disabilities, if the arts value is missing, *no* students will have quality access to the arts.

The U.S. varies tremendously in its regions and communities. Clearly, no common standard of what strong arts education looks like exists in everyone's minds, despite published state and national arts standards. When reflecting on their programs, interviewees compare their districts' situation both to what is offered nearby and to what they believe is possible. For instance, educators in one urban district deeply appreciate their art and music specialists, because neighboring districts have none. A suburban district with a music therapy and adaptive arts program prides itself on successes, but clearly articulates programmatic gaps it plans to address in the future. A rural alternative school with two teachers and a principal explains they do not have enough per pupil dollars to have arts teachers. Instead, they seek professional development from the district arts coordinator. When examining the arts value in a particular district, keep in mind its interests, history, and resources — including money, people, and organizations. These all influence today's possibilities and tomorrow's plans.

High Quality Educators

...in the teaching and learning profession.

The experience, abilities, and attitudes of teachers and education leaders play key roles in determining the level and quality of access to arts education for all students.

Hiring

A school district's relationship with a teacher begins with the hiring process. Interviews suggest that when educators have a high skill level and a strong belief in the capacities of all students, good things happen. But, numerous parents speak of the struggles their children face when teachers do not possess these qualities. Accordingly, surveyed districts rate "teacher background/ experience" as helpful or challenging in equal numbers; teachers can make all the difference.

Educator Shortage

Many district administrators and teachers speak of the challenges of finding "good people." With a shortage of qualified arts teachers and a large percentage of teachers reaching retirement age over the next few years, simply filling positions proves difficult. A few districts mention a substitute teacher problem. With no qualified substitutes for relief — especially people skilled in teaching to many abilities - it is difficult for arts educators to attend intensive professional development opportunities. In addition, frequent principal and superintendent turnover results in a roller coaster ride regarding support of access to arts education.

Some interviewees express concern with the quality of teachers just entering the field, both in arts and special education. They worry that new arts teachers demonstrate content competency but little knowledge of how to accommodate students with various

disabilities or how to teach to many levels.* Likewise, many special educators declare that, barring personal interest and initiative, their training does not include use of arts techniques. A few interviewees note a lack of supply of dance and theatre teachers, due to very few teacher education programs in these areas. Others express concern that the most challenging schools have a difficult time retaining quality educators.

Arts and Disability Backgrounds

While an arts background is critically important to the hiring of arts educators, survey respondents indicate arts skills rarely factor into the hiring of special educators (18 percent) or principals (7 percent) and only occasionally with elementary educators (32 percent). Experience working with youth considered at risk of academic failure is seen as much more important in the hiring of principals (76 percent). In general, districts consider skills with students with disabilities more often than other factors listed in the survey.[†] When hiring arts educators, over half of participating districts consider experience working with students with disabilities (58 percent) and with youth at risk of academic failure (60 percent).[‡]

Districts with centralized, rather than collaborative or site-based, hiring report the lowest consideration of any of the listed hiring factors (arts, disability, and at-risk skills). This might suggest that the involvement of school level personnel in the hiring process increases the attention paid to issues relevant to access to arts education. Interestingly, the percentage of children with IEPs in a district does not correlate with these hiring criteria, while poverty level of the students' families does.[§] Districts that consider experience working with arts, with students with disabilities, and with students at risk of academic failure tend to have wealthier families and fewer students at risk of academic failure.^{**} The exception to this correlation occurs in the districts that consider arts skills when hiring principals, as they have more students living in poverty.^{††} Given the arts interest of the GAA districts participating in this research, these principals may work in schools where arts contribute to education reform methods particularly geared to helping urban youth from high poverty families succeed.

Suggested Strategies:

Lest hiring look too bleak, participating districts offer innovative strategies to combat the challenge of hiring skilled people who can provide access to arts education.

Explore Alternative Routes

^{*} Their perceptions support a 1994 inquiry by the National Art Educator Association finding many new art teachers feel underprepared to teach students with disabilities (Guay 1994).

[†] Over 50% of the time, responding districts answered "Yes" to "considered skills with students with disabilities" when asked about hiring arts educators, elementary educators, and principals.

[‡] District arts and special education coordinators responded to a survey on behalf of districts, using their best knowledge of the hiring processes for arts, elementary, and special educators, as well as principals.

[§] The mean percentage of children below poverty is strongly related to hiring criteria. The ratio of percentages between those that do and those that do not vary from .27 to 2.4, with 8 out of 9 less than 1.

^{**} The ratios of those that use the criteria to those that do not range from .35 to 1.22, with 7/9 ratios being less than 1.

^{††} For this question 33% of students are below poverty level when the criteria is used and only 14% when not used.

One strand of advice offers alternate ways to find arts educators, if there is a shortage, providing the recruits have or can get the necessary certification.

→ **Recruit sideways.** Become involved in the arts education field locally, at the state level, and if possible nationally. Friends and colleagues may be persuaded to make a change.

⑧ **Hire arts therapists as arts educators.** One district finds that new teachers trained in music therapy make excellent general music educators who are able to teach to many levels of abilities. By building a high quality music therapy program over the last decade, there was no shortage of interested candidates. One incentive for recruitment: higher earning potential than in a clinical setting.

⑧ **Groom interested artists.** One urban district with a shortage of applicants for arts educator positions found a solution through its arts partnerships. At several schools, long-term relationships with artists began to deepen over time. The artists had necessary content skills but needed more professional development to gain additional teaching skills and a greater sensitivity to students of all abilities. Several artists have since worked with the schools and the district to acquire the necessary background to become arts educators.

Another recommendation offers an innovative way of cultivating a pool of talented teachers:

⑧ **Develop an intern program.** One district developed a music therapy internship program for high school and college students.

→ **Keep track of today's students.** Especially in smaller and rural districts, today's students may choose to give back to their community by becoming tomorrow's teachers. Informal contact with students who have graduated helps some educators follow the career paths of their students.

Look for Personal Experience

Another strand of advice speaks of attributes to look for when hiring. Various interviewees reveal the important role personal experience plays in their capacity to succeed in providing access to arts education. Personal experience has a profound effect on the belief system and "can" or "can't-do" attitudes of the educator.

⑧ **Seek experience in the arts.** Special educators and aides with personal experience or interest in the arts are more prepared to participate actively in their students' arts education. One urban school benefits from aides who work as professional musicians in their "night jobs." These aides have no hesitation about actively participating during music class. At another school, the principal states the importance of her background as a music teacher in carving out a place for the arts in her school's larger education agenda. Another school principal describes how parenting introduced her to the value of the arts education she never received, as

she saw her children blossom in arts classes. This led her to take community-based arts classes herself, deepening her appreciation of the value of arts education in her school.

⑧ **Search for experience with access issues.** A personal connection with people with disabilities translates to a greater sensitivity in the classroom. Interviewees from one northern district include an art teacher whose wife volunteers with the disability community and an aide who is a foster parent of a student with disabilities. A southern district arts and humanities teacher speaks of how she pulls upon her first career as a nurse to help students with all abilities to achieve in her class. There can be no greater personal experience than living with a disability. Yet, only a few districts report having any arts educators with first-hand experience with disabilities (18 percent).^{*} Not surprisingly, more districts (46 percent) report having one or more special educators with known disabilities.

Hire People with a District-Wide Vision

Finally, when it comes to hiring, respondents look at the big picture, advising districts to fill two key positions:

1. A district arts coordinator[†]
2. A district inclusion coordinator

Both can help facilitate vital relationships and shared knowledge among arts and special education personnel.

Professional Growth

From teachers to principals to district administrators, educators reinforce the continuing importance of professional development. It's not a one-time thing; real growth happens with continued learning, far beyond official schooling. These educators say they are committed to deepen their understanding, to challenge themselves, and to learn from others. Collegial connection and inspiration recur as important components of growth; it is hard to learn in a vacuum. Dialogue among arts and special educators about students' needs can especially benefit access to arts education.

Personal Investment

The educators we interviewed often came recommended by district administrators or others as having something particularly valuable to contribute to this investigation. As a result, we heard from passionate people who derive personal gain from their professional success in teaching young people. Exclamations of "I love what I do!" or "I love my job! I'm learning every day!" speak to the deep caring needed to rise to the challenges found in educational systems. Many educators say they enjoy learning on the job and can chart their growth in providing access to the arts. For some special

^{*} Respondents were asked about "known disabilities."

[†] Corresponds with findings from *Gaining the Arts Advantage*.

educators, that means switching paradigms, from self-contained teaching to a more inclusive practice and mindset. For some arts educators, the learning increments relate more to the development of particular structures that make the classroom more inclusive. Forward thinking educators describe both how they are growing today and what they would like to learn in the years ahead.

Some parents and educators assert that a love of young people should be the most important aspect to nurture in an educator. Certain district administrators and parents point out the difficult consequences for students when it is absent. One music teacher explains the presence of so much patience, goal setting, and performing in his classes containing students with various disabilities: “When they get happy, I get happy....” For this reason, he continually tries to challenge them.

Other educators and administrators mention the importance of the “artist within” arts educators. One art teacher reflects on feeding his creative self by taking studio art classes and continuing to create: “It keeps me in touch with what it is to be a student.” He sees his re-certification course requirements as an opportunity for renewal.

The survey data indicate that districts with arts educators are likely to have at least one annual gathering for arts personnel by discipline.^{*} Participating districts having more than one meeting for one arts discipline tend to have more for other disciplines as well.[†]

Suggested Strategy:

⑧ **Ask for help.** First, identify the gaps in knowledge. Then, seek assistance in connecting to others who have that knowledge. Districts that offer both time and help navigating the network are highly touted by their teachers.

Formal District Offerings

Educators participated in limited formalized professional development in the area of access to arts education over the last three years, according to survey respondents. While 85 percent at least regularly participated in professional development on increasing student achievement, only 13 percent did so on using arts in special education. However, participation rates in other areas relevant to access are higher. Around 55 percent report at least a regular presence in professional development on “reaching students at risk of failure” and on “respecting diverse cultures.” Around half indicate at least regular participation in opportunities to learn how to provide adaptations to students with disabilities or apply multiple intelligence theory to the classroom.

^{*} Less than 5% of districts that report having each type of educator reply they did not have any annual arts educator gatherings.

[†] This has not been normalized by the size of the districts. The highest correlations are between arts and music educators ($r=.84$), and music and drama ($r=.66$). Between 16 and 61 percent of districts left each gathering question blank, and were directed to do so if they did not have that type of educator. 61% of reporting districts report having no dance educators. 37% report having no drama educators.

Individualized Professional Development

Formal district offerings only offer one piece of the professional development picture. The survey also asks respondents to rank how much various practices help educators teach arts to students with disabilities.* From individualized professional development, “personal experience” rates the highest (85 percent in the top two). This reinforces the importance of the personal – beginning with beliefs and attitudes, but resulting in experience. Next, half of respondents find “attending workshops” effective (50 percent in the top two). Both of these top-rating areas encourage active learning. “Individual study” falls in the middle.† “Enrolling in classes”‡ and “volunteering in the community”§ are rated least effective. These rankings may indicate that, in general, respondents find a quick, intensive workshop can be particularly helpful, offering more direction than unstructured individual study or a longer course, which takes more time. On the whole, they do not seem to think educators benefit much from volunteering in the community to learn these skills. Nonetheless, each area garners a top rank from at least one district; clearly each of these areas has importance. No significant difference is found when comparing the ranking of formal training (workshops and classes) with individualized training (experience, volunteering, and individual study).**

Collaborative Professional Development

In collaborative professional development practices, responding districts rate “discussions among special education and arts personnel” as the most effective (75 percent in the top two). This corresponds with interviews, as many educators also attribute their success to such discussions. These communications can be simple, such as quick discussions in spare moments, or at times more formal, as when arts personnel learn about and contribute to IEP content. “Observing other educators” ranks as the second most effective practice (55 percent in the top two). While it is difficult, when schedules are tight and substitutes scant, many interviewees mention the opportunity to engage in such observational practice. Some educators visit neighboring districts, diversifying beyond their colleagues in their own system.

The middle-ranked “working with mentors”†† (40 percent in top two) seems to connect with the higher ranking discussions and observations, as it provides a deeper level of collaboration. “Informal conversations” follows (30 percent in top two), which could suggest that leaving things to chance moments does not work as well. Respondents rate “enlisting help from parents/ adult volunteers”‡‡ and “enlisting help from students”§§ the

* Analysis combines a top rating of “1” with a second rating of “2” to create a “top two” rating score, offering a better picture of a high rating. Ratings may be less indicative of districts with site-based hiring practices, with n=5 site-based in the analysis and a small sample size.

† Individual study is nearly uniformly ranked: the percentages for each ranking are similar.

‡ Six percent rank it highest, but greater than 50% rank it in one of their bottom two selections.

§ Four percent rank it highest, 10% rank in the top two, but 80% rank it in the bottom two.

** Also, there is no correlation (r=.01) between the two; respondents did not consistently rank the two together.

†† Working with mentors and informal conversations fill in the middle ground with some districts ranking them high or low.

‡‡ Ranked last in 47% of responses and in the bottom two rankings 83% of the time.

lowest, putting each at one of the bottom two scores at least two-thirds of the time. These ratings suggest that educators may feel more comfortable learning from someone in the same role – professional educator – as themselves, than from the education consumers — parents or students. In addition, while parents indicate in interviews that they could be rich resources in understanding how to teach their student with a disability, the survey indicates they may not be actively involved in the day-to-day arts class.

Internal Networking

To promote sharing among educators within a school system, interviewees made numerous recommendations, some of which follow.

Suggested Strategies:

⑥ **Use the buddy system.** Pair experienced educators with those with less experience to provide a person to consult with on challenging teaching issues, students, structures, and other questions.

⑥ **Permit “I don’t know.”** Numerous educators and school leaders advise their colleagues to ask for help when they need it. Including students of various disabilities in arts classes can be difficult without guidance. Rather than hide difficulties, they recommend teachers seek out special educators, administrators, parents, or external advisors – people with expertise to help them approach this work. One district arts coordinator of a rural district explains, “(Don’t) be afraid if you don’t know something, but go on ahead and ask for assistance.... We get so caught up in wanting to show strengths in ourselves that we don’t ask for help: ‘I don’t want anyone to think I can’t handle this.’”

⑥ **Strategic neighbors.** Location, location; planning spaces matter. Office neighbors can share more than a frequent “hello.” Traveling music therapists and adaptive arts specialists share the same planning office in one district. During interviews, many of them brought up conversations with officemates that led to integrating the other art form into their classes.

⑥ **Provide e-mail access.** Not all interviewed districts promote teacher access to e-mail. Yet, educators with that access often praise the ease with which e-mail conversations allow them to connect to educators in other buildings or even regions. A couple of districts recommend using e-mail regularly and complementing it with face-to-face sharing. One district turns a lesson swap with neighboring educators into a party, with music making and a potluck.

⑥ **Cross train.** Invite eloquent special educators in the district to train groups of arts educators in accommodation, inclusion, and access. Encourage the experienced arts

⁷ Enlisting help from students ranks highest in only one district (2%), while it ranks in the bottom two in 2/3 of all responding districts.

educators to lead in-service workshops for special educators on using the arts. The inclusion facilitator in one district ensures that the workshops offered by special educators are open to all teachers, including the arts educators. In the summer, her district offers a full-day intensive and invites every teacher with students on an IEP or with a disability. At the beginning of the year, each school provides at least a half-day for special educators to meet with other teachers – including arts educators – to review the IEPs and possible adaptations needed.

⑧ **Include planning time.** Educators reinforce the importance of planning time, many going far beyond the allotted hours. For districts that truly want their teachers to teach arts to students of varying abilities, planning time is crucial – it allows for educator discussions and personal communication with parents. When time to plan is lacking, it becomes a challenge.

⑧ **Cultivate teacher trainers.** Not only develop skilled educators; invite them to give back. Strong educators who can both teach the arts and teach students of varying abilities often take time to develop. For the last ten years, one district has methodically groomed good educators who increasingly spend some of their time teaching their colleagues.

Intensive Growth

Frequently, the experience base within the district is not broad enough to support all professional development efforts. Some educators value intensive external learning experiences where they connect with other educators and new ideas and come home bursting to try new ideas. Often in the form of a summer institute or intensive course, these opportunities allow the educator time to enter deeply into concepts in a short period of time. Interviewees recommend the following areas:

Suggested Strategies:

⑧ **Personal arts experience for educators.** Provide opportunities for special educators, aides, classroom teachers, and administrators to gain personal experience with the arts.

⑧ **Arts interventions for the toughest learning situations.** Offer intensive learning that connects the arts to specific challenges in the educational world around specific disabilities, such as youth at risk of academic failure or those who have behavioral disabilities.

External Networks

School and district educators spoke of the need to go beyond district politics to create individual professional networks. In times of rapid principal turnover, economic distress, or lack of leadership, external networks can provide educators with tangible solutions and emotional support that will help them succeed in challenging situations. Conferences

provide a common face-to-face gathering opportunity for developing networks. Strategies recommended include:

Suggested Strategies:

⑧ **Get involved in professional associations.** Many active teachers, some of whom became district coordinators, swear by their involvement in associations, such as those for teaching arts disciplines and arts therapy. State and national chapters offer a range of opportunities.

⑧ **Explore promising practices.** Colleagues can provide a rich source of real-life examples of how to make access to arts education work. Long-time educators talk of a network of friends whose programs they have visited. Rather than simply pulling a good idea from the page, go visit to see it in practice.

Leading the Way

For progress to happen, someone needs to take the first step. Teachers, district administrators, and principals all have leadership opportunities when it comes to helping students with disabilities and difficulties learn the arts. In the interviews, leaders shine from every level of the system.

Teachers

Teacher leaders go beyond the call of duty. For instance, some teachers find ongoing ways to communicate with parents about their children's needs and interests. Others become staunch advocates, working to include better arts opportunities in more students' lives. Still others help their peers by spending time mentoring, demonstrating, presenting at conferences, setting up internship programs, and writing articles so that other colleagues can benefit from their experiences.

While dedicated, these teacher leaders do not want to be martyrs. Some feel stretched by a system that does not necessarily compensate them for the "extra miles" that they feel compelled to go. One district has a strong arts therapy program but a hierarchy that places students with behavioral disabilities at the bottom of the priority list, leaving them scheduled last or not at all. Nonetheless, a number of arts therapists who sincerely believe these students need their services squeeze extra visits out of their planning, travel, or free periods. In another district, a dance teacher says, "I would be happy not to be a leader. If I don't take leadership we're dead; we're the only ones that fight for the arts. Very few academic people fight for the arts, unless they are losing planning time." The extra time spent beyond the school day is simple for some and a difficult decision for others, especially when it comes time for contract bargaining. However, some decide the benefits to the students outweigh the drawbacks.

* Teachers participating in the interviews for this report often added extra hours to their day to talk to our researchers, whether before school or late at night after their own children went to bed. Their own benefit was secondary to their desire to participate. Most importantly, they hoped to help other educators across the country.

One district art department chair offers a piece of advice in this area:

Suggested Strategy:

⑧ **Do the cost/benefit analysis.** Treat professional educational staff as a hospital treats its doctors. The doctors do not do the clerical work; nor does it make sense to have the highly educated educators perform study hall or cafeteria duty. By transferring duties requiring less training to support personnel, provide more time in the schedule for educators to teach, plan, collaborate, and grow.

Principals / Superintendents

When a supportive principal stands behind good teachers, this lays the groundwork for a good school. The area of arts education is no exception. A principal can help lay the foundation for keeping the arts on the “educational plate.” Similarly, when dealing with the school board and public, the superintendent can help keep the arts in the district picture.* Likewise, school leaders set the tone for the ways students with various disabilities or who are at risk of academic failure will be served by the school system. One parent described the principal of her school as “warm and caring,” someone who “knows what she’s doing in education and knows who everybody is.” The fact that “her door is always open,” especially when something *isn’t* working in the classroom gives this parent the confidence that her child with disabilities will be well served.

District Coordinators

District arts, inclusion, and special education coordinators often play a crucial role in a district’s successes in arts education access. Interviewees use words like “visionary,” “sees the big picture,” and “cheerleader” to describe particularly active coordinators. One arts coordinator in a rural district works “like an artist-in-residence,” consulting with arts teachers and other educators. For arts specialists, who can be isolated, the district arts coordinator manages central gatherings, facilitates communication, and keeps the arts on their colleagues’ minds. One speech therapist and dancer explains how she was helped: “(The district arts coordinator) really supports me; he recently sent me to a five-day intensive that set my hair on fire. They gave me research and we danced for six and a half hours a day.”

While nearly all districts responding to the survey have special educators in their schools, and the majority have district special education coordinators, the same is not true for arts personnel. Responding districts do not have many district-level arts coordinators; over 40 percent report no arts personnel at the district level (responses range from 0 to 4). The presence of these coordinators seems to be related to population density/ metro status, with two-thirds of rural districts reporting no district level arts personnel compared to the

* These findings reinforce the roles of principals and superintendents found in *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership 1999).]

lack in one-third of suburban or urban districts. Districts with arts coordinators have a larger percentage of children at risk of academic failure, which is possibly related to their predominance in urban districts.* Also, responding districts rarely use arts therapists to offer arts education services.†

District coordinators can affect equity and access in the district through their roles in hiring, scheduling, professional development and teacher support. Some of the districts participating in interviews benefit from 25+ years of experience with the same district coordinators, with arts coordinators especially. On the down side, a few have just replaced long-tenured arts coordinators – possibly part of the growing teacher retirement bubble. On the up side, these veteran educators are full of advice:

Suggested Strategies:

⑧ **Hire good people; then get out of the way.** Give teachers the authority to make changes. Since they are closest to the most important part of the education system – the students, they are well equipped to see how the system can be improved.

⑧ **Offer district mini-grants to teachers.** District administrators and teachers in one district say that competitive mini-grants go a long way. The grants fund the best ideas and serve as a source of support for trying innovative ideas or techniques. One music therapist received a grant to try some new equipment. An adaptive art specialist learned papermaking. The assistant superintendent observes that the arts and arts therapy teachers aggressively use the program to benefit students.

⑧ **Develop an inclusion committee.** One district has a committee of parents and teachers that advises the superintendent on special education issues.

Leader Attributes

In the interviews, people who play critical roles in their district's access to arts education reveal some of the attributes that contribute to their leadership skills. These attributes include:

- ✓ **Commitment to young people.** Interviewees emphasize it is all about the students. Great educators, as savvy or political as they may need to be to lead others, must still be primarily focused on the students.
- ✓ **Ability to wear many hats.** By being involved in many aspects of the profession, from teaching or administering to mentoring and serving on professional associations, leaders gain much broader perspectives. This breadth proves

* The fraction of IEPs and children in poverty was similar whether there were district level arts educators. However, there are three times as many at-risk children when there is one or more district level arts educators (which could be confounded with urban/rural). Similarly, the fraction of IEPs and children in poverty is similar whether there were arts teachers teaching the arts. However, there were five times as many children at risk where district level arts educators were used.

† The use of arts therapists, parents and volunteers and alternative schools are rarely used (regularly + very often < 10%).

useful in interacting with those who have different priorities, in negotiating competing needs, and in finding allies.

- ✓ **Grounded in research.** By learning from promising practices, philosophies, and a variety of disciplines, leaders develop multiple ways of approaching teaching. For instance, a teacher may understand a student through an arts lens and a therapy mindset, as well as through knowledge of development and learning theory. One dance educator explains, “Research is my thing; I’ve always been into it.”
- ✓ **Accreditation.** Beyond being fully certified in their profession, a few educators seek the next level. One nationally board-certified teacher recently became the district art coordinator. She found the national certification process energizing and emerged with a renewed dedication to her work.
- ✓ **Cooperation.** Leading educators not only shine through in the interviews, but are also identified as leaders by their colleagues. They are willing to work with, work for, and sometimes take a back seat in collaboration with others.
- ✓ **Ready to pave the way.** Being the first to try, support, or suggest something does not daunt educator leaders. Instead, they relish the challenge. If the new area has potential, they enter into it wholly and enlist others by communicating their clear sense of vision and possibility. For instance, a visionary new teacher built the music therapy program at one district. She enlisted the help needed from leadership at the district level, but others credit her with being the “fireball,” the force that made things happen.

4. Environment

... *in which the learning occurs.*

Physical, programmatic, and emotional aspects of students’ learning environments strongly affect their ability to fully participate in arts courses. Location, accommodations, scheduling, and accessibility of appropriate materials can facilitate access or can inhibit student learning.

In general, surveyed districts find “spaces” and “schedules” particularly challenging barriers to providing strong arts education to students with various disabilities,^{*} more so than than the “number of arts educators”, “district priorities”, “teacher experience”, and “class sizes”. By region, the South reports the most challenges overall, the West the fewest.[†]

^{*} Although, when looked at as a subclass, suburban districts rate spaces and schedules as slightly more helpful than do rural and urban districts, but not within a significant range of difference.

[†] Although generalizations about the West are limited by a small response (n=4).

Surveyed districts were asked to rate how often they engaged in various practices that could improve the access to or quality of the arts education for students with disabilities – ranging from individually adapted assignments to appropriate physical accommodations in the arts classrooms^{*}. No one particular metro region (urban, suburban, or rural) tended to have a specific access profile. Overall, the responding districts leave room in their self-ratings for expansion of the various techniques they use to offer access to arts education; it looks like they believe there is more they could do.[†]

Physical Space

The room and building matter, as do the tools, materials, and accommodations that help students learn. The physical environment can become an obstacle if thoughtful planning in design, placement, and usage has not occurred.

Locale

Room design, doorways, table placement, seating spaces, and elevator access relate to physical flow, which is particularly important for students who use wheelchairs or have mobility disabilities. Lighting, proximity to the teacher, and use of visuals can help maximize participation opportunities for students who have little or no vision, have learning disabilities, are deaf or hard of hearing, or speak English as a second language. Fortunately, with the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), amended in 1997, schools have long been working to improve physical access. Parents interviewed for this report do not dwell on challenges of locale.

However, districts should not become complacent. When surveyed districts were asked to rate how regularly certain situations occurred, they rated physical accommodations fairly high with the second highest regularity in the section. At the same time, they leave room for improvement. Two-thirds of respondents rate that “arts classrooms offer appropriate physical accommodations” at least on a regular basis. Just over 50 percent of respondents report “student performance and exhibition spaces offer appropriate physical accommodations” at least regularly. One example of a district with room for physical improvement occurs when student performances are offered on inaccessible stages. Students using wheelchairs are invited to perform from the floor, but cannot independently move on and off the stage and may miss out on the complete performance experience.

Responding suburban districts seem to have the easiest time with spaces, with 80 percent indicating their performance and exhibition spaces are at least regularly accessible performance spaces. Urban districts seem to face the most challenges, with 46 percent indicating arts venues that are regularly accessible. This is not surprising as oftentimes urban districts face both older school buildings and inadequate resources.

^{*} For a full listing, see Section D of the *Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire* in the Appendix.

[†] Given a list of possible situations that could increase access to arts education for students, districts on average rate themselves as implementing a composite of the situations somewhere between “sometimes” and “regularly”. This could also indicate less need for that strategy.

Some interesting correlations arise when comparing regularity of physical accommodations with other adaptations*. Districts regularly providing physical adaptations, such as adaptive tools, are more likely to regularly offer classroom and performance space accommodations. Districts regularly offering accommodations in arts classrooms are more likely to offer performance space accommodations, to have arts educators participate in the IEP process, to have other adults providing individual assistance during class, and to have students with disabilities proportionately represented in arts magnet schools.

Materials

Within the classroom, the materials and tools of learning can be adapted for students with disabilities. Materials that are easier to hold or see, can help a student participate in the arts experience. Likewise, teachers explain adaptations in their teaching style to make use of materials more inclusive.

In another way, materials can also be expensive. Hidden costs, such as fees for art materials or band uniforms, can hinder students whose families have fewer resources. A superintendent and school board member from one suburban district express concern that challenging economic times have led to an increase in fees. The board member notes that while the district offers financial aid to students from families meeting Title 1 poverty guidelines, a number of students whose families barely miss the cut off may be adversely affected.

Suggested Strategies:

→ **Plan and budget for adaptations.** All districts should plan ahead for complete accessibility — including all arts spaces — especially during renovations and capital improvements. While schools are sometimes the most physically accessible public locations in a smaller town, educators and administrators could invite community input to help them continue to improve. The best time to prepare for adaptations – large or small – is before they are needed. Doing it in consultation with people with disabilities and those familiar with specifications helps avoid making a mistake. In one district, a music teacher anticipated the need for a ramp to provide access to the stage for an incoming student who uses a wheelchair. He consulted with the maintenance department to ensure it was installed before the student arrived. The educator asserts that both district level staff and teachers need to plan ahead for the cost of adaptations.

→ **Use new technology opportunities.** In the arts, today's software provides useful adaptation possibilities for students with disabilities. One art department chair describes how one student with brain damage and difficulty with motor control uses software in her artwork. She hand draws the assignment, then has it scanned into a digital image. The program allows her to digitally add color, patterning, and texture, expanding her ability to make creative choices. Another district uses music software to help students compose,

* These physical accommodation correlations are of reasonable strength ($r > .35$).

listen, and critique music. By working in teams through peer coaching, worlds of music beyond performing are opened to all students.

→ **Find friendlier materials.** Some art educators described how the types of materials could enhance student's participation level. For students with less hand strength, one teacher provided more malleable clay.

→ **Teach through multiple modalities.** A few interviewed educators spoke of pulling upon a variety of the human senses so that students could comprehend and participate in arts lessons. For instance, music and choral educators in one district provide tapes of songs for 6th – 8th graders who do not read music. These tapes can be listened to in class on headphones or circulate home, to help students learn the music. One teacher integrating the arts into early reading literacy suggests sandpaper letters help young visual learners. To reach auditory learners, she has the group sing, clap, and spell out words to help with understanding. For kinesthetic learners, she incorporates acting, jumping, and taking the shape of letters.

Programming

The level of personal attention, the scheduling of classes and teachers, and the types of courses offered can work for or against students with various disabilities.

Individualized Attention

Parents emphasize that their children blossom when schools provide individualized approaches to meeting their needs in arts classrooms. Responding districts give themselves the highest ratings in this area. "Arts assignments were individually adapted to meet students' needs," is selected as happening at least regularly by 75 percent of districts. Districts with individually adapted arts assignments are more likely to have special educators incorporating arts into their lessons and to have schools that provide appropriate physical adaptations.* This could indicate a flow between arts and special education. Districts that have arts educators involved in the IEP meetings are more likely to regularly have students receiving individual assistance from another adult during class. This makes sense, as special education programs that include the arts in a student's IEP or recommend the arts as a teaching method may be more likely to place an active, assisting adult — whether an aide, occupational therapist, or special educator — in the arts classroom. Finally, districts where students receive individual adult assistance at least on a regular basis are also more likely to often have students receiving assistance from other classmates. Perhaps indicative of smaller student populations and more family-like environments in rural schools, 44 percent of responding rural districts report at least regularly having their students receive assistance from other students, while only 23 percent of responding urban districts do the same. When

* Both this and the following relationships are indicated by a correlation of reasonable strength ($r > .35$).

assistance happens, we find people helping people, regardless of whether they are the teacher, aide, volunteer, or another student.

Class size arises as a matter of great concern to survey respondents and interviewees. The number of students in a class and their varying levels of abilities, disabilities, and needs for accommodation affect the quality of the learning experience. When there are too many students – regardless of abilities – and too few teaching adults, it is difficult for any student to receive individualized attention, much less accommodation. In a significant correlation, we find that districts regularly offering small class sizes to teach arts education to students of various abilities are more likely to have students with disabilities proportionately represented in arts-focused schools. Also, more Northeast districts report regularly offering small class sizes and individualized adult assistance for students than do districts in the South (by a factor of 2).

Suggested Strategies:

→ **Offer smaller class sizes.** It's virtually impossible for a teacher to provide individualized attention and accommodations when the student to adult ratio is high and there are many students with disabilities or even one student with severe disabilities. One educator suggests that districts look at reducing class sizes and providing adequate adult support, particularly when there are a significant number of students who need more accommodations.

→ **Provide school-based arts therapists.** Parents of students with disabilities, arts therapists, and educators and administrators familiar with arts therapy programs recommend that districts consider establishing a program if they do not already have one. When districts offer the services of arts therapists, in addition to occupational and speech therapists, parents and educators see tremendous benefits to students who flourish with individually tailored learning in and through the arts. One parent of a child with disabilities asserts that music provides her daughter with basic life skills. The student has violent tendencies and does not understand time-outs, but music soothes her. The parent believes that if her child had a music therapist at school, music could be part of the child's needs evaluation and her motivational and behavioral modification plan.

→ **Focus on individual achievement.** By focusing on each student's individual achievement in the arts instead of creating situations where students are in competition with one another for recognition, all students achieve success while working at their own ability levels.

→ **Mold yourself to the child's needs.** Some educators and parents discuss the importance of replacing the paradigm in which students who can't do the standard work fail or are held back. Instead, they recommend that teachers, including teachers of the

* The correlations coefficients (r) comparing students helping other students and other assistance were as follows: (adult assistance .51, small class sizes .41, special educators incorporate art lessons .39, arts educators participate in IEP meetings .32. All other coefficients in similar comparisons were low.

arts, challenge themselves to create new ways to include and teach students who would otherwise fall through the cracks.

→ **Avoid over-assisting.** Numerous special educators, some arts teachers, and one community member touch on the fine line between helping and over-helping. One community program manager says, "...if they've never worked with clay, are hesitant, get in there with them to play with it, get used to it. But, then step back and let them go," so that students with disabilities have as much freedom as their classmates have to experiment. She posits that teachers and aides sometimes unwittingly diminish the effectiveness of inclusive programs by spending too much time with students in special education and not enough with the other students: "In our heads and hearts we believe we are (inclusive), but in our actions we segregate."

Scheduling

Educators and administrators frequently mention scheduling as a challenge. Arts teachers find that while scheduling arts classes as planning periods for other teachers maintains an incentive for retaining the arts, it also tends to isolate the arts teachers from the classroom teachers, since they then rarely have time to meet together. Even more challenging, the intricate schedules of district arts therapists weave through many schools and students, reflecting the individualized scheduling challenges of special education and its therapies. Some parents also mention scheduling problems, as one describes: "(My child) used to have music and loved it. It was her life. Now that she (isn't getting it) at her new school, we miss it so."

Surprisingly, surveyed districts do not report large scheduling conflicts between special education and arts classes. Only four percent indicate their students miss arts classes for special education services on at least a regular basis. In fact, some of the interviewed arts and special educators explain that districts sometimes place special education students in arts classes disproportionately to other classes. Some educators see this as a blessing, as students with difficulties in other areas may shine in the artistic realm. A few arts teachers see this as a challenge; one teacher said the arts become a "dumping ground" where the burden is on the teacher to make it work, despite higher than preferred student: teacher ratios. One music teacher worries that placement of students in music sometimes wrongly ignores the need for high level cognitive skills, such as music literacy. Other arts educators boast that guidance counselors encourage special education students to take the arts due to a departmental reputation for successful inclusion of all students.

Suggested Strategies:

Ⓢ **Longer school year.** More school days allow for more overall instruction that can include expanded arts time.

Ⓢ **School-based before and afterschool arts opportunities.** Time before and after school allows some students to stay at school to pursue arts interests more deeply. Many educators, parents, and administrators mention this time as a possibility for

expansion of numerous areas of study, including the arts. They emphasize this should not be a replacement for arts education during normal school hours, as access to outside-of-school programming can not be universally accessible. A few districts mentioned the U.S. Department of Education's grants for 21st Century Community Learning Centers as a funding strategy. One district targets students at risk of academic failure and recently added a strings instruction program to its varied after school learning opportunities.

In addition, districts from the original GAA study recommended interested educators become involved in school scheduling committees, to help become part of the decision-making structure that apportions time (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership 1999) (Ellis unpublished).

Course Accessibility

The actual courses a district offers broadly determine the range of inclusion or exclusion. For instance, districts that offer no-audition choruses and bands provide opportunities for all interested students to participate. One high school visual art department offers all but two of its courses to all students of any ability level without prerequisites. Interviewees find this greatly increases access to the visual arts.

Emotional Climate

Less tangible than the buildings or the programs, "climate" refers to the emotional "spaces" that students encounter in school learning environments. Parents bring up this aspect especially when they mention challenges families face when educators lack belief in a particular child. On the other hand, some parents describe a positive "atmosphere," where their children experience challenge, support, success, and joy. A number of parents observe that their children claim music, art, and adaptive PE as among their favorite classes, places where joy in learning is encouraged.

A school psychologist and dancer in one district serves as a prime example of the value of creating a positive emotional climate. Her in-school dance studio serves students with various disabilities, including emotional, developmental, and learning disabilities. She builds the climate of her dance classes on predictable rules* and rituals. "Respect is a Big One... And, no spectators, only participants on whatever level," she explains. Everyone participates in the warm up, which starts with modified bar exercises. By not allowing passive visitors or observers, the class feels safer to the students — everyone is taking risks, including the paraprofessionals. Students contribute their own music to the warm-up selections and participate in improvisation as part of the class ritual, broadening their sense of ownership of class content.

Suggested Strategies:

* Refer to Shirley Brice Heath's research on after-school arts learning experiences to further explore the relationship between teaching the arts and the presence of rules, roles, and respect (Heath 1999).

→ **Build supportive learning communities.** By developing a sense of community within the classroom and reducing the focus on groups segregated by ability, a few districts work towards a more positive climate for all students. Many districts' educators recommend classroom work groups and pairs that mix students with and without disabilities to allow them to learn from each other.

→ **Integrate arts with other curriculum priorities.** The climate of the school can affect the climate of the classroom. To support the larger educational vision, some educators recommend arts teachers take the time to understand current curricular priorities, such as reading literacy. Beyond that, some recommend arts educators reinforce priority concepts such as math and reading through the arts in their teaching. Such linkage enhances the relevance, acceptance, and ultimately support of the arts, according to a few school board members and superintendents.

→ **Promote “backward integration.”** By working with class population distribution, some districts combine their general and special education resources to create mixed classes with extra support systems and personnel. For instance, one district creates classes with approximately half of the students with disabilities, half without, with appropriate levels of support personnel to meet the needs of all students. It finds this model more effective than spreading special educators thinly throughout all the classes.

→ **Promote student buddies.** Many educators mention the benefits to all students when students of various ability levels work together in the classroom. Similarly, one district has a lunch buddies program, pairing students with disabilities with other schoolmates for social interaction.

→ **Sensitize students.** One community program manager explains that tension in mixed ability classrooms can arise from students with disabilities not understanding that some of their actions may appear strange to their peers, and from students without disabilities becoming uncomfortable and refusing to interact with their classmates. She recommends two approaches:

1. Offer guidance to students without disabilities on appropriate response methods.
2. Offer alternative self-expression techniques to students with disabilities who need it, such as softening their volume or taking a quiet walk around the room to release energy.

5. Connecting Strands

...in the network that supports.

Districts need many people working together to successfully provide full access to arts education. Interviewees emphasize the need for educators at various levels and community members to work together for and with the students. This point reinforces a major finding of the *Gaining the Arts Advantage* research, the importance of the

networks of community members and educators which “creates a degree7 of consensus among the school board, the school superintendent, and major influential segments of the general community that the arts are an essential part of learning” (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership 1999).

Communication

Communication emerges as one the most important factors in successful arts education for all students, including those with disabilities. The opportunity for communication happens at many levels, from student interactions to the politics that change schools.

Communication allows for:

- ✓ Information sharing: What do you know that I need to know?
- ✓ Informal evaluation: How are we doing?
- ✓ Mobilization: Let's make sure there's a good turn out at the board meeting.
- ✓ Planning: How can we work together on this theme?

When communication is lacking, as it so often is given the time pressures schools face, problems follow.

Students with Students

Both arts and special educators speak of connections they have learned to encourage among their students, emphasizing the role positive peer interaction plays in creating a successful, inclusive arts learning environment. Some teachers measure success in the quality of personal interactions students exhibit when working together. Others watch for signs of openness about new ideas and approaches to problem solving in their students. One principal tells of yearlong partnerships at her school between general classes and special education classes. She says that students learn to relate to each other and that find there is nothing wrong with people being different from each other. A theatre teacher describes pairing two students to perform one speaking part in unison. One student was able to read the text. The two worked together throughout rehearsals and the final performance.

Educators with Students

When students and teachers develop personal relationships, they can learn to trust each other. For instance, one school psychologist managed a collaborative project among teenaged students and technology artists in the development of a multimedia AIDS awareness and prevention quilt. She initially had difficulty with one “hard” student, whom she found to be very “tough”. But, by inviting him to become a “techie” and her assistant in the work, she helped him find his niche. Over the course of two years, he learned how to combine his classmates' original drawings and photographs into graphic designs. This psychologist also describes the simple ways she and students stay in touch – some often tap on her window as they pass by, just to say hello and let her know they are there.

Educators with Educators

Teachers speak of the need to engage each other, as well as students and parents.

Educator Dialogue

Because scheduling rarely allows arts and other teachers to plan during the normal school day, many educators grab conversations on the fly. The short time between class dismissed and the next class provides opportunities for quick dialogue. For many, e-mail provides a forum teachers use to communicate across the district, combating isolation. Others take extra time and seek out deep and ongoing conversations.

Suggested Strategies:*

→ **Involve aides.** The aides, paraprofessionals, and assistants who accompany students with various disabilities can be important partners in successful arts education when there is enough communication. An adaptive art teacher emphasizes that the assistants are a real part of the teaching team: “Sometimes I encourage the assistants to model a behavior that I want the children to do, especially the autistic children, who are more apt to copy.” Recognizing that the assistants know the students very well and are with them every day, this art teacher also relies on them to help identify subtleties in the students’ behavior, so she can better reward positive behavior and manage the negative.

→ **Strategic neighbors.** Location, location – one district benefits from educator proximity. Traveling music therapists and adaptive arts specialists share the same planning office. Many of those interviewed spoke of conversations with office mates that led to integrating the other art form into their classes. One adaptive art therapist explains that she now starts off her art class with “two little songs and (a sung version of) the rules of listening”.

→ **Therapists as consultants.** The leading music therapists of one district consult with the general music educators about best ways to serve students with moderate to severe disabilities who choose to participate in the general education class environment. The music therapist sits in and helps out with the general music class for half the class, then leads a “mini-lesson” for a handful of students with disabilities for the next half. Then, at a later time, she consults with the teacher as well as leads general workshops for the department.

IEP Discussions

One contentious point arises around communication between art teachers and special educators regarding the IEP, the individualized education plan, for each student in special education. On the one hand, most teachers and administrators believe all teachers should know as much as possible about a child.[†] They advocate close

* For other strategies see the Professional Growth section, page 20.

[†] The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires the inclusion of “regular teachers” in the development of goals and objectives in student’s IEPs (Education Development Center and OSEP 2002).

communication between special educators and arts teachers, so that they can work together to explore accommodations of students' particular disabilities and needs. In a couple of districts, the arts teachers are appraised of or even involved in creating relevant IEP language that connects to the students' learning goals. This can happen when a school system or a parent discovers that a student learns particularly well through the arts. The skills developed can be artistic, personal, social, or even other academic ones.

On the other hand, a few educators and administrators want the arts teachers and many others to know as little as possible about students' IEPs, including the fact that a student has an IEP. They describe the disability label as a stigma and believe arts teachers should approach each child without preconceptions of possible limitations. This philosophy connects to concepts that arise frequently in this research: that a child might have a disability in some areas, but not in others, and that students sometimes exhibit artistic and life skills in arts classes that parents and other educators have assumed they do not have.

Educators with Parents

The interviews of parents and teachers reflect a broad range in satisfaction with parent-teacher communication. However, interviewees universally agree on the necessity to strive for good communication. When communication breaks down, some parents find teachers to be unresponsive or unable to adapt to the needs of their child. At times teachers find parents to be overprotective of their children, to the point of not wanting them to be challenged, or they single-mindedly focus on their children's needs without looking at the entire context. Naturally, parents see their specific child as top priority, while educators must make decisions to benefit the at least the majority of children in a class or district. Solid and ongoing communication can help the parent and teacher be on the same team, working together on behalf of the student.

Suggested Strategies:

→ **Keep it simple; make it a habit.** One parent recommends sending a notebook back and forth between parents and teachers on a regular basis. Write notes about what is happening in class or at home, how things are going, and questions, suggestions, or concerns.

→ **Plan to perform.** Many interviewed educators and principals find performances, including small or ad hoc ones, provide a perfect opportunity to demonstrate to parents what skills their children are learning in the arts.

→ **Document the process.** One music therapist recommends documenting the creation of group works of art – such as a mural. Then, he suggests turning the documentation into a presentation using computer-projected visuals and accompanying it with performances and a celebration with the parents.

→ **Listen during IEP meetings.** Some interviewees remind us that parents can be a rich source of ideas for accommodations and teaching strategies for students with disabilities and difficulties. IEP meetings offer fruitful opportunities for such sharing.

District-Community Communication

Another important component in access to arts education is the communication between the school system and the community that votes for the school budget, advocates for education, and volunteers time and resources.

Suggested Strategies:

→ **Tell & show:** One superintendent suggests one of the most important parts of his work is communicating with community members so the public better understands public education. He not only makes it a priority to visit classrooms, but he brings people from the community along. He hopes when they see students with severe disabilities integrated in the classroom, they will understand not only the value of inclusion, but also the reason such an education is so expensive. This superintendent advises other districts to communicate their successes in the arts to the community – especially to those families without children in the public schools.

→ **Recognize success:** Another strategy for creating a positive culture of communication with the community is recognition of success at all levels. Suggestions for recognition include:

- ✓ District regularly showcases student work through exhibitions and festivals.
- ✓ School leadership makes announcements and mentions performance and exhibitions in conversations and speeches.
- ✓ Newsletters and news releases describe arts successes.

Allies

It is one thing to communicate, another to get things done. Affecting the politics of a school system and its community requires allies. A school district needs a series of connected successes at many different levels to develop a strong arts education truly available to each student. Interviewees explain strong alliances move things forward in this intersection of the arts and special education. Many of the superintendents and assistant superintendents note that both areas can be political hot buttons: special education, because of its costs; arts education, because of its perception as peripheral.

People

Interviewed educators and survey respondents describe a variety of types of alliances at different levels of the district that can help in the work of providing access to arts education:

- **Special education teachers and aides** actively collaborate with the arts specialists and students during art, music, dance, and theatre classes.
- Experienced **arts educators** with a particular commitment to inclusion share their insights with their colleagues in the arts and in special education.
- **Superintendents and assistant superintendents** “set the tone,” according to the interviews. They can place a strong value both on arts in the district and on educating all students.
- **District curriculum specialists and arts, special education, and inclusion coordinators** can work both separately and together to increase access to the arts. Their work with teachers, often involving professional development and hiring, can be tremendously important to creating a climate where teachers can learn from each other across schools. When teacher specializing in music, art, theatre, or dance seeks colleagues who understand their discipline or want to find others who understand accommodation and access and can offer innovative ideas, these district level personnel can be invaluable resources.

How to:

Examples of district allies at work:

- ✓ Special education teachers and aides collaborate with arts educators.
- ✓ Department chairs and administrators develop a critical mass of arts teachers with knowledge/experience in including all students.
- ✓ District administrators link teachers through professional development.
- ✓ Superintendent sets a tone that values the arts and embraces all students.
- ✓ School board & community vote their support.

- Interviewees also mention **passionate individuals from throughout the district** who support and help pave the way or make connections for the teachers most involved in teaching the arts to all students. They include individual board members, principals, parents, resource room specialists, occupational therapists, classroom teachers, technology teachers, and librarians. Equally important are the arts teachers willing to ask for help, tapping the expertise of others in and out of their district.
- One school board member says **board members** play an important part in access to a strong education that includes the arts. He feels he and a majority of his district

colleagues make a difference by:

- **Hiring the superintendent.** The superintendent helps create trust and support in the community.
 - **Standing up for the arts.** In the face of a minority on the board that would have cut the arts, the majority continues to support the programs.
 - **Supporting inclusion.** The board helps the public and the parents understand that the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms best serves all children.
- In addition to the irreplaceable role they have in advocating for their children, communicating with teachers, and creating a supportive learning environment at home, **parents** also can become involved in the politics of access to arts education. For instance, one parent describes how her Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) includes a music committee that secured a \$150,000 grant from a private foundation to incorporate collaborative work among her school and a museum and an opera.

Beyond School Walls

Some districts and their educators seek beyond their district for opportunities that can enhance the arts education experiences of their students. Politically, external involvement helps to mobilize resources for the school district that are subject to public vote and board approval. In addition, educational assistance happens at all levels, from concerned volunteers to local, state, and national communities and opportunities.

Who Receives External Help?

Our survey findings point out inequities that began to arise anecdotally during the *Gaining the Arts Advantage* research (Ellis unpublished). Of respondents, the rural districts are not benefiting from help from external organizations in the same way as suburban or urban districts. Likewise, responding districts with higher percentages of students living in poverty or at risk for academic failure are less likely than other districts to receive help from a wide variety of organizations. However, arts organizations reverse that trend and seem to be working a greater percentage of districts that have more students living in poverty or considered at risk.

In general, suburban districts may have access to more resources, while urban districts have proximity to interested organizations. In addition, suburban districts may benefit from political clout for improving arts budgets, accompanied by parental and community appreciation of the value of fine and performing arts education. As a result, suburban schools may have the right climate for inviting organizations and artists into school, for residencies and performances and taking students and teachers out into the community, for enrichment such as field trips or internships. Urban districts, often very large, may be less likely to have a critical ratio of involved, interested parents relative to the size of the student population, decreasing the family's political capacity to affect change. At the same time, with the concentration of not-for-profit organizations in cities, our survey

analysis suggests urban districts have greater access to interested collaborators, especially arts and youth organizations.

Rural districts possibly have the least amount of access to outside organizations due to geography and fewer resources. For example, two-thirds of the suburban and urban district respondents, compared with only 30 percent of rural districts, indicate receiving educational assistance from professional teachers associations.* As for arts organizations, 55 percent of rural respondents report receiving their help, while it is 69 percent for suburban and 87 percent for urban. Likewise, 25 percent of rural respondents report receiving help from youth organizations, compared to 31 percent of suburban and 53 percent of urban districts. One special education teacher from a rural district describes her school system's geographic challenges: "Our location has been a disadvantage.... With a one-hour drive to the city, and taking trips to a museum, that would be a two-hour trip.... The distance for traveling is really, really too much." However, while districts from rural areas tend to get the least amount of help from external organizations, they do receive the most help from individuals in the community (85 percent compared to 69 percent suburban, 60 percent urban).

To no surprise, poverty appears as another point of inequity when it comes to help from external organizations. In general, for survey respondents, the more poverty in a school district, the less likely it is receiving non-governmental external assistance from all listed sources.† Similarly, external help is also related to the percentage of students at risk for academic failure.‡ Responding districts that receive assistance from colleges, churches, and private businesses have lower rates of students considered at risk for academic failure, compared to those that don't receive such help.

Interestingly, the relationship between external arts organizations and poverty or youth at risk for academic failure reverses the trend. Responding districts receiving help from arts organizations are more likely to have a high rate of students at risk for academic failure or families in poverty than those not receiving arts organization help.

Types of External Assistance

The survey inquires about a range of outside organizations responding districts work with for educational purposes. At the low end, around 18 percent of respondents work with churches. At the high end, 80 percent receive educational opportunities or assistance from colleges or universities.

* This relationship was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The following differences in this paragraph are not, possibly due to the limited sample size.

† Computed after summing the nine external assistance categories on the survey and performing a correlation analysis on selected socioeconomic factors taken independently from the Common Core of Data 1997-98. The amount of help received is inversely related to the percentage of students above poverty level ($r = -.25$). The greater the household income of the students' families, the more likely the district receives assistance ($r = .33$). See Appendix survey, section G.

‡ These relationships are not very strong.

For the arts community, a common relationship with schools consists of artists or artistic groups visiting the school, teaching, demonstrating their disciplines, and working with educators. Of the responding districts, two-thirds report having one to three such artist residencies a year. The remaining one third of the districts have no arts residencies at all. The districts in the Northeast report a very high percentage of working with arts organizations (93 percent), compared to the Midwest (53 percent).*

Surveyed and interviewed districts work in a wide range of ways with outside organizations. Many of the arts collaborations they describe specifically focus on improving inclusion of students with the least amount of access to the arts. Types of partners, the percentage of survey respondents indicating their schools work with them, and the nature of the collaborations follow in the diagram.

TYPES OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

- ✓ **Colleges and universities** (80%): Districts go to them especially for assistance in professional development, but also for programs focused on arts and students with disabilities and for low or no cost arts programming, such as concerts and performances, for qualified students.
- ✓ **Individuals** (73%): Individuals volunteer time and occasionally materials. Professional artists share their expertise in residencies, while gaining teaching experience.
- ✓ **Arts organizations** (69%): Arts organizations offer residencies, financial support, advice and assistance with professional development, workshops, and student displays and performances. A few districts describe arts partners with a focus on various abilities and disabilities. Coalitions of arts organizations interested in working with the schools are popular in some urban districts.
- ✓ **Teachers associations** (54%). Both current and retired associations are mentioned. One rural district pairs students in its alternative school with retired teachers through the local retired teacher association. The pairs prepare for, attend, and critique a theatrical show together, participating in a long correspondence before and after the show.
- ✓ **Private businesses** (53%): Schools benefit from donated materials, tutoring, financial advice, advocacy, and most importantly, funding.
- ✓ **Public libraries** (43%): Libraries provide arts and curricular books and videos as well as space for exhibitions and performances.
- ✓ **Advocacy organizations for people with disabilities** (39%): Organizations with a disability awareness theme as part of their mission offer performance and exhibition opportunities, participation in the arts, sensitivity building, and role models for students.
- ✓ **Youth organizations** (35%): With the call for increased before, after, and summer school arts education opportunities, youth organizations sometimes become valuable, seasoned partners.
- ✓ **Churches** (18%): A few districts report partnering with religious institutions around such areas as character education.

(For further information, see Table 1. District External Assistance by Region and Table 2. District External Assistance by Metro Status in the Appendix.)

* The West (75%) and the South (67%) fall in the middle, although the West is difficult to generalize with a small n. We see some significance with $p < .10$.

Beyond local organizations, interviewees mention state and national opportunities that help enhance the quality of their access to arts education such as VSAarts festivals and artistic competitions and National Park Service art competitions.

Surveyed districts were asked to give advice to external organizations looking to help them in the area of access to arts education. They express particular interest in **financial assistance** and **volunteers**. In addition, suggestions from them and their interviewed colleagues include:

- ✓ Professional development and support
- ✓ Providing high quality substitute arts educators to allow for greater professional development of teachers
- ✓ Free residencies
- ✓ Financial support of adaptive music/art services
- ✓ After school programs

Some commend their state legislatures for providing access to arts organizations and their performances, such as the symphony or ballet. Others point out the challenge of unfunded mandates – to teach the arts to state standards, when there is not enough state funding to support arts specialists in all elementary schools.

Cons on External Assistance

While most school districts value receiving external assistance, a small contingent of respondents brings up some negatives, primarily improper substitution of arts educators. An interviewee in one urban district complains that the district leadership is not supportive enough of arts specialists within the schools. She describes local arts partnerships and related arts-in-education work as interesting but a distraction from the need for a stronger district commitment to the arts. Similarly, a survey respondent writes about a “red light” regarding external organizations being the “outsourcing agenda” where organizations “charge for performances, etc. and not all students are served, especially those with special needs.” This respondent continues, “The best way to assist the students is to make sure all students are provided with an arts education as part of the core curriculum.” These sentiments are not new. At times, the national arts education community has polarized over whether arts-in-education residencies and partnerships threaten or enhance arts education provided by arts specialists employed by the school system.

Making the Most of Resources

At times, districts create more powerfully supported arts learning opportunities by harnessing external assistance. One urban district regularly sends listings of upcoming grant opportunities and deadlines to its schools. In the district, the arts coordinator encourages entrepreneurship, where locally driven school/community partnerships seek external funding to enhance long, ongoing relationships. Another district in a suburban setting cultivates support from voters who do not have children in the public schools.

This footwork paid off when a recent referendum passed, allowing the school to maintain level programming, including the arts, over the next three years, despite uncontrollable rising costs, such as health care. Numerous districts regularly partner with outside organizations to showcase student work in the community, whether in exhibitions at the mall or performances at libraries or museums.

Conclusions

What it takes to offer children full access to high quality arts education in the public schools is not much different than what it takes to give them a strong overall education. Especially when students have difficulty learning in the current system, have disadvantages in their home or community life, or have disabilities requiring accommodation, they benefit from:

- ✓ A belief system that imagines students' success, with individualized attention to help them get there.
- ✓ Strong educators who have the interest and ideas to create real learning opportunities.
- ✓ A supportive environment that values both the arts and students' participation.
- ✓ A connected system in which students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and community members communicate, share what they know, and strategize to find solutions.

A strong district helps create a fertile, sharing environment across schools and among the various arts disciplines, special education, and other departments. Likewise, access to arts education is affected by the same challenges plaguing many public schools today, such as lack of resources, teacher shortages, and lack of communication. Because of the arts' particularly precarious relationship to the politics of public schools, success in access to arts education may face a "double whammy." On one hand, the arts are often relegated to peripheral status. On the other, students and educators involved in special education can face marginalization and separation. These challenges are magnified when resources are scarce, as in the case of districts in rural areas and districts with a high amount of poverty or with many students considered at risk for academic failure due to socioeconomic or educational circumstances. Advocates of arts education bear a particular responsibility for ensuring that the arts education "bandwagon" does not leave these students or communities behind.

We are grateful to the districts that volunteered to participate in the interviews. Selected from a pool originally nominated as strong in arts education, their sharing of their strengths and challenges with our research team presents valuable ideas for advocates of strengthening access to arts education:

Advice for Advocates:

- ✓ **Don't forget about aides and paraprofessionals.** Much of the professional development focus of the arts crossing borders with other disciplines is spent on workshops for teachers, especially general educators. Both arts and special educators interviewed for this work speak to the critical role of the hands-on partner – the special education aide. To enable aides to better facilitate arts education for students with various disabilities, heighten the aides' own arts exposure, interest, and awareness.
- ✓ **Improve existing communication networks.** Within the district, communication among teachers, departments, parents, and community counts. To the extent advocates can assist with, facilitate, direct resources to, offer opportunities for, and provide forums in which these folks can communicate *with each other*, they can help improve the existing system. Where e-mail systems don't exist, link with providers within or without the school district, so that the opportunity and habit can develop. Provide food, structure, incentives, and appropriate scheduling around other school and community events to encourage dialogue.
- ✓ **Lead by example.** Positive personal experiences working with people with disabilities or different backgrounds play a critical role in the development of educators' belief systems. Provide nonthreatening opportunities for everyone in the educational network to work with, learn from, hear about the lives of, and befriend people with various disabilities or diverse backgrounds. The survey results indicate responding districts do not have many people with disabilities in critical educator positions. The first step may be to add people with personal experience with accommodation and disability challenges to the burgeoning professional development networks.

In addition, educators and administrators have opportunities to use existing resources in new ways. Ideas from colleagues include:

Advice for Educators:

- ✓ **Apportion existing personnel differently.** By examining class ratios, support staff availability, and needs at both the district and school levels, colleagues recommend creative rather than typical approaches to which bodies go where. It may be possible to:
 - Pair particularly seasoned special educators and aides and their students with newer arts educators seeking guidance and ideas.
 - Shift inclusive class sizes so that classes with students with more severe disabilities have smaller student: adult ratios.
- ✓ **Practice mentorship.** Some districts connect older students with younger students with disabilities, others create mixed groupings within classes – all with the idea that in addition to service, friendship, and accommodation, students on all sides will learn from each other and grow. Likewise, some districts link teachers with questions to teachers with answers, so that there is always a first place for someone to turn to

when they do not know how to effectively teach a student. Similarly, internship programs provide the next generation of teachers and citizens the chance to interact, help, and learn from students with disabilities.

- ✓ **Tap the collective wisdom.** Through purposely scheduling overlaps – such as teachers’ discussions within and among various departments – districts can tap their existing collective knowledge. Discussions can include separate or joint lesson planning, school themes, useful accommodations for particular students, collaborations between arts and special education personnel, and reaching beyond those departments.

Learning from others’ experiences helps shorten the learning curve. Districts that participated in this research hope to help because they want other young people and those working with them to benefit from what they have learned along the way. They are giving back, and we thank them.

What Next?

Springing from This Work

This study only begins to scratch the surface of questions about access to arts education in our public schools. Further research is needed to answer many questions that this work raises. With any one critical area, it would be helpful to go much deeper, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to learn more. While this study relies on practitioner perspectives and personal assessments of quality, another could develop tools that measure district quality that add more objective information to our understanding of promising practices. Likewise, while this research built on an existing pool from a previous research study, a new nomination process could bring to light districts particularly skilled in access to arts education today. Practitioners often remind us that as much can be learned in failure as success, so an analytical piece deeply examining a few cases of districts that tried and experienced failure may also reveal more than can be found in this broader study.

Selected questions from the survey tool we developed, the *Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire* could be used to create various shortened fast-response types of surveys, designed to reach a larger sample of districts. Such tools could each probe a particular area of interest arising from our work, such as *regional differences*, *effective professional development*, or *community assistance*. With extensive follow-up time and increased response incentives, it should be possible to acquire a larger response rate that could contribute to the overall picture of the nation’s districts. Nonetheless, the competition for educators’ time is fierce, and access to arts education will not always contend successfully. Another approach is to continue to study the “interested” — those who care enough about either access or arts to participate and learn from such research. Practitioner and external researchers could be invited to reflect on particular components of both the challenges and successes in access to arts education. Likewise,

organizations, such as VSAarts, arts councils, or foundations, that work with districts interested in access to arts education could use the tool developed for this study to continue to compile a larger pool of data about district practice. As these organizations often offer incentives, such as grants and professional development, data collection could be integrated into the planning and reporting work with districts.

An important question in access to arts education is “Who’s not getting the arts and why?”. In this study, many of the questions on the survey and interviews focused on district strategies particularly around working with students with disabilities and in special education. More can be learned about students at risk of academic failure. Access to arts education needs to be more closely examined in relationship to race, class, school quality, and poverty, as well as educational attainment. Similarly, many advocate assumptions need to be examined through a lens looking at those with the least access. For instance, “What relationship does access to the arts have to communities with interest in the curricula?” “To what extent does fine arts education in public schools connect to a community context?” And, “How do educational consumers in different areas perceive the relevance fine arts education and of the arts in general arts in their lives? Is there a disconnect or a missed opportunity?”*

Arts therapists and arts educators often march to different drummers, attend different conferences, read different journals, and occasionally work for different education departments. And yet, our brief encounters with practitioners indicate there may be ripe sources of overlap, lost because of the barriers between approaches that use the arts as a source of healing and those that teach the arts to provide skills of the disciplines.

Missing in Action

While this work points to some new and ongoing directions, gaps in the field also invite other areas where we could benefit by knowing more about access to arts education. While the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) administers a fast response survey of schools across the country on arts education, alternative schools and schools focusing on special education are not included in its sample (U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics 2002). As is frequently the case, the students who have the most difficulty learning or obtaining a strong education are often left out of the picture. The nation, and those working on behalf of a strong education that includes the arts, could benefit from further data collection and research, including:

- ✓ A large scale, random sample, quantitative national study that examines more clearly who is, and who is not, receiving arts education. We know there are gaps. For example, the authors of the 1997 nation’s “arts report card” (National Assessment of Education Progress) could not find a large enough theatre sample to test a random sample of eighth graders and so developed a targeted sample. They also were never able to develop a large enough sample to test dance at all.

* A recent public awareness campaign survey sponsored by the Americans for the Arts begins to examine this question in relationship to parent interest and participation in arts education. (Davidson and Michener 2001)

- ✓ Data on the arts that can be linked to already collected data on the large samples and populations of school districts, from sources such as the Common Core of Data (Common core of data school years 1993-94 through 1997-98 2000).

To further understand the question of access to the arts, both in-depth and broad approaches are needed, qualitative and quantitative. Particularly useful areas include:

- **The perspective of students with disabilities and their families.** Thanks to strides made in civil rights over the last 30 years, we may have many more people with personal experience with disabilities and disadvantage that have increased access to society. Looking backward and forward, it would be particularly helpful to understand what role the arts can and have played in the civic and professional lives of those with disabilities, if any. Can and do the arts make a difference? If so, why and how? If not, what has made a difference, and what could be done better? Both longitudinal and cross-section snapshots could help educators and advocates learn more about the nature or level of importance that access to arts education could and should have.
- **What works.** The work presented here comes primarily from the perspectives of practitioners and parents. While measures of arts achievement are difficult to come by in large scale, what does exist could be examined with an eye to access to the arts.* More data is needed. Beyond quantitative data, further qualitative inquiry could help delve more deeply into the “what works” question from the perspectives of the education consumers – the students and parents, especially those with various disabilities or disadvantages.

And, as this report strives to do, future research needs to be placed in the hands of practitioners for it to become useful for today’s students and communities.

While access to arts education for all students may only be a small part of the overall education picture, the deep participation of the districts involved in this research project is one testament to the thought that it matters. It is energizing to speak with caring educators. Their belief in the human spirit and their love of young people remind us that good work happens today, despite challenges in the current climate. To grow access to arts education, many more like these will be needed. The challenge continues to be placing arts and special education in the value system, recruiting and developing quality educators, and maintaining school systems that can support their good work. The effort ahead will be a balancing act – sometimes a magic act – as resources grow scarcer. But, energized educators, parents, and administrators use knowledge as a powerful tool. We hope we have placed the tools of a few districts into more hands and have contributed to a growing discussion about access, equity, and the arts.

* Possibilities include the National Assessment of Educational Progress and states piloting and implementing statewide arts assessments.

III. Coda: The Appendix

Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire

The following instrument is the survey developed by this research team to collect quantitative and qualitative subjective data from school districts regarding access practices in arts education. The survey was addressed to district arts coordinators and special education coordinators.

Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire

Your responses will help contribute to national research on the strengths and challenges of offering arts education to all students, including those with disabilities. Please fill out and return to Access to Arts Education Research Investigation, P.O. Box 612, Newark, DE, 19715 or artslearning@prodigy.net before February 15, 2002. Districts completing survey will receive two curricular kits as a thank you gift. The survey is also available online at <http://clientside.net/access>.

A. District Contact Information

Collaborations among the arts and education district directors or similar personnel encouraged.

		Arts Education Contact	Special Education Contact
1.	Name:		
2.	Title:		
3.	School District:		
4.	Address:		
5.	City:		
6.	State:		
7.	Zip:		
8.	E-mail:		

DISTRICT CODE: _____ (On mailing label or online)

Confidentiality Needs

Responses will be analyzed to develop a national report on access to arts education. Researchers can accommodate your confidentiality needs, so that you may answer as candidly as possible.

	Confidentiality Levels	Yes	No
1.	May we mention your name(s) in any report or web document that arises from this data?		
2.	May we mention your district's name in any report or web document that arises from this data?		
3.	May we quote from your answers in any report or web document that arises from this data?		

B. Arts Education Practices in 2000-2001

Fill in the appropriate numbers.

How many....

		#	All
1.	Arts educators worked in your district? (visual arts, music, theatre/drama, dance specialists) (in full time equivalents: FTE's)		
2.	Arts personnel worked at the district level? (district arts directors, fine arts coordinators...in FTE)		
3.	Artist residencies were offered in your district? (visiting artists or artistic groups, such as a theatre troupe, who work with students or teachers)		
4.	Elementary schools had arts educators teach the arts?		
5.	Elementary schools had classroom educators teach the arts?		
6.	Middle/ junior high schools had arts educators teach the arts?		
7.	High schools had arts educators teach the arts?		
8.	Alternative schools had arts educators teach the arts?		
9.	How many schools had a special arts focus? (e.g., arts magnets, performing arts high schools,...)		

How often did the following occur in your district? Put an "X" under the appropriate category. Use "Not Applicable" (N/A) if the question did not apply to your district. Use "Rarely" if the situation rarely or never occurs. Use "Very Often" if the situation occurs most or all of the time.

	How were the arts taught?	Rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Very Often	N/A
10.	Integrated into other subjects					
11.	As part of teaching based on the theory of "multiple intelligences", by Howard Gardner, (such as the visual or interpersonal intelligences)					
12.	During field trips to arts or cultural institutions (museums, performance centers...)					
13.	By parents and/or volunteers					

C. Special Education Practices in 2000-2001

Fill in the appropriate numbers.

How many...

1.	Special educators worked in your district? (special education teachers in FTE)	
2.	How many therapists worked in your district? (occupational, physical, speech, etc. in FTE)	
3.	How many of these were adaptive arts therapists? (FTE)	
4.	How many other personnel served special education needs in your district ? (aides, etc. in FTE)	
5.	How many special education personnel worked at the district level? (special education directors, etc. in FTE)	
6.	Schools in your district were designed primarily to serve students with disabilities?	
7.	Schools in your district had full-time self-contained classrooms? (solely serving students with various disabilities)	

How often did the following occur in your district? Put an "X" under the appropriate category.

	How is special education taught?	Rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Very Often	N/ A
8.	By integrating students into general classrooms (mainstreaming)					
9.	Through full-time, self-contained classrooms					
10.	Through instruction that pulls students out of general classrooms					
11.	Through schools designed primarily to serve students with disabilities, such as alternative high schools					
12.	Students had personal assistance from a special educator or aide during general classes					
13.	Using arts therapists					
14.	By parents or volunteers					

D. Access to Arts Education in 2000-2001

Did your district have a written policy about access to arts education, especially for students with disabilities, in special education, and/or at-risk of academic failure? Y N
 If yes, please send a copy.

Mark an "X" under the heading that best describes the situation in your district.

	How did students in special education and/or with various disabilities receive arts education?	Rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Very Often	N/ A
1.	Arts assignments were individually adapted to meet students needs					
2.	Special educators incorporated arts into their lessons					
3.	Schools provided physical adaptations for learning the arts (e.g., adaptive tools...)					
4.	Arts classrooms offered appropriate physical accommodations (e.g., ramps, multi-sensory signage...).					
5.	Student performance and exhibition spaces offered appropriate physical accommodations (e.g., stages...)					
6.	Students missed arts classes for special education classes					
7.	Arts educators participated in individualized education plan (IEP) meetings					
8.	Small class sizes allowed for more individualized instruction					
9.	Students were proportionately represented in arts focused schools					
10.	Students received individual assistance from another adult during class					
11.	Students received assistance from other students during class					

Indicate how the following characteristics of your district affect its ability to provide a strong arts education to students in special education and/or with various disabilities.

Place an "X" under the appropriate heading.

	Characteristics:	Very Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Somewhat Helpful	Very Helpful	Has No Effect
12.	Budgets					
13.	Spaces					
14.	Schedules					
15.	Class sizes					
16.	Teacher Background/ Experience					
17.	District priorities					
18.	Community priorities					
19.	Socioeconomic status					
20.	# of Arts Educators					
21.	# of Special Educators					
22.	Other:					
23.	Other:					

E. Personnel Practices in 2000-2001

1. How were hiring decisions made in your district? (check one)

Site-based Centralized Collaborative

	Hiring Practices	Yes	No
2.	Were arts skills considered when hiring special educators?		
3.	... when hiring principals?		
4.	...when hiring elementary educators?		
5.	Were skills with students with disabilities considered when hiring arts educators?		
6.	...when hiring principals?		
7.	...when hiring elementary educators?		
8.	Were skills with students at-risk of failure considered when hiring arts educators?		
9.	...when hiring principals?		
10.	...when hiring elementary educators?		

11. How many arts educators in your district had known disabilities? _____

12. How many special educators in your district had known disabilities? _____

F. Professional Development

I. Professional Development Gatherings

In the 2000-2001 school year, how many times did the district bring together the following personnel?
If you did not have these personnel, leave the field blank.

1. Art educators _____
2. Music educators _____
3. Drama educators _____
4. Dance educators _____
5. Special educators _____

RANKINGS: Rank the effectiveness of these practices in helping your educators teach arts to students with disabilities. Do not use the same number twice in a category.

II. Individualized Professional Development: Rating: (1= most effective, 5=least.)

1. Personal experience _____
2. Attending workshops _____
3. Enrolling in classes _____
4. Volunteering in the community _____
5. Individual study _____

III. Collaborative Professional Development: Rating: (1= most effective, 6=least. Use each number once)

1. Observing other educators _____
2. Working with mentors _____
3. Enlisting help from students _____
4. Enlisting help from parents /adult volunteers _____
5. Informal conversations _____
6. Discussion among special education and arts personnel _____

How often have district educators participated in professional development in the following areas **over the last three school years (1997-2001)?**

	Professional development area:	Rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Very Often
17.	Using arts in special education				
18.	Providing individual adaptations for students with various disabilities in arts classes				
19.	Providing individual adaptations for students with various disabilities in any classes				
20.	Respecting diverse cultures				
21.	Multiple intelligence theory				
22.	Increasing student achievement				
23.	Reaching students at-risk of failure				

G. Working with the Community

Put an "X" by any of the following community segments that helped your district provide educational opportunities to your students or educators over the **over the last three school years (1997-2001)**.

1. ___ Colleges/ Universities
2. ___ Youth organizations
3. ___ Advocacy/service organizations working with and for people with various disabilities
4. ___ Churches
5. ___ Teacher associations
6. ___ Private businesses
7. ___ Arts organizations
8. ___ Public libraries
9. ___ Individuals

H. Descriptive Comments

Please attach additional pages to comment.

1. Describe the types of community organizations/ segments noted above and the services they provided.
2. What other ways could external organizations help your district provide every student, including those with disabilities and at-risk of academic failure, access to a meaningful arts education?
3. If your educators have developed specific strategies for teaching the arts to students with specific disabilities (such as orthopedic or visual) or students who are at-risk of academic failure, please share up to five suggestions.
4. Please list any recommended resources in this area, such as curriculum, organizations, books, magazines, newsletters, or websites, and related contact information.
5. Please add additional comments on any of the other sections, including ways the arts and/or special education are taught, and how professional development, hiring, or community collaboration play a role in this process.

Related Literature

Following *Gaining the Arts Advantage*

The Access to Arts Education Investigation follows directly from the Systemic Arts Education Research Project, both under the principal investigation of Dawn M. Ellis. The project culminated in the report *Gaining the Arts Advantage: Lessons from School Districts That Value Arts Education* (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership 1999).^{*} From 1997 through 1999, the Systemic Arts Education Research Project, the first American national research study on school districts and arts education, explored the success strategies employed by districts nominated as having strong arts education programs.

District nominations were solicited from national and state leaders and from service organizations, ranging from teachers of the arts to groups focused on arts organizations, from school board members to the U.S. Department of Education. Various organizations submitted nominations based on their knowledge of particular levels of strength, The student level was represented by the Presidential Arts Scholars. The school level was represented by the Blue Ribbon School awards that focus on arts. School districts were nominated by state arts councils, departments of education, and alliances for arts education. The more than 500 nominated school districts were invited to submit evidence of strength in each of the following criteria:

- ✓ Student performance
- ✓ Breadth and depth
- ✓ Staffing
- ✓ Access
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Community involvement
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Use of guidelines, such as local, state, or national standards

Over 300 responded, leading to the selection and further investigation of 88 of those districts by phone and mail, with 8 sites visited by teams of researchers and superintendent practitioners as case studies. As a result, researchers found that combinations of the following 13 factors contributed to the school districts' abilities to sustain strong arts education:

- Leadership from the:
 - ✓ Community
 - ✓ School board
 - ✓ Superintendent

^{*} Referred to as "GAA." This original research was sponsored in part by major grants from the GE Fund with assistance from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

- ✓ District arts coordinator
 - ✓ Critical mass of interested principals
 - ✓ Teachers who practice their art forms
- Continuity in that leadership
 - Utilization of parent/ public relations
 - Beginning with an elementary foundation
 - Offering higher levels of achievement for students
 - Utilization of national, state, and other outside forces
 - Development and incremental implementation of a plan
 - Cultivation of a culture of continuous improvement

To follow up the research begun in this landmark study, in 2001VSAarts^{*} commissioned the Access to Arts Education Investigation to specifically learn more about the “access” criteria, which was part of the original study. Anecdotally, researchers and reviewers in the GAA study noticed the “access” criteria was one of the more difficult areas for the participating school districts to document beyond a philosophy and was mentioned as “challenging” during various case study visits (Ellis unpublished). With assistance from the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and the Arts Education Partnership, this investigation utilized the existing pool of districts nominated for the GAA as a starting place. It also used a small, stratified national random sample as a comparative departure, to learn more about the access part of arts education, especially as it relates to students with various disabilities, and to some extent, those who are considered at risk for academic failure.

Alignment with National Priorities

The need for this inquiry is indicated by a number of recent publications and articles. Thirty districts of the 88 highlighted in the GAA work visited Washington, DC, in 2000 and participated in a conference to explore their experiences in dialogue with the field (Arts Education Partnership and President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities 2001). From these conversations, while the original factors were affirmed, new challenges had emerged for these districts, including contending with the multiple effects of student and community population change. This work fits into the context called for by the national Arts Education Partnership in its national research plan of action, calling for more policy research on the field (Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership 1997). Similarly, priorities for research cited by the U.S. Department of Education in 1997 contains a focus on supporting schools to effectively prepare diverse populations (Robinson et al. 1996). Also, the national policy rhetoric from the current Bush administration supports the concept of *leave no child behind*, which relates to access.

While arts education statistics are collected nationally occasionally there are not regular annual mechanisms for collection, collection is not well integrated into the broad educational databases, and there are not population statistics available in the same

^{*} An international not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting the creative power in people with disabilities, formerly known as Very Special Arts.

breadth as some other areas of education. The fast response survey to principals supported by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts, was issued to a national sample in 1994 (U.S. Department of Education 1995) and again in 1999-2000 (U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics 2002) It uses the school as the unit of analysis, which does not provide the ability to extrapolate to the district level. Numerous national publications highlight programs of interest, such as the report *Coming Up Taller* (Weitz 1996) and its profiles of strong after-school programs for youth at risk of failure. But, the baseline of “what’s happening in arts education today” continues to need to be filled out at the district level.

Of Interest to the Classroom

Some of the field debates the whole idea that excellence and equity are compatible in arts education. For instance, visual art professor Enid Zimmerman lays out the dilemmas presented by the tradition of arts education being offered to those of privilege, the idea of striving for measurable achievement, and the concepts of democracy and inclusion in all education (Zimmerman 1997). Visual arts historian Peter Smith situates the history of fine arts education in the tradition of the education of the elite (Smith 1996). Philosophies of organizations such as VSAarts support the ideal that all students, including those with disabilities can and should participate at high levels in arts learning.

In exploring the intersection of arts education and education of students with various disabilities and in special education, the relationship between arts therapies and arts education arises. Art therapist Sharyl Parashak posits there is a natural connection among the two fields worth exploring (Parashak 1997), including in the area of teaching and professional development. On one hand, the expressive arts in forms of therapy and counseling serve to evoke emotions and offer an outlet for expression of those feelings (Gladding 1992). On the other hand, the arts education field has focused on promoting and assessing arts achievement. The creation of the 1997 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the arts (National Center for Education Statistics 1998) reflects an emphasis on teaching the disciplines of the arts.

In shaping our inquiry, a few resonant areas affected the development of our tools, including multiple intelligences and inclusion. The resonance of psychologist and education professor Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences in education reform has with practitioners also informs our research (Gardner 1983). This theory includes kinesthetic, musical, and visual intelligences, along with mathematical and linguistic, leading some educators to teach to various intelligences – or ways of knowing and learning – in the ways they present material from a range of disciplines. In inclusion, art professor Doris M. Guay offers a framework of possibility of what to expect in classrooms that have successfully integrated students with disabilities with other students (Guay 1995). She posits that successful integration of students with various disabilities into the art classroom work requires new models of collaboration, including classroom assistance, co-teaching, and consultation among arts and special education staff as well as support from parents and other community members.

Why Does It Matter?

The results of the arts report card from the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) of eighth graders in the arts indicate that those eighth graders who had participated in an arts education program that provided them with frequent instruction performed better than those who had little or no access (National Center for Education Statistics 1998). This effect was evident in visual art and music in the national random samples. While this is a seemingly obvious relationship, it begins to point to arts performance not being just about natural talent – students can learn the arts.

Of equal note, education professor James Catterall analyzes arts measures in the large scale (more than 25,000 students) National Educational Longitudinal Survey database (NELS: 88). Catterall finds correlations between students with strong arts education backgrounds and various measures of academic performance in other areas (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga 1999). As the NELS database did not collect measures of academic performance in the arts, he was not able to analyze this area. Even with socioeconomic status controlled, Catterall finds evidence that students with high arts experiences exhibit stronger performance on many other academic measures.

If students that partake in a strong arts education do well in both the arts and other areas, it bears looking into the nature of access to arts education for all students, including those with disabilities.

Detailed Methods

The following section elaborates upon the various research methods utilized in this project, which are summarized in the main report.

Building on GAA Districts

All qualifying districts* (n=463) nominated for *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (GAA districts) were invited by mail to participate in the research project in late spring of 2001 in any of three ways:

1. Providing short answers to three questions that dealt with strengths, challenges, and professional development offerings.
2. Completing a survey questionnaire in the 2001-2002 school year.
3. Volunteering to be considered as a site to be further investigated through phone interviews.

Background information from the GAA files was perused to search for information on districts regarding the access criteria and to seek districts with particularly innovative strategies.

The response to the short answers questions and advice from a group of practitioners including district arts and education professionals and a former student with a disability informed the development of the research questions and approach.

Interviews

During fall- winter 2001, seven districts were selected from the pool of 12 interested GAA districts for participation in phone interviews, based on diversity in geography, background materials from the original GAA study, and other available information. The purpose of the district phone interviews was to provide context, stories, and background to help researchers understand the work of making arts education accessible in school districts. Primary contacts at the GAA districts, often district arts education coordinators, were invited to share their recommendations of a pool of possible interviewees at different levels in the district including:

- District arts and special education administrators
- Art, music, dance, theatre, and special education teachers
- Superintendent or principals
- Parents of students with various disabilities
- Primary movers in their community regarding access and arts education (such as school board members, community members, university professors)

* Some nominations were for single schools that were not also districts, and were disqualified from this investigation, which focuses on school systems.

Each phone interview with either Dawn M. Ellis or Marv Klassen-Landis lasted approximately one hour. Seven to nine interviews were conducted with each of the seven districts for a total of 57 interviews. Interviewees represented a wide range of roles in relationship to the district including:

Parent of student(s) with and/or without various disabilities	Principal of elementary, middle, special education, and alternative school(s)
Special educator	District art coordinator
Speech therapist	District music coordinator
School psychologist	District arts coordinator
Audiologist	District special education coordinator
Aide/ paraprofessional	District program specialist
Art teacher	Title 1/ Assessment Coordinator
Music teacher	Assistant superintendent
Dance teacher	Superintendent
Drama teacher	School board member
Music therapist	Community arts educator
Arts and humanities teacher	Arts administrator
Adaptive art teacher	Artist-in-education
Preschool teacher	Private funder

Anonymity was made available to all interviewees, provided in part by the selection of interviewees from a larger pool of recommendations and the use of a research consent form. As a result of the broad requests for confidentiality, the entire report is offered anonymously.

Statistical Methods

The following sections offer insights into the statistical design of the quantitative sections of the study.

The Sample

Summer to fall 2001, the survey instrument was developed and piloted in fall 2001 and revised in winter 2001. From December 2001 to February 2002, the survey was administered to all GAA districts expressing interest and to a small national random sample of districts. This random sample was based on the districts participating in the 1998 Common Core of Data database collected by the National Center of Education Statistics for the U.S. Department of Education (Common core of data school years 1993-94 through 1997-98 2000). Twenty-four GAA districts volunteered to participate in the study in various ways. The random sample was stratified by region (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) and by population density/ metro status (condensed into urban, suburban, and rural), with $n = 161 \times 3$ or 483 for the national random sample. In addition, a random sample of the targeted GAA districts was re-invited to participate in the survey ($n = 161$), for a total of 644 possible survey invitations. This number declined

as a result of overlap between GAA and random districts and districts with incorrect addresses in the Common Core of Data to a total assumed to be successfully sent of n=597.

The survey was administered both on paper and through a website, offering districts choice in participation mode. To further encourage survey participation, two curricula material kits providing arts integration strategies and disability awareness activities, were promised to each participating district as a thank you gift to honor their participation.

The structure of the survey was not intended to provide unbiased results that pertain to the population of United States school districts because GAA districts were purposefully included in the sampling frame. However, the intention was to include a large component, randomly selected, that could serve to offer an American context for the experience of the GAA districts using fairly precise measures on a national scale. The random sample was stratified by population density/metro status (urban/rural/suburban) and region of the country (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West) to assure adequate sample representation within these divisions. Survey analysis software (Sudaan) was used to compute proper estimates of standard errors (required for making statistical comparisons and producing confidence intervals) with complex sampling schemes. The size of the samples was selected to be able to produce confidence intervals that are small enough for measuring important differences (within 15 percent change for many questions). The survey was expected to produce a 50 percent response rate (response rates typically range from 10 percent to 90 percent depending on the incentives, follow-up approach, and several other factors). Our response rate was much lower- about 9 percent. Given the limited scope of the project, it was not possible to further increase the response rate. This low response rate poses several difficulties analytically:

1. The odds increase that the sample is not representative- if those that answer are different than those that do not, the response is biased.
2. The small sample precluded the possibility of performing a stratified analysis (separating the random sample from the GAA sample to produce national estimates).
3. The small sample limited the ability to perform hypothesis testing- only very large differences are statistically significant given the sample size.
4. Confidence intervals are not included in the results because they are very wide in many instances. Confidence intervals provide a good feel for how much the true values could vary.

While it is impossible to determine how those that did not respond would have responded, we used the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data: 1997-98 national database (Common core of data school years 1993-94 through 1997-98 2000) to compare the respondents to non-respondents. As the comparison yielded similarities in many factors, including student/teacher ratio, percentage of children below poverty, percentage of children who are not white, the respondents seem similar to non-respondents. The main area of difference is responding districts are, on average, around 40 percent larger than non-responding districts as measured by number of students,

teachers, and schools. Given that the survey was sent addressed to both district arts and special education coordinators, this may also speak to an increased likelihood of the coordinators' existence and availability in larger districts.

Another limitation relates to our ability to make conclusions that relate to a true random sample of districts within the US. With our sample size we should not generalize the results to the population of school districts in the country (such as comparisons between urban and rural). Instead, we look to this conglomeration of arts-oriented districts and random districts for results that will be slightly more representative of districts that have arts than those that do not. This probably does not affect our results greatly in the areas of the survey related to special education, access, and community. In the areas that relate to arts specifically (such as arts specialists), we would expect a slight arts bias. However, only 28 percent of responding districts were from the GAA pool, barely over the 25 percent included in the sample, so the potential bias is not very large.

Typically, statistical conclusions are made through hypothesis testing. With our sample size, only very large differences can achieve statistical significance. However, we report differences when the P value did not reach .10 to indicate possible areas for further study and provide the mean results. Further research with larger sample sizes should evaluate the statistical significance by increasing sample size and response rate.

Given these limitations, the analyses that were performed were simple univariate statistics (such as percentages and means), correlation analysis, and some principle components and regression analysis. We feel these simple analyses still provide valuable information about the responding districts who come from all over America as well as relationships about access, arts education, poverty, and the number of students with IEPs that may be more representative of the country.

National Database Context

We purposely limited the scope of the survey in an attempt to increase response rate (the longer the survey, the less likely people will respond), relegating demographic information to be collected through other national databases. We used the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data: 1997-98 database (Common core of data school years 1993-94 through 1997-98 2000), which contains a wealth of information on the population of school American districts including income, poverty status, district size, and demographics. The database provided helpful information about area demographics (percentage of residents in poverty, zipcode level income) as well as special education (students with IEPs). The data was sporadic in areas such as number of teachers, and school sizes and types, preventing our normalization of the data*. But, by choosing not to weight data, we avoided a particularly large district from dwarfing the others due to the small sample size.

* We expected to be able to normalize many of our values (such as art teachers as a fraction of all teachers) by determining information such as number and types of schools, school sizes, per-pupil spending, however the database held sporadic values on these indicators for our sample. Therefore, we created other simple indicators to provide comparison (such as whether or not districts have district level arts coordinators).

Qualitative Analysis

Both interviewers worked with a template of questions developed after consulting the advisory groups^{*}. Some questions were asked of all interviewees, others were tailored to their particular role within the district. Phone interviews were transcribed and shared between interviewers, who had regular discussions to observe emerging themes. Intense thematic exploration was used to consolidate, chart, and compile emerging themes. These themes provide the larger framework for the report.

In addition to quantitative questions, qualitative open-ended answers allowed all groups of districts filling out the survey to provide greater detail about strengths and challenges. These answers were tallied, grouped, and compared with the interview and survey trends. Specific advice, challenges, and insights are offered throughout the report to provide greater depth and utility for practitioners. Interviews in the selected targeted group of districts should provide even greater insight into the strengths, challenges, and strategies, while also providing context for the quantitative data.

^{*} Template made available upon request.

Tables

Table 1
District External Assistance by Region
(Unweighted, section G
Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire)

Table provides mean percentage of districts reporting involvement with particular sector or organization when offering education to students or teachers, broken down by region.

	Region		South east	West central	North west
	North east	Mid west			
Colleges	77%	79%	87%	75%	82%
Youth Orgs	54%	67%	70%	60%	67%
Disability Advocacy Orgs	38%	26%	40%	35%	38%
Churches	0%	26%	33%	25%	26%
Teacher Associations	46%	53%	54%	47%	53%
Businesses	38%	63%	47%	35%	63%
Arts Orgs	92%	53%	92%	55%	53%
Libraries	15%	53%	15%	30%	53%
Individuals	54%	84%	54%	77%	84%

Table 2
**District External Assistance by Population Density/ Metro
 Status**

**(Unweighted, section G
Access to Arts Education District Questionnaire)**

Table provides mean percentage of districts reporting involvement with particular sector or organization when offering education to students or teachers, broken into rural, suburban, and urban.

	Metro Status			
	Ru ral	Suburb an	Urb an	A ll
Colleges	70 %	88%	87 %	80 %
Youth Orgs	25 %	31%	53 %	35 %
Disability Advocacy Orgs	40 %	50%	27 %	39 %
Churches	15 %	25%	13 %	18 %
Teacher Associations	30 %	75%	67 %	55 %
Businesses	50 %	56%	53 %	53 %
Arts Orgs	55 %	69%	87 %	69 %
Libraries	35 %	56%	40 %	43 %
Individuals	85 %	69%	60 %	73 %

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