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Study Finds More Collaborative Approach Can Improve Arts Education for Kids

A new study by ArtsFund reveals that even in today's challenging economy, new, more substantive school arts programs can be developed and sustained if arts groups, public schools and funders work together in a more systematic fashion.

"Support for arts education by both schools and private funders is insufficient and too often scatter-shot," said **Dr. Alec Clowes**, board president of the Clowes Fund and an avid supporter of music education. "A central recommendation of this study is to develop a more systematic and collaborative approach. I hope the study provokes schools, funders and arts groups to jointly embrace practices that will make a real difference in students' lives through the arts."

The study was conducted for ArtsFund by nationally recognized consultant to education and arts organizations, Christine Goodheart, and was supported by a generous grant from The Clowes Fund, Inc. It drew on information gathered from King and Pierce County nonprofit arts groups, public school officials, arts education funders and successful arts education programs across the country.

"People inherently love the idea of arts education, but this study shows that even with current very narrow resources we can, collectively, be more effective," said **Jim Tune**, President and CEO of ArtsFund, a nonprofit umbrella arts funding and advocacy organization now in its 40th year. "ArtsFund can be a catalyst in making that happen."

Tune said ArtsFund will convene a workshop with funders and arts educators from the public schools and arts organizations in September 2009 to determine if recommendations from this study can be put into practice.

The top recommendations from the study are:

- **Arts organizations** should better align their programs with needs of schools by increasing advance planning, focusing on multi-year programs and choosing partner schools more strategically.
- **Schools and school districts** should invest in collaborations with arts organizations by providing such support as funding and release time for teacher planning.
- **Funders** should provide multi-year support for school-arts organization collaborations and rethink what counts as success, moving away from measurements based on simple head counts.
- **Arts organizations** should consider collaborating with other organizations working in such areas as professional development and educational materials. Such other groups include ArtsCorps, ArtsEdWashington and Arts Impact.
- **All parties** interested in arts education should work together to create a systematic approach to such things as matching arts organizations and schools, criteria for success and funding.

ArtsFund currently gives modest grants to arts organizations to work with K-12 schools. A range of possible roles emerged from the study, including supporting funders in building a common understanding of best practices in arts education and funding the creation of an arts education directory for use by K-12 schools in print and on-line.

"Working together in a more collaborative way and putting the study's recommendations into practice, arts organizations, the city, schools, parents and funders can have a powerful and lasting impact," said **Sandra Jackson-Dumont**, Deputy Director for Education + Public Programs/Adjunct Curator at the Seattle Art Museum and chair of the Seattle Arts Commission's Education Committee. "In addition, the ArtsFund study will strengthen the partnership that the City and Seattle Public Schools formed to restore arts education to improve student learning."

"Nonprofit arts groups are a tremendous resource for schools," said **Paul Luczak**, principal of Juanita Elementary School in Kirkland. "Fortunately, we have been able to partner with arts organizations. They have expertise and programs that, when done right, give students a much richer and more effective learning experience in the arts and in other subject areas."

The research revealed an impressive commitment by nonprofit arts groups to public-school education. The 52 arts groups that completed a survey included in the study reported 102 arts education programs reaching widely to schools, teachers and students.¹

¹ The survey did not attempt to identify which programs reach which individual schools, teachers or students. But a simple tally shows these programs reach 2,493 schools, 10,132 teachers and 312,851 students with some of these constituents obviously served by multiple arts organizations.

To accomplish this work, the 52 reporting groups employ 89 full-time and 98 part-time educators as well as 942 teaching artists (some teaching artists work for more than one arts group, so that number does not represent unique individuals). Further illustrating the commitment of groups to arts education, 47 percent of those responding said they convene a board committee on education and 49 percent convene an educator advisory committee.

Although 84 percent of reporting groups say arts education programs are central to their missions, arts organizations and their school partners struggle to find funding that supports multi-year relationships which result in the highest quality work with students.

The full study is available on-line at www.artsfund.org.

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