

Strengthening the Effectiveness of Collaborations  
Between  
Arts Organizations and K-12 Schools  
in King and Pierce Counties, Washington

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Recommendations**

#### **Strengthening Collaborations between Arts Organizations and Schools in the Puget Sound Region**

1. Arts organizations need to work harder to address the needs of schools using strategies such as the strategic identification of school partners, conducting needs assessments, review of school plans and collaborative planning on all levels.
2. Schools and school districts should invest in collaborations with arts organizations by providing support such as funding and release time for teacher planning.
3. Funders should provide multi-year funding for school-arts organizations collaborations and rethink what counts as success, moving away from success based on levels of participation.
4. Arts organizations should consider collaborating with other organizations pursuing similar work in key areas such as professional development and provision of educational materials.
5. The community should develop ways to support technical assistance to arts organizations, especially in critical areas like understanding work within schools structures, assessment and collaborative program design.
6. Schools and arts organizations should assess and report impact broadly.

### **Possible Roles for ArtsFund**

1. Support funders in building a common understanding of best practices.
2. Fund the creation of an arts education directory for use by K-12 schools in print and on-line.
3. Given the relative strength of K-12 music education programs in the Puget Sound and the student musicians they train, create a program that funds professional musicians to work on an ongoing basis with student musicians.
4. Create a program that funds arts organizations to work with family and community members in schools in collaboration with PTAs.

### **Research Questions**

What strategies would strengthen the relationship between arts organizations and K-12 schools in support of student learning? What role could ArtsFund play?

### **Methodology**

- An online survey was administered to 70 arts organizations in King and Pierce Counties who are ArtsFund grantees. 52 organizations completed this survey, 7 responded that they do no work with K-12 schools. 11 organizations did not respond.
- Follow-up meetings of arts organizations' education leaders were convened in King and Pierce Counties to probe more deeply into survey results.
- Focus groups and interviews were conducted with arts education leaders, district arts coordinators, principals, teachers and funders who fund arts organizations to work with K-12 schools.

- National program models were documented.
- Past local studies on the topic were reviewed.

## **Findings and Conclusions**

### **Scope and Impact**

Arts organizations in this sample reported on 102 programs that are serving large numbers of schools (2,493), teachers (10,132) and students (312, 851), although it should be noted that these numbers do not represent discrete schools, teachers and schools due to overlaps in programs working with the same constituents. They report their work has grown more than 20 percent over the last 3 years. 60 percent of programs are one-time only exposures for students, while only 16 percent of programs last more than 6 months with the same students. 60 percent of organizations include planning with teachers in their program design but only 30 percent of partnerships engage family and community members beyond performances for them. As is often the case, assessment practices are weaker than instructional practices. Just 28 percent of programs develop an evaluation plan with partner schools.

### **Arts Organizations' Support for Education Activities**

Although 84 percent of arts organizations report their programs are perceived as central to their organization's missions, budget allocations do not support this claim. Only 4 percent of the total of all organization budgets is devoted to work with K-12 schools.

### **Challenges and Priorities**

Organizations report the main challenges they face in this work as finding adequate funding; working within the structure of schools; program design that balances depth and breadth; and retaining skilled teaching artists.

### **Different Expectations: Arts Organizations and Schools**

There is a disconnect between the expectations and priorities of arts organizations and the stated priorities of schools. For schools, multi-year collaboration is an absolute requirement for their commitment to work with arts organizations. They state that they cannot commit time and resources to this work unless they can count on its sustainability. For arts organizations multi-year collaboration is a desire, but seems difficult to carry out.

Schools want arts organizations to come to them and ask what they need. Arts organizations often design and deliver programs to schools without intensive co-planning. Finally, no arts organizations report working with principals as a feature of their collaboration but schools say this is critical.

### **Need for a Systematic Approach**

Everyone who participated in the research project agreed that there is no system by which arts organizations and schools are matched. Nor are there any agreed upon standards of excellence or criteria for success. There is also lack of a systematic, community-wide approach to funding.

### **Building on the Success of School Music Programs**

Given the relative strength of K-12 music education programs in the Puget Sound training student musicians, there is a missed opportunity to link professional musicians to student musicians. There are remarkable professional music organizations and musicians in the Puget Sound and most schools do have music instruction and ensembles. But up to now, there has not been a way to link these two arenas beyond modest examples.

### **Overlooked Sources of Expertise**

There are a number of arts education organizations in the Puget Sound Region that are perceived by educators and school administrators as critical to the development of arts education practice such as ArtsEdWashington, ArtsCorps and Arts Impact. However, producing, presenting and exhibiting arts organizations who have K-12 education as a part of their mission do not seem to view them as sources for information and expertise to help improve their own practice.

### **Reaching Beyond the Schools**

Schools view parent involvement as critical to their success and see the arts as a natural way to further engage parents in the life of the school. However, arts organizations do not commonly work with families and community members as a part of their arts education partnerships.