

Castaic Union School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 3,397

1 middle school (grades 6-8)

3 elementary schools (grades K-5)

DISTRICT CONTEXT

Prior to 2003, Castaic Union School District had an active Visual and Performing Arts Teacher Advisory Committee (arts committee). It was headed by the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services and upon her retirement, by the Director of Instruction and Special Projects (ISP), who includes arts education among her areas of responsibility. The district arts committee had been awarded a California Department of Education *Arts Work* grant three years in a row for their existing programs in music and visual arts, and to augment future programs in dance and theatre. The Castaic vision included infusing arts instruction into all areas of the curriculum. The arts committee had already compiled essential standards for the visual and performing arts based on the California Department of Education's Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Framework, designed a VAPA portfolio assessment system for students and in 2000, adopted textbooks in visual arts (K-8) and music (K-5). In addition, the essential visual and performing arts standards were posted in classrooms district-wide.

Depending on the grade level, visual arts were taught by elementary classroom teachers or by a middle school specialist. There was a music specialist with an award-winning instrumental music program and choir at the middle school. In addition, a full-time video production teacher had been on staff for several years. There was no dance program at the middle school but it was taught in the three elementary schools—either through a SPARKS physical education program or by knowledgeable classroom teachers. All four Castaic schools had small, but active theatre programs through integrated classroom instruction, afterschool clubs and the staging of annual plays. A district-wide musical theatre program was also available to all upper elementary (grades 4-6) Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) students each summer and drew broad participation.

Castaic welcomed artist-parent volunteers on a regular basis and had relationships with the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, Los Angeles County Arts Museum, Music Center of Los Angeles County Education Division, and California Institute for the Arts (Cal Arts). Castaic applied to join the *Arts for All* initiative in 2003 with hope of obtaining additional funding for professional development and instructional resources to fully actualize its goal to integrate arts instruction with all subject areas.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

As Castaic already had a high-functioning arts committee consisting of district administrators, teachers, supportive parents and a board member, the process of adding additional community members was undertaken primarily to satisfy a planning requirement

set forth by the *Arts for All* coach assisting them. Some CAT team members were turned off by what was presented as a mandated, singular approach to strategic planning when the district had already adopted another style of planning. While the newly trained *Arts for All* coach attempted to stay true to the techniques—as she understood them—from the CAT team perspective, the approach was not adequately sensitive to their uniqueness as a district, their learning goals or administrative processes. In time, the dynamic of the group was negatively impacted and long-time enthusiasts stopped participating—effectively stalling the planning process.

In the second year of planning, an alternate coach was assigned to Castaic who worked with the director of ISP to restructure the arts plan to better align with their previous successes in arts education. The plan included the following components of a quality arts education program: standards-based instruction, a variety of teaching methodologies, student assessment and exhibition/performance outcomes, professional development, community partnerships, a committed administration, instilling arts appreciation, program evaluation, and funding for facilities and resources. The long-term goal for the district arts plan was sequential, standards-based instruction in the visual and performing arts offered to all students, at every grade level. Though not listed as a major component of the plan, the district also wanted to advance multicultural goals by offering arts appreciation instruction that reflected the many ethnicities of Castaic's diverse student population. The governing board approved an amended board policy in January 2005 and a strategic plan for arts education the following spring.

An existing arts education policy was updated to reflect an emphasis on standards-based instruction and to recognize the arts as part of the K-8 core curriculum. It also acknowledged the importance of the basic components included in the arts plan. Borrowing language from other districts' visual and performing arts board policies, the revised version also stated the board's support of the need to provide adequate funding for arts education programs and the need for regular review, evaluation and ongoing development of the arts plan.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

Formal implementation began in 2005-2006 with a reorganization of the CAT team following its demise the previous school year. Under the leadership of the director of ISP, the reorganized team consisted primarily of those who were responsible for achieving the goals of the plan. The core of the team included the director of ISP, the arts specialists and two teachers from each school who had a special interest or training in an art discipline. Other teachers, school principals, artist-parents and the governing board president also attended regularly, schedules permitting.

Rather than follow the district arts plan exactly as written, the CAT team identified immediate priorities and opportunities and worked to achieve goals in those areas. For example, one full-time and one part-time certificated music specialist were immediately hired to service the three elementary schools. In the fall of 2007 the CAT team was

awarded a matching grant from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund that helped pay for a former teacher/visual arts specialist to be hired on a stipend basis as a part-time arts coordinator to assist the director of ISP in implementing the plan.

Using a portion of the one-time state legislative block grant and another grant from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund, musical instruments—including a tuba, wind instruments and guitars—were purchased for the middle school and keyboards were purchased for the elementary schools over a two-year period. The *Arts for All* Pooled Fund grant also provided funds toward professional development and the purchase of supplies and materials.

Students had opportunities to exhibit their artwork and stage both vocal and instrumental performances, as in the past. The elementary schools hosted annual arts celebrations with a variety of themes, and the middle school annually held a district-wide celebration called Arts Extravaganza. During this popular event, students in grades K-8 had an opportunity to display their artwork in a community gallery setting alongside teachers and other community artists. Middle school performance groups staged vocal and instrumental concerts, and visiting students could choose to participate in a Shakespeare theatre workshop, build with clay, and participate in street painting and chalk drawing.

The first project undertaken by the district arts coordinator during 2007-2008 was to design and lead a series of professional development classes that focused on state content standards and arts integration. Making the transition from art project-oriented professional development to studying standards-based instruction initially was challenging for teachers who had little formal background in the arts. They were accustomed to learning practical skills for teaching specific art lessons such as ceramics techniques or bookbinding, rather than discussing theories behind instructional choices. For the first time, middle school teachers outnumbered the elementary teachers in an arts education training program. They knew the arts coordinator as a former teaching colleague and wanted to try using integration as an instructional method. As a result, the sessions were geared to identify links between the arts and technology that would appeal to older students, such as political cartooning and creating graphic novels along with understanding how those lessons correspond with language arts standards.

To support the professional development effort, CAT team members attended curriculum fairs and were exposed to a range of new sheet music and instructional materials for elementary music and visual arts. The district planned to use ongoing legislative block grant funds to pay for these resources over time. In an effort to increase the use of technology among students and teachers, the district set up computer labs at all three elementary schools (labs were already in place at the middle school) and teachers received training on basic applications in the arts, including the use of graphic design elements like Clip Art to improve the appearance of class assignments or announcement flyers.

Students were provided with numerous opportunities to share their accomplishments with fellow students and parents through exhibitions and performances at their schools, in district-wide shows and community venues. Grants from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund were given to schools to use for assemblies and other performance costs. The Castaic District

also continued to partner with other community entities such as Cal Arts and the Music Center of Los Angeles County to increase student access to professional artists.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

As one CAT team member put it, the arts were very much alive in the Castaic District before the district's involvement with *Arts for All*. The high valuing of arts education by parents and district personnel is recognized as an important mechanism for continued program development. Other keys to change are listed below along with challenges faced by the CAT team:

Mechanisms for Change

- *District leadership.* The CAT team and the district arts plan are supported by all district leaders—including the governing board, the chief administrators and the school principals.
- *Successful grant writing.* The director of ISP has a proven track record for winning arts education grants.
- *Culture of collaboration and sharing.* The teachers in Castaic had previously developed a collaborative culture for sharing lesson plans and other instructional ideas that foster the use of arts instruction in the elementary classroom.
- *Arts-skilled classroom teachers.* Each elementary school has hired classroom teachers who have prior training—and in some cases, full certification—in one of the four major art disciplines. These teachers use their knowledge to integrate arts learning in other subjects and to share ideas with their colleagues.

Challenges of Change

- *Conflicted planning process.* The *Arts for All* strategic planning approach did not take into consideration the progress Castaic had already made in developing a full arts program in its schools. This alienated participants, causing a split between what was initially written in the plan and what the district was actually interested in implementing. This problem contributed to extending the planning time by an additional year.
- *Program Improvement status.* The year Castaic USD joined *Arts for All*, it was also put on academic watch. With this came the mandate to focus on raising math and reading test scores amongst struggling student subgroups. As a result, the CAT team reported that it became more difficult to ask for, and get approved, professional development or time for classroom instruction and student activities in the arts.
- *Lack of instructional time.* Elementary teachers find they have little time to teach history and science in addition to the mandated time spent on math and language arts, so adding more dance, music, theatre and visual arts instruction into their teaching schedule, even through integration, is perceived as an extremely difficult challenge.

OUTCOMES

Castaic's most visible progress in working to integrate arts instruction since joining the *Arts for All* initiative has been through increasing teaching supplies, hiring certificated music specialists, hiring a part-time arts coordinator and providing professional development in arts integration for K-8 teachers. However, the district has made advancements in most of the factors that define a quality arts program. These outcomes are listed below.

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. The district has identified essential visual and performing arts standards that were published and disseminated to all teachers. There are student textbooks available for music and visual arts instruction at all schools, but teachers primarily rely on the teacher's edition for lesson ideas. The CAT team is currently researching state-approved texts for purchase in the near future. In the fall of 2008, the title of arts coordinator will pass to a part-time classroom teacher who will lead the task of creating cross-curricular, K-8 lesson planning guides in all four art disciplines to deepen the rigor of arts integrated instruction.

Pedagogy. Castaic USD uses a combination of methods to bring learning opportunities to students. At the middle school level, visual arts and music electives are offered by certificated specialists, including instrumental band, guitar, string instruments, and an all-district choir. Classroom teachers have now received training in visual arts-integrated instruction. Currently there are no dance or theatre electives, but there is a drama club after school. At the elementary level, two certificated specialists (1.5 FTE) offer music instruction for the three elementary schools. Visual arts are taught through integration or as a discrete subject by teachers with adequate training. Theatre continues to be taught primarily by classroom teachers or during the GATE summer musical theatre program (grades 4-6 only), which is led by recent Cal Arts graduates. Because Castaic is currently subject to Program Improvement mandates by the California Department of Education, teachers spend the majority of instructional time on language arts and math. Integration provides a way for them to continue providing instruction in the arts as well.

Student Assessment. Students currently receive a letter grade for elective art classes at the middle school level. At the elementary school, students receive an Excellent, Satisfactory or Needs Improvement rating in visual and performing arts and music on their report card. The music rating is awarded by the music specialists. Prior to *Arts for All*, Castaic was working to adopt a student portfolio assessment process, however this plan went on hold when the district was put on academic watch.

Professional Development. The arts coordinator developed a series of afterschool workshops on teaching content standards through visual arts integration. These were primarily attended by the middle school teachers. The director of ISP plans to design future trainings in all four art disciplines for all grade levels.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. The director of ISP is responsible for administering all arts education programs in the district. In 2007, she hired a part-time external arts coordinator to organize the professional development series on integration and to take leadership in building relationships with community partners. A classroom teacher has assumed the role of arts coordinator (50% teacher/50% arts coordinator) for the 2008-2009 school year and will lead the effort to complete the development of cross-curricular lesson plan guides for each grade. She will also be working closely with school principals to schedule artist residencies with community arts providers.

Personnel. Full-time credentialed arts specialists are employed by the district to teach visual arts and music at the middle school level and two music specialists have been hired to teach music across the three elementary schools. In addition, the middle school has a video production teacher on staff. Classroom teachers are expected to provide dance and theatre instruction, though it is not mandated.

Facilities and Equipment. At the middle school, there are dedicated rooms for visual arts and music plus a multi-purpose room with a stage for use with any of the art disciplines. The back of the stage has ballet barres, mirrors and a wood floor for dance instruction. There is also an outdoor stage and choir room for performing arts instruction. At each elementary school, there are designated music rooms and a multi-purpose room with a stage, sound system and curtains. State legislative block grant funds were used to purchase portable exhibit walls and to replace components of the sound system in the middle school's performing arts center. Other arts equipment was also purchased, including musical instruments, arts supplies and curriculum materials for all four schools. With rollover funds remaining in 2008-2009, additional curriculum materials will be bought for visual arts and/or music.

Partnerships and Collaborations. The district has longstanding relationships with the City of Santa Clarita, Cal Arts, Castaic Education Foundation, Santa Clarita Valley Education Foundation, *Arts for All* and the PTAs for sponsoring or collaborating in creating student learning opportunities and community exhibitions. For example, students are annually recruited to participate in a local street art festival as well as a Children's Literacy and Arts Festival, with sponsorship obtained through the City of Santa Clarita and the Santa Clarita Education Foundation. They also take field trips to the Music Center of Los Angeles County for performances when funding is available.

Sustainability

Policy. An existing arts education policy was revised to reflect the district's goal of offering standards-based instruction in the visual and performing art for all students. While the governing board could not commit to providing funding for all of the goals set forth in the arts plan, it did acknowledge the need for the basic components of the plan to be set in place and to have progress evaluated on a periodic basis.

Funding. The Castaic USD arts education budget in 2007-2008 was 1.7 percent of the total budget, which is a slight increase over prior years. The district's primary sources for funding have been the general budget—including special program categorical funds, the state legislative block grant funding and grants from the Castaic Education Foundation, the Santa Clarita Valley Education Foundation, the City of Santa Clarita and the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund. Last year, 12 percent of the arts education budget came from grants and donations. A two-year grant from the Pooled Fund was used to pay the arts coordinator's stipend plus contributed to the purchase of instructional materials, supplies and professional development.

Evaluation. Informal program evaluation and reflective discussion have been regular components of the CAT team meetings since the initial needs assessment was conducted prior to joining *Arts for All* in 2004. A more formal evaluation is not a priority in the arts plan to date.

Communication and Advocacy. The CAT team reports on its activities and plans through the director of ISP at bi-weekly administrative council meetings that are attended by all school principals and district administrators. The director of ISP also sends out e-mails and flyers through each school's CAT team representative to keep teachers informed of student and community arts events and professional development opportunities. The CAT team continues to enjoy the strong support of the board, administrators and parents, despite the initial setbacks in *Arts for All* implementation. Student performances such as the spring choral concert, GATE summer musical theatre and the middle school's Arts Extravaganza celebration are well attended and are the district's affirmations of arts education's worth.

District Leadership. The two main district-level advocates are the assistant superintendent of educational services and the director of ISP who together hold broad authority over arts education planning and spending. The CAT team also benefits from the pro-active support of the Castaic Governing Board, the superintendent, the middle school principal and all three elementary principals. All principals fully cooperate with district-driven plans to improve arts education offerings in their schools. In addition, the newly hired middle school principal is a national board certified visual arts teacher.

CHANGES IN INCREASED ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

Prior to *Arts for All*, students in each of Castaic's schools already had access to instruction in at least three of the four major art disciplines either during the school day or through extracurricular programs, although offerings were not necessarily equitable or adequate. In the past two years, a number of steps have been taken to improve these deficiencies.

Approximately 25 teachers mainly from the middle school received visual arts integration training in the last year, although the degree to which this training has changed classroom practices has not yet been documented. In an effort to incorporate dance instruction into the physical education curriculum, the middle school purchased a video sequence called the

Hops Program from which students learn about and practice creative movement. One challenge faced by the district is that middle school students in need of academic intervention are unable to include a music elective in their highly structured schedule. District administration is looking into the possibility of extending the school day with additional periods so these students have an equitable chance to participate. At the elementary level, access to and quality of music instruction increased notably with the hiring of two specialists that now provide instruction for all students in each elementary school, grades one through five. However, dance, theatre and visual arts continue to be taught by classroom teachers.

Teachers have responded to district conversations regarding multicultural approaches to visual and performing arts instruction. Some fifth grade elementary teachers have designed cross-curricular lessons that focus on the development of jazz music in New Orleans and the history of the “Blues” in Chicago. These lessons integrate language arts, social studies, music, visual arts and math, with emphasis on the historical influence of African-American culture on the development of these musical genres.

The schools benefited from state legislative block grants that paid for new musical equipment. To increase student access to a greater array of instruments, the elementary schools purchased keyboards and the middle school purchased guitars, sound equipment and a new tuba for the school band, among other items. Castaic already had textbooks in the classrooms for visual and performing arts, and is looking to update the visual arts and music texts in 2008-2009, as well as complete cross-curricular instructional guides to strengthen instruction in the arts. Though Castaic Union School District is currently in program improvement, its historic commitment to advancing arts education continues to remain strong even as it grapples with improving student subgroup performance in language arts and math.

“Having a passion for the arts, coupled with the ability to administrate and coordinate, is more important in running our programs than being an accomplished artist.”

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the focus interview with CAT team members, the following areas present possibilities for technical assistance from *Arts for All* staff:

- Developing new arts partners in the vicinity, both fiscal and instructional
- Arts coordinator training in how to administer and coordinate effective arts education programs
- Curriculum mapping on fitting arts instruction into the teaching schedule
- Paid specialists or artist residencies to model dance and theatre integrated instruction
- Program evaluation measures