

Compton Unified School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 28,081

3 high schools (grades 9-12)

8 middle schools (grades 6-8, 7-8)

24 elementary schools (grades K-5, K-6, 3-8)

4 alternative schools¹¹

DISTRICT CONTEXT

Prior to joining *Arts for All* in 2004, Compton Unified School District offered limited choices in arts education instruction. The three high schools had band, choral and visual arts specialists; one site had a theatre program and no dance instruction was available. At the middle school level, four band teachers offered elective classes at eight sites and a dance elective was available at a single site. At the elementary level, there were no arts specialists on staff. Visual arts instruction was taught sporadically by a limited number of classroom teachers. Each school made its own decisions on providing students with access to arts instruction. This policy led to inequities in access across the district. Compton USD also lacked written curricula in any of the four art disciplines, K-12. Professional development in arts education was not available through the district with the exception of one high school band teacher who occasionally mentored middle school band teachers.

In late 2003, one of the associate superintendents and a member of the Compton Board of Trustees spearheaded the creation of the Compton Education Foundation with a mission to restore arts instruction to all schools in the district. When the *Arts for All* initiative was announced, the foundation and district administrators recognized an opportunity to receive help in creating a comprehensive plan for arts education and to leverage its ability to attract the funding to actualize it.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE ARTS

“...we stuck with the things that the majority of people thought it would be durable to do.”

To develop the district arts plan, a 17-member Community Art Team (CAT) was formed that included Compton administrators, community liaisons, two trustees, an interim arts coordinator, the district grant writer, three principals, two arts specialists, a community advocate and a high school student. Working with a California Alliance for Arts Education coach, the CAT team identified the following elements of a quality arts education program in their plan: standards-based curriculum, instruction and methodology, student assessment, professional development, program

¹¹ Alternative schools are addressed in the LACOE case study.

administration and personnel, funding, resources and facilities, plus program evaluation. Missing from the list were communication and advocacy, which were incorporated into action steps within the other components as implementation of the plan progressed.

The planning process lasted from the fall of 2004 to the spring of 2006, because the CAT team took time to conduct an inventory and needs assessment survey in the 39 schools before creating the plan. In addition, the team wanted to ensure that the plan was realistic and achievable. The team started by meeting weekly, then transitioned to holding monthly meetings, and finally met quarterly once implementation began. Taking advantage of a matching grant from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund, the team hired a former Los Angeles USD English and drama teacher as the visual and performing arts administrator (coordinator) in the fall of 2006. At the same time, the CAT team membership shifted slightly to reflect new leadership needs during the implementation phase. As of 2007, a streamlined nine-member team included the new arts coordinator, a board member, the district grant writer, three arts specialists, the project manager for the city of Compton and two university professors who were acting site directors for *ArtsBridge*, an arts-integrated teaching program employing university students.

During the planning process, the CAT team wrote an arts education policy that was reviewed by the Compton Board of Trustees and approved in June 2005. Key points in the policy are as follows: The arts are part of a comprehensive education; teachers are encouraged to use arts integration as a teaching method; weekly instruction, qualified staff, training, facilities, curriculum resources and community arts partners are necessary for a quality program; and the curriculum should be standards-based and allow students to meet college entry requirements. In addition the policy stated that the superintendent would oversee the development of an arts plan with a budget and procedures to implement board of education policies, and would provide for the ongoing evaluation and development of Compton's arts education program.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

In 2006-2007, the implementation process began with an effort to increase resources, teaching personnel and arts instruction time in the school day. Through the administrative assistance of Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation and donations of musical instruments by the Smith Barney Corporation and the Audrey & Sydney Irmas Charitable Foundation, the Compton CAT team was able to fully equip every secondary school in the district plus a handful of elementary schools with active music programs. Ongoing state legislative block grant money was used to pay the salaries of two middle school specialists, increasing middle schools arts elective offerings and strengthening equity in access to arts instruction.

At the urging of the arts coordinator, the superintendent sent a letter to all school principals with the following statement: "Compton Unified School District, being a member of the Los Angeles County *Arts for All* Organization, *has* committed to providing arts education to all students during the school day. The first phase of implementation is to mandate that every elementary school allot 60 minutes per week in their school schedules

for arts instruction beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year.” The letter informed the principals that textbooks had been selected that aligned with the district’s previously adopted English-language arts curriculum, that curriculum guides would be developed to accompany the books and ongoing professional development would be provided to facilitate their use.

The next project undertaken by the arts coordinator and the CAT team was to purchase arts curricula. Thus, state approved, standards-based music appreciation books were purchased for grades K-12; choral books for grades 9-12; visual arts appreciation for grades K-12, with an art history emphasis for grades 9-12; studio guides for grades 9-12; and theatre arts for grades K-5. The intention of the arts plan was that the arts would be taught by credentialed specialists at the middle and high levels and by classroom teachers at the elementary level. According to the arts coordinator, Compton students have a transient rate of 35 percent primarily within the district, and the CAT team wanted to ensure all students received a similar arts education experience regardless of which district school they attended. It was decided that kindergarten and third grade students would study visual arts, first and fourth graders would study general music and second and fifth graders would study theatre.

Once the books were ordered, the arts coordinator and a team of specialists wrote curriculum guides during the summer of 2007. The purpose of the guides was to help teachers with little or no experience in the arts understand the teacher’s edition of the textbooks and gain confidence in their ability to teach the arts lessons. The guides helped teachers learn appropriate arts vocabulary and provided examples of effective instructional

“The teachers are signing up in droves.....saying they want the training. They’re getting excited and the principals are getting excited because they know we’re not going away.”

pedagogy to be used with each lesson. In addition, the CAT team intended that the guides would serve as substantial instructional aids for the teachers if the arts coordinator or a specialist were not available to assist them with trying new lessons from the texts.

To support the adoption of the new curricula, a professional development program was designed with summer and afterschool workshops in the four art disciplines, relative to the grades at which instruction in each discipline was offered. The first workshops took place during the summer of 2006. In the second year (2007), 120 teachers are expected to participate. School principals reportedly expressed their enthusiasm over the teachers’ strong response, realizing the push for more arts education through the *Arts for All* initiative appeared to be sustained, unlike previous efforts to reestablish arts education. A full-time staff teacher with a background in music was hired in January 2008 to help with training. She and the arts coordinator have since visited classrooms and modeled theatre instruction as needed.

The CAT team helped district teachers organize new opportunities for students to exhibit or perform their work, such as a Holiday Showcase in December 2007 that attracted 900

parents and students. For the past two years the CAT team also organized a Community Arts Day in June in which students from all grades—including the exceptional adults school—participated in an art exhibition or performance. This event attracted 1800 visitors in 2007. The arts coordinator also forwarded announcements of student competitions and festivals to the secondary arts specialists so they could provide their students with more opportunities to demonstrate their skills and achievements in the arts.

In 2008-2009, the CAT team plans to continue providing professional development for elementary teachers, while beginning to address instructional gaps at the middle school level. In addition, the arts coordinator intends to organize a cadre of K-12 educators who are interested in being trained as lead teachers in visual arts and music integration to assist other teachers with fewer arts education skills. At the high school level, an animation program piloted this year will be extended to the other high schools and a dance class will be offered at Centennial High School.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

Perhaps the strongest arts education asset that Compton USD has is its proactive, visionary arts coordinator. As a district-level administrator, she has worked to implement the plan by successfully advocating for and sustaining the support of the superintendent, the arts specialists, parents and community donors. Other mechanisms that support implementation are listed below along with some of the challenges being confronted:

Mechanisms for Change

- *Instrument donations.* Large, private donations enabled the purchase of a sufficient number of musical instruments to provide music instruction at elementary schools with music programs, at every secondary school, and to have a band at each high school.
- *District level support.* District superintendent(s) and the board of trustees have been strong supporters for the arts and spearheaded the effort to start an education foundation for arts education and join the *Arts for All* initiative.
- *Parent support.* Parents have shown their support by attending district-wide arts programs in record numbers.
- *Community partnerships.* The arts coordinator has been able to attract and secure corporate underwriters to fund aspects of the arts plan.
- *Arts plan as leverage.* The arts plan has been used to leverage policy changes such as mandated instructional time and to attract grants and donations.
- *A vision of social change.* Both district staff and its external arts partners perceive restoring the arts to Compton schools as part of a larger process of creating constructive social change in the community.

Challenges of Change

- *Principal support.* Compton principals are primarily focused on meeting academic requirements of the No Child Left Behind law and are not always receptive to making time for arts instruction or excusing staff for planning meetings during the school day.
- *Arts are not taken seriously.* The CAT team continues to confront a perception held by some administrators and teachers that the purpose of the arts education program is primarily to provide entertainment at district-sponsored events or to provide signage for school hallways.
- *Insufficient funding.* While the district has been successful in attracting funds to purchase curriculum and initiate training for teachers, further implementation of the arts plan is reliant on developing sources of funding to supplement the district allocations.
- *Assigned course enrollment.* Historically, students in transition between schools or who need elective credits have been placed in arts classes whether they have an interest in the subject taught or not, which negatively impacts the instructional environment.

OUTCOMES

Compton's most notable outcomes have been 1) the purchase and distribution of curriculum materials, supplies and musical instruments needed to provide systemic instruction in the arts and 2) the creation and initiation of a professional development plan. However, progress has been made in all areas of the district plan. With a year to go, the arts coordinator projects the district will complete 80 percent of the 5-year objectives in the district arts plan.

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. The district purchased K-12 textbooks in visual arts and music plus theatre texts for grades K-5. The lessons in the books align with previously adopted language arts curricula to facilitate integrated instruction, particularly at the elementary level. The CAT team also assigned a committee to write curriculum guides to accompany the text—to help teachers translate the contents into instructional practice.

Pedagogy. At the secondary level, credentialed specialists teach all arts courses. Integrated instruction is not a priority at the secondary level, though the CAT team plans to pursue this direction as time and funding permit. Elective courses available at all secondary schools include visual arts, instrumental band and choir. They will extend to include animation courses in 2008-2009. Dance instruction will be available at one site in the fall, as continues to be the case with theatre instruction.

At the elementary level, teachers are mandated to provide at least one hour of arts instruction each week. During the K-5 years, students will have access to two years of

visual arts instruction, two year each of music and theatre on a rotating schedule, regardless of what district school they attend. Teachers may choose to use integration or teach the arts as discrete subjects.

Few of Compton schools have hosted afterschool programming in the arts in recent years. During 2007-2008, however, the district paid for an afterschool program called *Math in a Basket* at 23 of the 24 elementary sites. The program was provided by Dramatic Results, a local arts and cultural provider, and introduced students to spatial and geometric math concepts through basket weaving. This program is also being offered during the school day in 2008-2009 as part of a research study at two schools. In addition, the Young Musician's Foundation now provides afterschool music instruction at eight elementary schools.

“—We’ve learned to fish ourselves, so we’ll be fed for the rest of our life. That was the goal with the whole sustainability and capacity building [effort].”

Student Assessment. Lessons in the adopted textbooks include suggestions for student assessment and have been discussed during professional development workshops. The practice of arts assessment has not been documented yet, though teachers are expected to assess learning in the arts as they would in other subject areas. The arts coordinator meets regularly with state officials and other professional organizations to stay abreast of arts assessment policies and practices.

Professional Development. The CAT team has designed a comprehensive plan for professional development including summer institutes and workshops during the school year. At the workshops the teachers have been oriented to the new curriculum materials and have practiced teaching art lessons. They have access to ongoing training opportunities in at least one art discipline per grade. An immediate plan is to train a cadre of lead teachers with a background or credential in an art discipline to provide support for other teacher. Principals were scheduled to receive an orientation to supervising arts instruction during the summer of 2008, on a voluntary basis.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. A district-level arts administrator (arts coordinator) was hired in 2006. As an administrator, she has had direct access to other district leaders and has used her authority to gain the approval needed to enact the various steps in the plan. Currently, the coordinator is also the chairwoman of the Compton Education Foundation, providing direction and leadership in fundraising efforts. In 2009, the coordinator will assume expanded duties including overseeing advanced instructional programs such as Gifted and Talented Education, which is expected to impact her ability to focus on the arts education plan. In 2008 a teacher was prompted to work in the professional development center assisting the arts coordinator with training classroom teachers.

“You have to learn how to be an advocate for what you’re doing..... We are ambassadors for our arts.”

Personnel. With the hiring of four music specialists at the middle school level and the transfer of one specialist to the high school level, every secondary school now offers music and choral instruction. In addition, all three high schools now have marching bands. According to the arts coordinator, the district is committed to funding these positions during times of budget cuts.

Facilities and Equipment. At the secondary level, all buildings have multi-purpose rooms or gyms with stages and classrooms designed for visual arts and music instruction. Compton High School has a 1400-seat performance hall and Centennial High will complete construction of a space for

dance classes in the fall of 2008—with a wood floor, mirrors and ballet barres. The elementary schools also have multi-purpose rooms with a stage but most arts instruction takes place in classrooms. Supplies, equipment and musical instruments were purchased or received through significant donations. They were distributed according to the needs of each school, but with an emphasis on improving equitable access across the district whenever feasible.

Partnerships and Collaborations. Compton’s main goal of establishing partners is to raise the funds and instructional resources necessary to continue implementing the plan. The CAT team has benefited by attracting the interest of private donors as well. Some of Compton’s recent instructional partners and sources of support include Target Corporation, Smith Barney Corporation, Wells Fargo Bank, the Audrey & Sydney Irmas Charitable Foundation, Mr. Holland’s Opus, Dramatic Results, The Young Musician Foundation, UCLA *ArtsBridge* Program, and the U.S. Department of Education through its Arts Education Demonstration Grant program.

Sustainability

Policy. During the planning phase an arts education policy was approved by the board of trustees that acknowledges the importance of the arts being taught on a weekly basis by qualified teachers with adequate materials. The arts coordinator has used this board commitment to successfully advocate for weekly mandated instruction, the purchasing of instructions and textbooks and the development of a large-scale professional development program.

Funding. Funding for Compton’s arts education plan has been provided through the district’s general budget for personnel salaries; state legislative block grants for curriculum materials and the hiring of music specialists; Legislative Proposition 49, which funded afterschool visual arts programs; as well as external grants and donations for the purchase of musical instruments and direct instruction programs. District administrators and trustees established the Compton Education Foundation in 2005 to raise funds to sustain arts education instruction in the district. It has held fundraisers and attracted significant private donations with hopes to eventually create an endowment.

Evaluation. When Compton joined the *Arts for All* initiative, an inventory of facilities, equipment and instructional supplies was taken to inform strategic planning. Additionally, the CAT team collects exit surveys after every professional development workshop and polls teachers annually to stay current as to their training needs.

Communication and Advocacy. The arts coordinator meets with district leaders on a regular basis and uses research in the field and the district's affiliation with *Arts for All* to leverage support for implementation of the arts plan. She has used her new skills as a member of the district technology team to show classroom teachers how to create podcasts and share ideas and information. The arts coordinator hopes to create a visual and performing arts website where teachers can download information about arts education-related opportunities and events around the district—both for students and teachers. The district-wide arts events have functioned as advocacy efforts, engendering parent and community support. In one instance the district earned the praise of California Congresswoman Linda Sanchez who attended a Foundation fundraiser and student performance and afterwards sent a letter to prominent members of the school community. The arts coordinator has also advocated for Compton by speaking at arts education meetings in the region and has been interviewed for *The Wave*, a local newspaper, and in a widely read academic journal, *Education Weekly*.

District Leadership. The decision to join *Arts for All* was spearheaded by the associate superintendent of curriculum and public instruction and two trustees who had long advocated for the restoring of arts education to schools. All three participated in the strategic planning process and have continued to support efforts to implement the district arts plan. It bears repeating that a former superintendent mandated weekly arts instruction in 2007. Compton's newly hired superintendent is committed to ensuring all students are aware of the college entrance requirements in the arts and that students cultivate personal responsibility in meeting those requirements before they graduate.

INCREASED ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

Considerable progress has been made in restoring sequential arts instruction to all Compton schools, although gaps remain, particularly at middle school level. Now in *Arts for All's* fourth year, students are already benefiting in tangible ways.

Compton's primary focus on increasing access has been at the elementary level. As of 2007, all K-5 students receive at least 60 minutes of weekly instruction in an art discipline, taught by their teachers. Students who stay in the Compton District throughout their elementary years will now receive two years each of music, visual arts and theatre instruction. Dance is not yet offered at this level except in cases where teachers have the skills, time and motivation to teach it. State-approved textbooks were provided in visual arts, music and theatre to help ensure standards-based instruction. While the lessons in the texts are linked to the language arts curriculum, integration is less of a priority than teaching the basic skills in each art discipline. The district is primarily aimed at keeping arts instruction within the

school day but it did apply for state funding to pay for the costs of a two-year afterschool visual arts program for 23 or 24 schools.

Access to arts instruction at the secondary level has seen improvement as well. With the hiring of additional specialists, music electives have increased at all schools. Two years ago there was one full band at Dominguez High School and a partial program at Compton High. With the transfer of a music specialist from the middle school level and the purchase of new instruments and uniforms, there are now marching bands at each of the three high schools as well as choir sections. Based on a student interest survey, music specialists are also to receive training in mariachi instruction at all secondary sites—expanding on existing programs at three schools. However, middle students receiving extra academic assistance may not be eligible to sign up for the music electives, simply because there are not enough periods in the school day and afterschool programs are not encouraged. An advanced visual arts class is now available at one high school and an animation program piloted at Compton is being extended to the other high schools in 2008-2009. Centennial High will offer a dance elective as well, in the newly remodeled dance space.

Students have also benefited from new opportunities to display or perform in the arts. District-wide exhibitions and performance events involved all district schools, including a school for adult learners. The school bands have marched during sports events and in civic parades. Visual arts students are now entering their artwork in local, state and national competitions and have won a number of awards. Secondary arts specialists reported increased invitations for their students to compete or perform, which they partly attribute to the advocacy efforts stemming from the *Arts for All* initiative.

Due to the progress made implementing the district arts plan, enthusiasm for arts education is reportedly beginning to snowball among staff and students. If the district can rely on its administrative advocates and community partnerships to raise the funding necessary to hire specialists in dance, theater and visual arts at the middle school level, and devise a way to teach dance basics at the elementary level, the realization of the vision for a comprehensive, standards-based arts program is within reach.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The following areas present possibilities for technical assistance from *Arts for All* staff:

- Ideas for funding sources
- Provide guidance in effective arts education website design and posting student work, whether written, in image, or a video format
- Set up on-line meetings and create information podcasts on pertinent topics
- Evaluation guidance
- Professional development guidance
- Student assessment guidance
- Research reports and articles that can be shared with Principals at administrative council meetings