

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arts for All is a strategic planning initiative adopted in 2002 by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to restore arts education—in dance, music, theatre and visual arts—to all 81 school districts in Los Angeles County, including the Los Angeles County Office of Education classrooms. To date, 34 districts have become *Arts for All* districts. Managed by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission staff and more than 100 community partners, the initiative is a national model for arts education reform.

The following report contains findings from case studies of the first 11 districts to join the initiative, six in 2003-2004 and five in 2004-2005. These initial districts, referred to as the Vanguard Districts, developed strategic plans to guide efforts to offer sequential, standards-based arts instruction for all students. The case studies were written in 2008 to document the progress made and the issues confronted by each district during the early stages of planning and implementing their arts plans. A second purpose was to measure preliminary effects on the level of student access to arts instruction. The results of the research are intended for use in identifying meaningful ways for Arts Commission staff and its partners to provide technical assistance as the *Arts for All* initiative advances.

Key findings from the case studies are as follows:

- Eighty-two percent of Vanguard Districts reported they joined the *Arts for All* initiative to replace a patchwork approach to arts education with sequential instruction. Approximately half were also motivated by the opportunity to improve equitable access for all students.
- Within two years, all Vanguard districts developed and secured school board approval on a comprehensive multi-year district arts plan. In addition, they each wrote an arts education policy that committed their district to supporting the objectives of the arts plan.
- All district arts plans reflected basic components of a quality arts plan. These included standard-based curriculum, pedagogy, student assessment, professional development, program administration, arts personnel, facilities & equipment, partnerships & collaboration, an arts education policy, funding, evaluation, communication and district leadership. Districts recommended that internal accountability be added to the list.
- During the first phase of implementing their district arts plan, the Community Art Teams (CAT) focused on hiring personnel, acquiring materials and equipment, aligning curriculum, writing lesson plans and organizing staff development. These areas reflected the spending priorities of available funding as much as the action items in the plans.

- Factors that drove the implementation of the plan included state and district policies that supported sequential instruction and proactive stakeholders—including school board and district administrators, parents and civic-minded community partners.
- All the Vanguard Districts had either hired or assigned someone to coordinate the arts education reform effort—a factor that was considered critical to achieving their goals. In general, districts with full-time coordinators in administrative positions were able to progress the furthest.
- Half the Vanguard Districts adopted standards-based sequential curricula in music and visual arts within three years of initiating implementation. Fewer than 20 percent have added dance or theatre.
- At the secondary level, credentialed arts instructors or teachers with an art endorsement teach all arts courses across the districts. At the elementary level, generalist teachers are designated as the primary instructor for all four art disciplines in 73 percent of the districts.
- Districts have grown more discriminating in their use of community arts providers, weighing the cost against other objectives in the arts plan. Providers were increasingly hired to plan with and model instruction for teachers along with providing direct instruction for students.
- With the exception of the Los Angeles County of Education educational divisions, each Vanguard District has established an education foundation to supplement the district arts budget.
- Those districts with established community partnerships prior to joining *Arts for All* were able to expand those relationships through the planning process. Districts that had not developed strong partnerships beforehand evidenced little change in their ability to do so since, with the exception of Compton Unified School District, which has benefited from sizeable unsolicited private and corporate donations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for furthering the *Arts for All* initiative are based on meeting the needs of the Vanguard Districts as they continue adopting sequential arts curricula in the four art disciplines. The suggestions were gathered during CAT interviews or are based on trends that emerged during data analysis. In the area of capacity building, programmatic suggestions: 1) offering leadership academies for district and school administrators, 2) providing policy updates and other forms of supportive research to community advocacy teams, 3) coaching arts coordinators in management skills such as fundraising, advocacy,

program administration and evaluation as well as guiding effective staff development programs, and 4) providing a mentor during a newly hired arts coordinator's first year of implementing a district arts plan.

Recommendations for assisting the districts with financial needs include helping them develop a concrete plan for funding the rest of their implementation objectives—including preparing for future facility needs as more students gain access to arts instruction. In addition, the Arts Commission might consider developing a grant program to provide funding for operational expenses that create bottlenecks in the implementation process—such as contracting for temporary clerical assistance, website design, program evaluation, documentation and creating public relationship materials. Another possible grant program could provide matching funds for districts to use for professional development partnerships with qualifying community arts providers.

Two recommendations for continued research include conducting a study of emerging models for successfully adopting sequential curricula in all four art disciplines and conducting a school-level survey to better estimate the level of arts instruction students are actually receiving.