

Los Angeles County Office of Education School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 10,109

67 alternative education sites (6 PAU¹⁴ + 2 specialized high schools)

19 juvenile court and community schools (10 PAU)

23 special education sites (11 PAU)

DISTRICT CONTEXT

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) provides support and services for more than 100 alternative education sites, juvenile court and community schools, and special education programs across the county. These sites are organized in 27 Principal Administrative Units (PAU), which comprise the LACOE classrooms. Prior to the *Arts for All* initiative, arts instruction in the three divisions was heavily reliant on the uneven skills of classroom teachers and scattered teaching artist residencies. This patchwork approach meant some students had little, if any access to a standards-based education in the arts. LACOE joined *Arts for All* in 2004 to improve the status of arts education for all of its schools dedicated to serving students who are at-risk or have special needs.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

With the assistance of an *Arts for All* coach, LACOE established a Community Art Team (CAT) and created a multi-year plan based on essential elements of a quality arts program. These included standards-based curriculum, instruction and methodology, student assessment, professional development, program administration and personnel, partnerships and collaboration, funding, resources and facilities, and program evaluation. The plan identified three initial areas for strategic action: arts education policy, professional development and budget. As part of the planning work, the committee prepared a board of education policy for arts education, which was adopted in August 2004. The policy specifically stated, "Arts education, with its four domains dance, music, theatre and visual arts is part of the core academic curriculum. All students shall have equal access to this curriculum." It also stated that arts education is to be comprehensive, sequential, standards-based, assessment driven and taught by qualified and /or credentialed teachers. Finally, it acknowledged the LACOE's support of the need to fund quality materials and facilities, teacher training and an arts coordinator.

During the 2005-2006 school year an arts coordinator was hired and planning continued in the areas of curriculum and instruction. After reviewing the state art standards, the CAT team identified the most essential, or "power" standards they wanted teachers to cover when teaching the four art disciplines. Next, a subcommittee of teachers, leaders from The California Arts Project (TCAP) and LACOE administrators designed a five-year professional development program. The goal was to train both non-arts classroom teachers

¹⁴ Principal Administrative Units

and arts specialists to teach the California arts content standards, and to develop integrated instructional units relevant to the needs of their special population students. Another professional development goal was to build the capacity of select lead teachers to provide ongoing support for arts education within each LACOE school.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

During the summer of 2006, 18 lead teachers—including arts specialists and general teachers—attended a TCAP professional development institute with a focus on teaching standards-based arts education. This was repeated in 2007. During the school year, community artists were also hired for residencies at several sites as funding and teacher interest allowed.

In early 2007, a change in staff resulted in a new arts coordinator being hired. This was an administrative post with the official title of Senior Program Specialist. For purposes of clarity and consistency, we will continue to use the term arts coordinator when referring to this position. The arts coordinator currently reports to the director of curriculum, reflecting the current focus of her work. Beyond her duties in the arts, she assists the director in developing curricula in other subject areas so must balance the two workloads. The arts coordinator holds a doctorate degree and has had prior experience as a K-8 school music specialist, district music mentor and district arts coordinator. Her stated priority has been to bring quality, integrated arts instruction to the students in all three LACOE school divisions.

The arts coordinator was new to LACOE and recognized that if she wanted to motivate the teachers to get interested in arts education, she needed to gain their trust. To do so, she spent months visiting schools and gaining an understanding of the needs of both teachers and students. She discovered that although the district arts plan had the goal of providing access to comprehensive, sequential arts instruction for all students, the model was not adequately sensitive to the realities of the special population of students served.

For example, she found that students who were placed in juvenile court schools and other alternative education schools have a high mobility rate. Particularly in the court system, it is not uncommon for students to be registered for as little as a day or a week, so planning a sequential course of study for them is not possible. In addition, these students are greatly restricted in the types of art materials they have access to due to personal safety concerns. The arts coordinator also realized that the students with special needs, ranging in age from 4 to 22, are not cognitively able to follow a sequential, standards-based course of study. These factors affected her approach to organizing professional development workshops and designing curriculum for the sites.

Initially, the arts coordinator organized professional development workshops in the visual arts for both specialists and classroom teachers. These sessions were held at various regional locations to make it more convenient for teachers to attend. However, they were usually scheduled during the school day and it proved difficult for teachers to attend due to a lack

of available qualified substitute teachers and other instructional priorities. In one instance, when 1,000 teachers were notified of a TCAP training institute, just eight responded.

Due to these circumstances, during the 2007-2008 school year the arts coordinator shifted her focus to fulfilling individual site requests. This primarily involved modeling effective classroom instruction. She also developed guides for instruction to help teachers gain a better understanding of terminology and techniques in the visual arts.

As many teachers were unable to attend trainings and learn to write their own arts lessons as originally planned, the arts coordinator prepared 30 weeks of visual arts lesson packets that secondary teachers could use at the alternative education sites and juvenile court schools. The teachers at these sites were especially interested in using integrated instruction to help students meet graduation requirements for two subject areas while taking one extended course. To address this need, the arts coordinator inserted visual arts standards into required learning guides for other subjects, effectively ensuring they would be taught through integration. For transient students at these schools, she developed one-week intensive courses in visual arts that would fulfill requirements for a week's credit. In addition, she identified visual arts instructional materials that could be used with students from a wide range of ability in all three schooling divisions. These included teacher editions, student textbooks and related supplies. Every PAU bought at least one set of visual arts instructional materials and planned to share across sites.

The one-time state legislative money was made available to schools once they had turned in an expenditure plan to the arts coordinator. However, she had little involvement in the development of the plans, unless schools specifically asked for guidance. Due to a miscommunication in how the funding was to be distributed, less than half the schools turned in an arts plan by the budget deadline in March 2008. The arts coordinator was unsure about the future availability of the unclaimed funds. While provided with occasional expense reports reflecting her work, she was not privy to overall budget figures for arts education and was unaware if additional funds had been raised from other sources prior to her date of employment.

In addition to her work in improving the relevancy of arts curricula and professional development, the arts coordinator worked with a part-time administrative assistant during 2007-2008 to create a quarterly e-mail newsletter for teachers announcing training opportunities, teaching tips in the arts and news of student activities at the various schools. The e-newsletter was attractive and personable in tone and was well received by teachers, who were unaware of arts activities going on in other schools. Due to the state budget crisis, the administrative assistant was transferred to another department in the summer of 2008, jeopardizing the future of the e-newsletter. As the economic downturn also left the arts coordinator vulnerable to job loss, implementation plans for the 2008-2009 school year had not been determined at the time this report was written.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

The following paragraphs contain a brief description of identified mechanisms that have supported the implementation of the district arts plan along with several challenges that have slowed the effort. Two factors were viewed as being central to increasing student access to quality arts instruction: educational policies that pressured teachers to learn about and offer arts instruction and the pro-active, engaging personality of the arts coordinator who was primarily responsible for implementation. The obstacles were primarily financial and bureaucratic in nature.

Mechanisms for Change

- *College entrance requirements.* As the secondary teachers wanted their students to meet all graduation requirements and also be eligible for college, they were grateful for the arts coordinator's assistance in developing integrated lesson plans and modeling effective arts instruction.
- *A simplified list of state arts standards.* An abbreviated list of key visual arts content standards was perceived to be less daunting by teachers and was more easily displayed on posters in LACOE classrooms as a silent reminder of the need to teach them.
- *Hands-on arts coordinator.* As a former teacher, the coordinator had an extensive background in teaching and lesson preparation. By providing training sessions, lesson plans, instructional modeling and continuous communication, she gave teachers the support they needed to teach standards-based visual arts more often.
- *Coordinator as administrator.* Since the arts coordinator had an administrative position, she enjoyed greater access to and cooperation with principals and teachers. She was also able to select curriculum materials and approve school arts expenditures, which expedited implementation in these areas.
- *Revised approach to curriculum design.* Understanding that a rigid approach to sequential instruction would not work with these special student populations, the customization of lesson plans for the various divisions was fundamental to their increased use.
- *Attractive and personable e-newsletter.* Sent on a quarterly basis, the appearance and tone of the visual arts e-newsletter gained the interest of teachers and became a catalyst for engagement and sharing.

Challenges of Change

- *Experienced arts leadership.* Each special schooling division would benefit from having its own arts leader, experienced in working with the particular needs of the students within, such as students with disabilities or severe behavioral issues.
- *Gaining teacher cooperation.* Since the arts coordinator was new to the district, she felt it was necessary to spend an entire year visiting sites to become familiar with their issues around arts education and win the trust and cooperation of teachers.

- *Teacher participation.* Efforts to stage large scale training workshops resulted in poor attendance due to other instructional priorities and the inability of teachers to leave their classes during the day.
- *Resource restrictions.* Due to safety measures, students were greatly restricted in the type of arts activities they were permitted to explore, hence the singular focus on visual arts at present.
- *Loss of administrative assistant.* The transfer of the arts administrative assistant left the coordinator as the sole arts education resource for over 100 sites.
- *Internal policies.* Due to LACOE hierarchy rules, the arts coordinator was not privy to the amount of funding earmarked for arts education, which made it difficult to plan ahead. Technically, she could only propose ideas and wait on approval.
- *Excessive paperwork.* The amount of time spent completing and filing application forms for all three schooling divisions inhibited the arts coordinator from taking advantage of available grants.

OUTCOMES

The *Arts for All* initiative and the implementation of the district arts plan have created a new level of awareness and excitement about arts education in the three LACOE school divisions. In great part, this was due to the hands-on efforts of the arts coordinator to provide relevant and user-friendly instructional resources and training sessions for teachers. While the number of teachers whose instructional practice has changed has not yet been tracked, the arts coordinator reported that the teachers she worked with over the past 18 months have more materials at hand and have expressed more confidence in their ability to offer standards-based instruction. Other outcomes specific to program quality and equitable access are as follows:

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. The focus of the district arts plan is currently on increasing quality visual arts instruction in the three divisions, primarily at the secondary level. All textbooks and lesson plans adopted since the district joined *Arts for All* in 2004 are aligned with California Visual Arts Content Standards. Efforts to integrate visual arts instruction with other subject areas are based on meeting standards in both areas. While a sequential curriculum is not an immediate goal, it is hoped that as more standards-based learning opportunities are provided to students at all grade levels, a relevant continuum of instruction that is sensitive to the learning abilities of LACOE students will emerge. Curricula for dance, music and theatre have been tabled for the immediate future.

Pedagogy. In terms of instructional approach, visual art is taught as a discrete topic and also integrated with other areas of the curriculum. As more teachers attend professional development workshops, watch the arts coordinator model effective instruction and use available standards-based instructional packets and lessons, the likelihood that students will

receive a more equitable and quality education in the arts will increase. Community-based teaching artists trained in the state standards are also used to model instruction and provide rigorous learning experiences for students during grant-funded residencies.

Student Assessment. Documenting and assessing student work has not been a priority to date, as teachers are still getting accustomed to offering visual arts instruction. However, assessment tools are being considered for implementation in the 2009-2010 school year.

Professional Development. One of the unique features of the 2004 LACOE arts plan was a five-year professional development model designed to provide standards-based training for arts specialists and classroom teachers. The plan called for an initial focus on visual arts adoption, followed by music, then dance or theatre. While the plan was admirable in its objectives to strengthen both the quality and level of access to instruction, it did not account for the challenges teachers faced in being able to attend training sessions nor the safety restrictions on student access to specific kinds of arts equipment and learning opportunities. Once these factors were identified, steps were taken by school division administrators to release teachers and expand learning opportunities for students whenever possible. The arts coordinator currently designs professional development workshops with input from LACOE visual arts specialists. The workshops are taught either by the arts coordinator (in the case of standards, curriculum, or early childhood training) or by locally contracted teaching artists.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. LACOE hired a new arts coordinator in mid 2006-2007. With experience in music education, a doctorate in education, credentials as an administrator and a warm and caring personality, she was able to gain the trust and cooperation of principals and teachers in implementing the district arts plan. This ability to work efficiently with the administrative team that provides oversight for the three school divisions helped maintain her position in the face of budget reductions. An administrative assistant was added in 2007-2008 to help with paperwork and communication. As was previously mentioned, this position was eliminated when the LACOE general budget was reduced in Spring 2008.

Personnel. Increasing the number of school arts specialists has not been a priority in the district arts plan to date.

Facilities and Equipment. The opportunity to purchase supplies and equipment was made available through the one-time grant from the state legislature. At the writing of this report, less than half the schools had completed the plan of action necessary to gain access to the funds. This was partly due to a miscommunication about the process, and partly due to filing deadlines that put a halt to the process until the fall of 2008. In terms of arts facilities, most sites are not equipped to provide instruction in dance and instrumental music, although one of the juvenile court community schools installed a dance floor with public funds. Instead, most available funding was spent on visual arts teaching materials and professional development.

Partnerships and Collaborations. In the past two years, the arts coordinator has established or maintained effective instructional partnerships with the Music Center of Los Angeles County, Bluepalm, Theatre of Hearts, Angels Gate Cultural Center and Bott Design with additional funding provided through LACOE and through an *Arts for All* Pooled Fund grant. The primary challenge in this area for the arts coordinator is locating teaching artists with the unique skills and sensitivity to work with students with severe behavioral issues and other special needs. Another obstacle is dealing with excessive paperwork caused by having to write separate proposals for each school division when applying to the same funding source.

Sustainability

Policy. LACOE adopted an arts education policy in 2004 recognizing the arts as part of the core academic curriculum. The policy set forth the board of education's commitment to a five-to-seven year budgeted plan, standards-based resources, professional development for arts instructors (specialists and generalists), and an arts program coordinator. While simply written, the policy effectively clarified strategic directions for the CAT team and has provided a framework for implementation over the past two years.

Funding. The district has provided salaries for arts specialists, the arts coordinator and the (temporary) administrative assistant, and has paid for instructional materials. The funding from the state legislature block grant for the arts has covered other costs for arts education. These funds have been allotted according to the student enrollment count at each school. Principals retain full control over the use of these funds, within set parameters. While less than half had turned in plans by the spring cut-off deadline in 2008, the requests for funding typically covered materials, equipment, professional development or teaching artist residencies. Currently, the arts coordinator is investigating an option to charge fees for teachers from outside the LACOE divisions who would like to attend district-sponsored professional development sessions in order to generate income to support further implementation.

Evaluation. Informal, observation-based evaluation was undertaken by the arts coordinator in 2007 to gain feedback on the relevance of the district arts plan and accompanying technical assistance efforts. In addition, attendance at professional development sessions has been documented, which will provide a basis for understanding changes in instructional practices over time.

Communication and Advocacy. With more than 100 sites included in the three school divisions, communication has been a challenge. The 2007 launch of an e-newsletter for visual and performing arts announcements, events, and the sharing of ideas has been an effective means for informing sites of available arts resources and of activities underway in the three divisions. The e-newsletter reportedly helped teachers develop a sense of being part of a larger instructional movement in the arts and promoted deeper engagement. External advocacy for arts instruction has been primarily coordinated through another administrative unit within LACOE.

District Leadership. While LACOE administrators oversee the art education budget and approve salaries for arts personnel, it is primarily the work of the arts coordinator to implement the district arts plan, given available resources and circumstances. The school division administrators and principals have been responsive and collaborative in supporting her efforts to provide training and curriculum materials at the classroom level. In May 2008, the arts coordinator reported she has gained more authority and flexibility as she has become accustomed to working in the system and has earned the trust of her colleagues.

CHANGES IN EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

Improving the level of student access to quality arts instruction has been the clear goal of the district arts plan and the focus of the arts coordinator's work since January 2007. Based primarily on the combination of providing professional development and new lesson materials, the arts coordinator reported students in all three school divisions received more hours of instruction in the visual arts, however this has not yet been documented. Her efforts in modeling instructional techniques were thought to have also assisted teachers in providing more rigorous, integrated instruction to a wider range of students.

The new and revised curriculum packets, along with the desire to help students meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements in the arts, also meant more teachers were offering arts instruction at both the alternative high schools and juvenile court school sites. These changes met the criteria for improved access for special population students as well, as all LACOE District students fall under this designation. In addition, available funding allowed for some students with special needs to take field trips to art venues for the first time.

Beyond advances due to improved curriculum and standards-based teacher training, there was also an increase in community artist residencies during 2007-2008. Six teaching artists worked at both the special education and juvenile school sites in an effort to increase student exposure to quality arts instruction. The residencies were funded through the legislative arts block grant and two matching grants from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund.

Since the arts coordinator's involvement with schools is currently based on individual site requests, increasing the equity of student access to quality arts instruction across the three LACOE divisions is not a strong focus at this stage of implementation. However, the requests from schools are increasing in number, indicating that the desire to offer arts instruction is growing. In addition, the arts coordinator's efforts to serve these special populations is addressing the discrepancy between the level of arts instruction offered by traditional K-12 schools in the region and the level offered at LACOE schools.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The arts coordinator identified five areas where continued guidance from *Arts for All* would be particularly useful:

- Creating professional development guidelines
- Obtaining clerical assistance, particularly with Internet applications
- Permitting the use of the *Arts for All* logo on district letterhead would add more clout to requests for cooperation from administrators, teachers, or external agencies
- Offering grant opportunities that do not require matching funds
- Providing ongoing support for the arts coordinator from a knowledgeable implementation coach.