

# Canvass the Community to Fund Art and Music Instruction

A new Rand Education study called "[Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination](#) [1]" offers some concrete pathways for public school districts to maintain arts classes in these days of financial drought.

Released in June 2008, the study advises school districts to collaborate with a variety of community arts and cultural organizations as a means of pursuing fundraising for arts education in their city, county, or region.

The study was commissioned by the [Wallace Foundation](#) [2] and conducted by researchers at Rand Education, a division of the Rand Corporation, headquartered in Santa Monica, California.

"We believe that every child -- and our broader society -- benefits from high-quality arts learning and that arts education deserves a secure place in our communities," notes Edward Pauly, director of research and evaluation at the Wallace Foundation. "Arts learning can enhance a child's ability to 'learn how to learn'; it can develop skills of persistence and teamwork; it can enhance the school experience for students, sustaining their interest and enthusiasm for learning; and it can nurture empathy and foster imagination through experiences that the arts uniquely provide."

The authors studied [collaborative arts-education efforts in six urban communities](#) [3] -- Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York City, and northern California's Alameda County -- reporting that each has experienced varying degrees of progress in boosting funding and expanding arts learning for children in and outside of public schools.

Even in the best of times, funding for arts education can fall short, according to Catherine Augustine, a researcher based in Rand's Pittsburgh office and one of the study's three authors. But as many districts face severe budget cuts in 2009, she says, now, more than ever, schools "can't expect new money for the arts. Districts are likely to continue to struggle."

Budgetary woes are not the only problem arts supporters face. Schools, Augustine says, are "directly affected by mandates from their districts and states." Often, she adds, those mandates "require them to focus on English, language arts, and math, and in some states science." Although Augustine is supportive of all fields of study, she points out that this emphasis means that

people trying to increase the time schools devote to arts education "face an uphill battle."

## Recipe for Success

On a positive note, Rand Education researcher Catherine Augustine says that there are a number of lessons from communities that have created successful, if fledgling, collaborative approaches to boosting arts education that can be replicated nationwide:

- **Stable, committed leadership is crucial to thriving arts programs,** as is appointing leaders the communities consider "legitimate." Rand researchers note that the leaders do not need to come from within a school district and, in fact, Augustine says that so far three of the most advanced coalition leaders are located outside their school districts. They are affiliated with county arts organizations, a county office of education, and a nongovernment community organization. However, she adds, all have a background in arts education or a deep knowledge of the arts, are able fundraisers, and are "fence menders able to build communication among disparate groups."
- **Fundraising is a critical component of these collaborations.** According to Augustine, successful communities were able to attract funding from national philanthropies such as the Ford and Wallace foundations. "They put time and energy into fundraising and then directed the monies to arts education, both in terms of actual programs and coordination work," she says.
- **Auditing the extent of and access to a community's arts education,** particularly at the beginning of the process, is a key to determining whether all students have access. She notes that the results of these audits -- which all the communities in the study conducted -- have proven to be "a powerful message when attempting to raise money." Audits also create a baseline of data to both develop strategies and push for improvements.
- **Arts advocates need to make the case.** Preferably, these are people in the district who have the authority to sit at the table when budgets are discussed. In Chicago, for example, the foundation community has agreed to provide half the funding through 2011 for an arts chief, who is on a level commensurate with the district's math and literacy chiefs.