

Rural Arts Education: A Community Approach to Addressing Government Policy and  
Partnerships in Illinois Rural Schools

by

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Rural Arts Education: A Community Approach to Addressing Government Policy and Partnerships in Illinois Rural Schools

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## Education

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**Master's of Arts Management**, December 2009

University of Oregon

Major: Performing Arts Administration

**Bachelor's of Music**, May 2005

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Major: Music Education

## Certification

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**Nonprofit Management**, earned through the University of Oregon

Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management, December 2009

**Illinois Music Education**, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve, May 2005

## Administrative Experience

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**Tennessee Arts Commission**

*Arts Education Special Projects Coordinator* – Manages arts education programs. Program responsibilities include: statewide Poetry Out Loud Recitation Contest, Artist-in-Residence program, and the Teaching Artist Roster. Designs and facilitates professional development workshops for teaching artists and teachers. Currently designing a new program which combines arts education and service learning standards through the national Learn and Serve model. Other duties include: website updates, Value Plus teacher evaluation, and support for constituents. July 2009-present.

**University of Oregon Arts and Administration Department**

*Graduate Administrative Assistant* – Responsible for logistics of 10 visiting scholars, design of all marketing materials for events, updates to the Department website, managing 5 listservs. September 2008-June 2009.

**Whatcom Symphony Orchestra**

*Education Intern* – Created community engagement lesson plans aligned with the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements, designed marketing materials for education programs, coordinated Musicians in the Schools concerts with school districts in Whatcom County in Bellingham, WA. August-September, 2008.

### **Willamette Valley Music Festival**

*UO Cultural Forum Coordinator* – Responsible for logistics of 20+ concerts and arts events at the Cuthbert Amphitheater in Eugene, OR. January-June 2008.

### **Southern Illinois University School of Music**

*Program Supervisor* – Coordinated programs for 31 faculty and 200+ students. Responsible for proofing, designing, and producing 100+ programs annually. 2002-2004.

*Music Festival Coordinator* – Preparation and registration for 300+ summer camp applicants. 2002-2004.

### **Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra**

*Executive Assistant to the Director*. 2004-2005.

*Manager* – Served as liaison with guest artists. Responsible for performance and rehearsal logistics. 2002-2004.

*Librarian* – Organization and distribution of music selections for 75 member orchestra. Maintained orchestra library of 1000 works. 2000-2002.

### **Southern Illinois Music Festival**

*Chief of Staff* – Responsible for logistics of 40+ concerts in 3 weeks. Summer 2005.

*Venue Coordinator* – Responsible for logistics of concerts at various venues in 3 weeks. Summers 2007, 2008.

## **Teaching Experience**

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**Music Director** at Jonesboro Elementary School, Jonesboro, IL. Taught general music to kindergarten through fifth grades. Conducted beginning and jr. high bands and chorus. Prepared two school revues annually. Taught 300+ students. August 2005-June 2007.

**Oboe Teacher** in Carbondale, IL community. Taught private oboe lessons for approximately 10 students as part of the Southern Illinois University Band Camps and through private contacts. 2001-2004.

## **Performance Experience**

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**Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra** – Principal Oboe, 2000-2004. Concert highlights: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, Corky Siegel's blues orchestra, HMS Pinafore, La Rondine, Cabaret: pit orchestras.

**Southern Illinois Wind Ensemble** – Principal Oboe, 2000-2004. Performed under guest conductor David Holsinger. On tour in England, performed with the Russian Military Band, made appearances at Neller Hall in London, Stratford-Upon-Avon, and Birmingham.

**Southern Illinois Double Reed Chamber Group/ Woodwind Quintet** – Oboe, 2000-2004. Performed public outreach concerts for schools, weddings, graduation ceremonies, and collegiate departments.

## Rural Arts Education: A Community Approach to Addressing Governmental Policies and Partnerships in Illinois Rural Schools

**Abstract:** This research explores the quality of arts programs in public education as influenced by government policies, arts partnerships, and community support in rural schools. Discrepancies in the quality of arts programs are associated with governmental funding and education policy and access to arts partnerships outside of schools. The guidelines for the distribution of educational funds at the national, state, and local levels emphasize primary allocation at the local level, resulting in differing economic capabilities of schools. Similarly, decisions regarding the implementation of arts programs are appointed to local jurisdiction through education policy. Access to arts partnerships outside of schools is an additional component in affecting arts programs. Through extensive literature review, this capstone addresses the need for specific strategies for rural communities to strengthen the quality of arts programs in K-12 schools.

**Keywords:** tax-based funding, arts funding distribution, education policy, arts partnerships, No Child Left Behind, National Standards for Arts Education, arts standards assessment, asset-based organizing, rural arts education, Illinois Creates, arts-in-education

## Rural Arts Education: A Community Approach to Addressing Government Policy and Partnerships in Illinois Rural Schools

A study commissioned by Illinois Creates, a statewide coalition of partners in education formed by the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation in 2004, found that “students in rural areas tend to receive the least amount of arts education, [and] arts education levels are lower in rural districts regardless of socioeconomic indicators, level of social problems or dominant race of students” (Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005, p. 2). Vast discrepancies exist in the quality of arts programs in public education in the State of Illinois (2005). The range of arts opportunities available for certain school districts is in contrast to opportunities in other school districts. The varying qualities of arts programs are directly linked to the location of school districts within the state. Government policies and access to arts partnerships outside of the schools are contributing factors to the quality of arts education programs in schools in rural regions.

As a result of the research findings in 2005, the Illinois Arts Alliance developed *Committing to Quality in Education: Arts at the Core*, a guidebook to planning for high quality arts programs for schools. The guidebook is comprehensive in offering methods to address the issues associated with arts education; however, the planning tools are designed to accommodate wide-ranging circumstances in all grade levels across the state. The problem is that schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas have different situations relating to government policy as well as access to arts partnerships in communities.

### **Purpose Statement**

Little research exists pertaining to the quality of arts programs in public education in rural regions. There is a need for an in-depth exploration of the unique components affecting rural school districts in providing arts-in-education programs, and how rural school districts can utilize



effective strategies to create successful arts programs. Furthermore, there is a call for community participation in arts education in schools. In this paper I will synthesize literature from government policy, arts education partnerships, rural community, and asset-based organizing strategies for the purpose of informing arts education in public schools in rural areas. Based on this synthesis, I will suggest specific strategies for key partners in communities to strengthen arts education in rural public schools.

## **Introduction**

Access to high-quality arts programs varies tremendously throughout school districts in the state of Illinois (Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005). Discrepancies in the knowledge of, appreciation for, and participation in the arts is dependent upon several contributing factors including: governmental funding policy (Carey & Roza, 2008; Loeb & Socias, 2004; U. S. Department of Education, 2005), governmental education policy (Education Week Press, 2009; Arts Education Policy, 2005; Wester, 2003), and access to arts partnerships in communities (Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Rand Foundation, 2004; Remer, 1996). As a result of the policy and partnership factors, some students in public education receive fewer opportunities for high-quality arts programs in schools. Rural school districts located in the southern region of Illinois are least likely to offer high-quality arts programs in public education (Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005). The following literature review explores the three concept areas of government policy, arts partnerships, and rural community to frame the discrepancies in arts programs in education for rural school districts. Strategies are determined to build programs with limited resources from a position of strength in rural communities through asset-based organizing.

## **Government Policy**

Government policy serves as an overarching determinant of the quality of arts programs in K-12 public education. Funding and education policies are interconnected in affecting public education programs. Governmental funding policy is a plan of action of the government intended to determine decisions in funding for public education based primarily on money raised by the public through taxes, although private sources are often incorporated into public domain (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.b). Governmental education policy is intended to determine decisions in public education defined by compulsory student attendance, certification of teachers, curriculum, and assessment standards. Federal, state, and local levels of government policy contribute to the amount of funding school districts receive as well as the types of education programs implemented in schools. There is an unbalanced distribution of control and responsibility at the local level.

Funding capabilities vary among schools in Illinois, as governmental funding policy currently permits funding spent per student to vary as much as 10 times among school districts (Parenti, 2002). As budgets diminish and priorities vary, “poor, inner-city and rural schools bear a disproportionate share of the losses” (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.). The higher the amount spent per student, the more opportunities the student has. Currently, governmental funding policies determine the allocation of money for education. According to a study by the National Education Association (2003), “local jurisdictions raise 45 percent of the total U.S. funding for K-12 education, and local property taxes alone account for 29 percent of the U.S. total” (p. viii). These high percentages of the reliance on local, tax-based funding result in a wide gap in the amount of money school districts receive. Economic levels differ by regions; therefore, school districts in economically depressed regions generally grapple with adequate resources.

The quality of arts programs in public education is strikingly different among school districts. “A traditional public school is one that students attend by virtue of living in a geographic zone that also forms a tax base for a school district” (Chapman, 2004, p. 6). The tax base serves as a means of qualifying schools into high or low socioeconomic statuses based on the economic health of the regions. As, there is a high dependence on local, tax-based funding, such distribution results in a wide gap in the amount of money allocated by school districts. Because economic levels differ by regions, school districts in less affluent areas often face funding challenges. The “disparity in funding between rich and poor schools is a national disgrace” (Fernandez, 1996, p. 180). The higher the amount spent per student the more opportunities the student has. The allotment directly relates to the quality of arts programs in education. “Issues of [high] socio-economic status and access to a high-quality arts education are clearly linked” (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006, p. 10). Affluent districts not only have a variety of arts programs, but the arts resources far exceed those of less affluent districts. The better the economy is in a region, the better the school systems [and arts programs] are in that region (Parenti, 2002).

Since educational funding occurs primarily at the local level, much of the priorities in education are similarly set locally. “Most states delegate enormous responsibilities to local school districts” (Hatfield, 2007, p. 4). All public schools are required to adapt standards-based methods to achieve National Education Goals for standardized tests; however, the arts are not included in these tests. “No matter how strong the policy for arts education may be at the national or state level, final decisions on what is taught in the school and what is supported through funding, facilities, and staffing are made locally” (Wester, 2003, p. 157). Less affluent districts that lack funding make choices that may sacrifice the arts as a means for implementation

of subjects that are tested. Many districts and schools must make choices that sacrifice the arts as a means for the higher concentration on subjects that are tested including English/language arts, mathematics, and science (Chapman, 2004). “Schools with high numbers of poor children face the twin dangers of low-quality arts education and teaching practices where test preparation and curricular narrowing are more likely to take place in response to the introduction of high-stakes tests” (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006, p. 10).

There is not the same tendency in more affluent districts because “Higher socioeconomic status is, of course, widely associated with higher test scores” therefore, not needing additional time for test preparation (p. 9). While almost all states adapt the nationally established guidelines for arts education, there is a lack of accountability in certain curricular areas. The “guidelines are often not implemented. The action [must] be school district by school district” (Dorf, 2000, p. 104). Essentially, the National Standards for Arts Education were established to “embed the arts in national educational policy [and] to impact state education policy and, subsequently, local education policy” (Wester, 2003, p. 158). Yet, local arts policies are often nonexistent or ignored resulting in no certified arts teachers, resources, or time to meet the arts goals (Dorf, 2000).

Local control can be related to the amount of responsibility indirectly placed on school districts at the local level through means of the United States Constitution. “In the administration of the [Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution], no department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States shall exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the policy determination, personnel, curriculum, or administration or operation of any school” (Hatfield, 2007, p. 4). This transfers power from the national level to the state level, which is inadvertently delegated to the local level. Consequently, because there is generally no oversight in arts procedures at the local level, school districts are able to provide any means of arts education and

on any terms. “The development of arts education programs is a matter of the overall effectiveness of individual arts educators working within the dynamics of their local school districts” (Hatfield, 2007, p. 5). While some children receive arts exposure, these experiences can be episodic and may vary depending upon the teachers (Kaiser, 2008). However, by working on their own terms, school districts may or may not meet the National Standards for Arts Education. True basic arts education “must be taught sequentially by qualified teachers; instruction must include the history, critical theory, and ideas of the arts as well as the creation, production, and performance; and knowledge of, and skills in, the arts must be tested” (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998, p. 1).

Furthermore, many schools districts, especially those in wealthy or in close proximity to urban centered regions, have access to arts organizations outside of the schools to supplement the arts programs in education. The Dana Foundation (2003) states that the best educational experiences provided by arts organizations use “instructional examples targeted to the appropriate levels and [are] aligned with state/local standards” (p. 12). Because numerous arts organizations design education programs to meet the standards, the instruction supplements arts programs in schools thereby reinforcing the curriculum. Rural school districts are less likely to have the resources to make use of these opportunities.

### **Arts Education Partnerships**

Participation of artists and arts organizations in public school education is a well-established occurrence throughout the United States (Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Rand Foundation, 2004; Remer, 1996; Wester, 2003). Partnerships between arts organizations and schools take form in a variety of ways to offer arts programs in education (Rand Foundation, 2004). Although there are many methods of providing arts education in school and throughout a community,

schools benefit from the engagement with artists and arts organizations because the collaborations can further enrich school curriculum (Remer, 1996). Much of the enrichment results from the opportunity to experience the arts through live performance or interaction with arts organizations, which result in deepened appreciation (Kotler & Scheff, 1997). Charles Fowler notes that “Schools need to attach themselves to community assets for practical purpose—because the in-school programs are often inadequate and incomplete, and the realities of the community can teach that which the isolated school cannot” (Remer, 1996, p. xiii). An isolated school is one that relies solely on the resources within the school to provide education programs. For arts education, an isolated school employs arts teachers to provide arts programs without the utilization of arts partnerships (Remer, 1996). Yet, there are schools that are truly isolated by geographic location, financing, and school and community values regarding the arts that less frequently have access to arts resources (1996). This research provides an examination of the purpose of arts partnerships in public education and issues regarding partnerships in isolated schools.

### *Purpose of Arts Partnerships*

Arts organizations and schools collaborate in several ways to provide arts education opportunities to students. When arts organizations unite with schools to provide arts opportunities, these collaborations are referred to as partnerships (Dana Foundation, 2003). A partnership is an association of at least two parties in which an activity of common interest is the motivation for the connection. The common interest in arts education partnerships is twofold with an interest in both the arts and education. While it is generally considered the interest of the arts organizations to be the arts and the interest of the schools to be education, arts collaborations offer a range of partnering possibilities with both non-arts and arts educators (Remer, 1996).

Both schools and arts organizations may serve as institutions of educational providers of arts programs independently or in partnership with those who share common interests.

An instructional partnership that serves one to multiple purposes is an artist residency also referred to as artist-in-residency or artist-in-schools (Dana Foundation, 2003; Remer, 1996; Wester, 2003). Artist residencies are workshops, presentations, master classes, clinics, and community performances and may also include professional development for teachers; training for the artists, principals, and supervisors; and the development of instructional materials (Remer, 1996). An artist residency is a direct type of partnership in which an artist works with students and teachers within the school from five days and up to a year with the purpose of supplementing existing arts programs (Dana Foundation, 2003; Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Remer, 1996; Wester, 2003). Artist residencies began in the 1960s as an approach to extend the arts experience from the institution to the classroom by presenting workshops to students (Dana Foundation, 2003; Remer, 1996; Wester, 2003). The National Endowment for the Arts with financial assistance from the Office of Education funded the Artists-in-Schools Program in 1969, which allocated funds to state arts agencies to fund artists and arts organizations and create artist residency partnerships (Hager, 2003; Remer, 1996; Wester, 2003). As a result, artists took residence in schools across the United States to provide arts education programs which continue currently (Remer, 1996).

Artist residencies provide an array of learning opportunities for participating partners (Wester, 2003). According to the Dana Foundation (2003), the three main purposes of artist residencies as instructional partnerships are: to spark students' interest in the arts; develop students' knowledge and skills in the arts and/or help them learn other subject areas through the arts; and build teachers' capacity to teach in, through, and about the arts. Artist residencies have

developed from a form of program evaluation for arts organizations in the 1960s to one of true instructional change in curriculum and whole-school reform for participating schools (Remer, 1996).

### *Issues of Arts Partnerships and Rural Schools*

Arts partnerships ultimately address matters of arts and education. The arts are important (Dana Foundation, 2003; Johnson, 2002; National Endowment for the Arts, 1988). Arts education is important (Arts Education Partnership, 2005; Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; National Endowment for the Arts, 1988). Education is important to the arts, as education is the single most predictor of “making art meaningful, important, necessary” (Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p.517). The arts are important to education because the arts “present a public face to learning” while offering a multitude of benefits (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999). Essentially, “no art can thrive without education; no education can be complete without the arts” (Wester, 2003).

Nevertheless, arts education in schools is in crisis (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.; Dana Foundation, 2003; Kamhi, 2003; National Endowment for the Arts, 1988; Rand Foundation, 2004). Part of the problem can be associated with the arts not being viewed as important or being properly defined within school curricula despite current education policy mandates (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.; Center on Education Policy, 2008; National Endowment for the Arts, 1988). Part of the culprit is the shifting priorities of leadership in governance, education, arts, and business-producer sectors (National Endowment for the Arts, 1988). Moreover, when school districts face funding cuts, the arts are generally the first to be sacrificed (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.). “The reality is that the educational system is not providing even a rudimentary arts education, and somebody had better pick up the challenge” (Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p. 518-519).



One strategy to confront this challenge has been the use of arts partnerships (Rand Foundation, 2004). There are numerous examples of arts partnerships throughout the United States that supplement school curriculum and enrich the classrooms, schools, and communities in which these are established (Remer, 1996; Waldorf, 2002). The arts organizations serve as cultural institutions that are “essential resources to set standards and provide resources for good arts programs” (Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p. 524). Remer (1996) argues, “In today’s highly complex and competitive world, effective arts-in-education programs cannot survive without partnerships and collaboration [at the] public/private, federal, state, and local” levels (p. 175).

As arts education programs are cut from schools because of funding, rural schools are affected unreasonably (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.). Therefore, these losses point to the need for arts partnerships to provide arts opportunities. However, in consideration of the array of much-needed benefits for student learning, teacher development, arts organization advantages, and community engagements, arts partnerships are limited resources that tend to favor certain regions (Remer, 1996). “Equity in the distribution and allocation of arts services to the public schools is almost nonexistent” (Remer, 1996, p. 174). Some school districts that could benefit greatly from arts partnerships do not have access because of geographic location, school population, school funding capabilities, and cultural values regarding the arts (Remer, 1996). These isolated schools may not have art or performing arts institutions within the communities, or the isolated schools may be geographically located several hours from major cultural institutions. Furthermore, schools with little resources may be unable to allocate funding or time to partner with organizations within even shorter distances.

These inequities in access to arts partnerships demonstrate the need for high quality arts education programs to occur in schools with effective strategies for partnerships to rural regions.

A major policy implication from a study on arts partnerships by the Rand Foundation (2004) is: “Schools must assume responsibility for creating a coherent, standards-based arts curriculum and become better-informed consumers of arts programs” (Rand Foundation, 2004, p. 2). Some school districts solely utilize arts organizations as the method for teaching the arts. Particularly in the potential for arts partnerships to be impractical, inefficient, and perhaps underutilized particularly in certain districts, arts education in schools should be paramount (2004).

Interestingly, during the Cultural Policy in the West II Symposium titled *Creating Cultural Policies with and for Young People*, past National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Frank Hodsoll emphasizes the importance of arts education in schools:

The notion of schools versus the outside is fascinating. A number of you are making an argument that many conservatives make—that there is something wrong with our schools and that more has to be done outside instead of inside of schools. I think much of this depends on the individual schools and individual school districts. Some are better than others at these things. Art, like history and math, can be done in schools, and it also sometimes can be done better outside of schools or in alternative schools. We teach in schools what society thinks is important for all kids to learn, and so, to the extent that you take the arts outside of the schools, you are saying what the school boards think—that the arts are not important (Roach, 1999, p. 63).

Therefore, while arts organizations, arts partnerships, and communities offer resources to schools that inevitably may have “inadequate and incomplete” arts education programs, there are many schools that cannot rely on such benefits, and schools cannot depend on arts partnerships to teach students the importance of the arts. Perhaps, there is hope for rural schools. Richard Bell suggests:

The next breakthroughs in the field [of arts partnerships] will occur not in our large urban school systems, but perhaps in medium-sized cities and even smaller communities [in which] the experience of working in partnerships [and] mak[ing] the most of limited resources is already part of the ongoing fabric of community life (Remer, 1996, p. 154).

The goal would be to enable school districts within all communities to engage in rich arts education programs in schools and through arts partnerships and to expand the limited resources.

### **Rural Community and Asset-Based Organizing**

Rural school districts face challenges in implementing arts programs in public education (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005; Sabol, 2004; Stokrocki, 2004). Three concepts contributing to such challenges include: governmental funding policy, governmental education policy, and the access to arts partnerships outside of the schools. Issues in funding and the methods of teacher certification, curriculum development, arts assessment, and other educational mandates are associated with governmental policies (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Access to arts partnerships is highly dependent upon geographic location and other school specific factors (Remer, 1996). While there are policy initiatives that address issues in rural school districts, often literature does not incorporate the challenges of implementing arts programs in rural schools (Center on Education Policy, 2007; Sabol, 2004). Rural is emphasized as a unique community that allows for benefits and challenges to implementing arts programs in rural school districts. The purpose is to determine ways in which rural communities can use an asset-based organizing strategy to strengthen arts programs in public schools. The research defines the term rural, includes issues of rural education, examines rural community, provides the purpose of asset-based organizing, and gives examples of assets and best practices of high-quality arts

programs in rural regions with a particular attention to Project ARTS (Arts for Rural Teachers and Students). The overall objective is to emphasize the need for community involvement in strengthening arts programs in rural regions.

### *Defining Rural*

In the community arts field, there is an emphasis on defining community (Ewell & Altman, 2003; Ewell, 2009). Defining a community can be established geographically, demographically, spiritually, socially, institutionally, etc. In community arts organizing, Ewell and Altman (2003) define community as a geographic place where “people who are different from one another live together and try to carve out a good life together” (p. 1). In researching arts education in rural schools, a definition of the term rural is necessary to determine the precise regions in which rural communities are located. Is rural defined geographically, socially, or demographically?

The term rural is defined in a multitude of ways. (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007; Provasnik et al., 2007). Rural regions are defined by national and state identifiers and may include: population, geographic location, economy, industry, and others (Arnold et al., 2007). In order to prohibit extremes of inclusivity and exclusivity, a definition of rural relating to education is most relevant. According to Arnold et al. (2007), there are six identifiers defining rural used for classification of school districts and/or relating to education policy and practice. The most common and widely used definition of rural is determined by the United States Census Bureau (Arnold et al., 2007; Provasnik, 2007). The Bureau’s classifications are certain geographic features, population, and “as a residual” (Arnold, 2007, p. 4; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Therefore, rural regions are most widely defined as areas with undeveloped country land and populations less than 2,500 (Arnold et al., 2007). The definition is an urban-centric

measurement: “Rural areas are what remain after all the urbanized areas have been identified” (Arnold et al., 2007, p. 4; Provasnik et al., 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The urban-centric definition is hierarchical in suggesting that rural areas are that which is “left over” from development; moreover, the United States Census Bureau’s definition is the identifier upon which the remaining five definitions are established (Arnold et al., 2007).

The second way in which rural areas are defined is by the use of metropolitan status codes (Arnold et al., 2007). This method categorizes schools districts by the location of the superintendents’ offices in relation to core-based statistical areas. Therefore, metropolitan districts, with a minimum of 10,000 people, house superintendents’ offices: in a central city of a core-based statistical code, are within a code but not in the central city, or not located in a core-based statistical code (Arnold et al., 2007). The third definition of rural is determined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in which rural regions have populations of less than 2,500 people and are either adjacent or not adjacent to a metropolitan area (Arnold et al., 2007). Rural as defined by population and proximity in the NCES classification is useful because the identifiers are based at a county-wide level (Arnold et al., 2007). This information is valuable in distinguishing the assets one rural community may have at the county level due to nearness of a more metropolitan or urban area.

The fourth type of system classifying rural regions is the metro-centric locale codes. These codes include: large city, mid-size city, urban fringe of a large city, urban fringe of a mid-size city, large town, small town, rural and outside a core-based statistical area, and rural and inside a core-based statistical area (Arnold et al., 2007). According to this definition, a rural region must have a population of less than 2,500 people and may be inside or outside of a defined statistical area (Arnold et al., 2007). The fifth type of classification designed to group

schools into districts effectively is with the assignment of urban-centric locale codes. Schools are classified by the distance to an urban center and are labeled as city, suburban, town, or rural schools (Arnold et al., 2007; Provasnik, 2007). The accuracy of the urban-centric locale codes is possible through the precise assignments of locations from technological advancements and the subdivisions of each category: large city, mid-size city, small city, large suburb, mid-size suburb, small suburb, fringe town, distant town, remote town, fringe rural, distant rural, and remote rural (Arnold et al., 2007; Provasnik, 2007). The rural regions are determined by Census-defined territories but include a distance ranging from 2.5 to 25 miles from an urbanized area or cluster depending upon the identifier: fringe, distant, remote (Arnold et al., 2007; Provasnik, 2007). Core-based statistical area codes (CBSA) are the sixth method by which to classify rural regions. Each CBSA has one or more urban areas with populations of 10,000 or more people (Arnold et al., 2007). This method is the classification system used the least in defining rural regions.

### *Rural Schools*

The varying definitions of the term rural are important in understanding the effects of such classifications on education policy, the characteristics of rural education, and consequently the arts programs in rural schools. Defining rural schools has been used sparingly in education policy (Arnold et al., 2007). Perhaps, this ambiguity allows for more flexibility in policy implementation. A notable reference to rural schools is the Rural Education Achievement Program provided by the No Child Left Behind Act, which utilizes the metro-centric locale codes to determine eligibility for the program (Arnold et al., 2007, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a). Yet, schools that qualify as rural according to the metro-centric locale codes may vary drastically from other schools similarly identified. In allowing for flexibility, the ambiguity may also lead to a difficulty in measuring results of policy implementation.

Furthermore, rural education policy and research rarely mentions the effects of rural locales on arts programs (Center on Education Policy, 2007; Sabol, 2004).

Not only do the varying definitions of the term rural indicate the discrepancies in identifying schools for certain policy measures and meeting evaluation measurements, but also the school districts may be within a metropolitan or urban region and not actually experience challenges associated with rural regions. For example, there are schools isolated by geographic location and school values regarding the arts that less frequently have access to arts resources (Remer, 1996). According to the most widely used U.S. Census Bureau's definition of rural, a rural school district is isolated by geographic location (U.S Census Bureau, 2008). Arts partnerships with major arts institutions and community arts organizations within urban and metropolitan areas are more difficult to execute with rural schools (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Remer, 1996). The missions of urban organizations may be to "reach out" to rural communities; however, the urban organizations may not be engaging schools in rural regions by virtue of error in defining rural. Also, if an arts organization carries the name of a region in the title and establishes a mission to provide educational programs for schools within a certain region, it is inadequate to extend only to the suburban regions of the urban center. Some organizations may define a suburban school as rural because of the "slower" pace or community qualities that differ from an urban center, yet actual definitions of rural are not aligned with such qualitative classifications.

While rural school districts share characteristics that are in common with schools in urban, suburban, and town locations which leads to misidentifying certain schools for arts partnerships, there are defining qualities that distinguish rural schools from other public schools. Rural school districts represent over half of the school districts in the United States but only a

third of the public schools and one fifth of the student population (Provasnik, 2007). These data indicate that there are more rural schools with smaller populations, and fewer schools within rural districts. Fewer schools within districts leave less option for collaborations across schools within a singular district. Rural schools face socioeconomic challenges at a high rate. On average, 45% of students in rural schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunches (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Urban and suburban schools have a population of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at a rate of 10% lower than that of rural schools (2007). The socio-economic challenges may signify that students in rural schools are also less likely to pay for opportunities in the arts outside of schools.

There are teacher shortages in rural areas, and those who are contracted are often not certified (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Sabol, 2004). Rural schools have difficulty recruiting or retaining teachers because of “social and collegial isolation, low salaries, multiple grade or subject teaching assignments, and lack of familiarity with rural schools and communities” (Barley & Brigham, 2008). Research regarding teacher certification issues in rural areas is generally for general education teachers but is expected to be similar for arts education (Sabol; 2004). Multiple grade and subject teaching assignments are common among arts teachers yet pose challenges if arts teachers are solely responsible for implementing all arts programs in a district.

Some attributes of rural schools are limited enrollment of students, smaller class sizes, and more individualized instruction (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Center on Education Policy, 2007). Limited enrollment may be considered as challenging for some forms of arts instruction. For example, a performing arts course such as theater or instrumental music or a visual arts lesson such as a mural project benefits from larger groups of students because of the



collaborative nature of the instruction. The smaller class sizes and individualized instruction associated with rural schools may be beneficial to arts programs requiring more attention. Chamber group lessons, individual vocal or instrumental lessons, and painting instruction are enhanced by one-on-one instruction. Yet, if rural districts lack certified personnel or funds to implement such programs, the advantage of lower enrollment is futile for this example.

### *Rural Community*

The community of “rural” further enriches the definitions of rural and rural schools. Descriptions of rural locations in literature often include the context of the area (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Kay, Beasley, Hollingsworth, & Smith, 1998; Manifold, 2000; Marche, 1998). The context includes the ancestry, distinct subcultures, descriptions of the land, architecture, and other qualities of rural community (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Kay et al., 1998; Manifold, 2000; Marche, 1998). Rural communities are generally associated with placing emphasis on family values relating to heritage, culture, and traditions (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000). In the study of the arts in rural communities, community landscapes, community members, and family are the emphasis of the artwork and thus exemplify the definition of rural. Manifold (2000) suggests that rural art subject matter includes “familism”, which is:

the reverence community members have for their families and, by extension, for the community as family, sense-of-place or place-of-being in the home, community, natural environment, history of the region and nation, and synchronous relationships to time in terms of calendar seasons, seasons of life, and seasons of the heart. (p. 19)

This subject matter is prevalent in the community arts of rural areas; however, the students encounter arts content in rural schools that contradicts the prevalence of rural life in rural community arts. Arts education for rural schools incorporate Westernized curriculum (Manifold,

2000). “Administrators and educators of rural schools, whether or not they are natives of the communities they serve, extol the values and goals of mainstream middle-class urban and suburban societies” (Manifold, 2000). The curriculum tends to model urban instead of rural principles (2000). There is a need for rural schools to embrace the sense of community unique to rural areas and strengthen the arts programs.

### *Defining Asset-Based Organizing*

Rural regions and schools have distinctive characteristics that stress community. Many of these defining qualities are beneficial while other traits pose challenges. An argument can be made for rural regions as resource-poor communities who lack culture and thus abilities to implement high-quality arts programs in schools. However, the concept of asset-based organizing challenges the manner in which rural schools provide arts learning opportunities. Asset-based organizing began as a way to build programs with little funds to lead to community empowerment (Borrupt, 2005). The purpose of using an asset-based organizing strategy in this research is to position rural schools to strengthen programs by incorporating the values already inherent to rural regions. Asset-based organizing is:

about fostering the capacity to see, cultivate, and use power [the] community didn't know [it] had. It's about seeing the world and approaching the work from a position of strength rather than weakness, and about taking initiative rather than an oppositional stance. . .to see change and power as things that most appropriately come from within. This is in contrast to the old approach of working from deficits, problems, and limitations [subsequently] perpetuating the sense that communities [are] powerless and [have] to depend on outside intervention, resources, and problem-solvers. (Borrupt, 2005, Web site).

As previously stated, rural school districts encounter challenges, deficits, and limitations. There are inequities in funding, problems in curriculum development, trouble in teacher recruitment and retention, adversities faced by students, etc. Yet, rural school districts have a wealth of valuable strengths; an asset-based organizing strategy is the key to cultivating the strengths. The goal is to identify the assets and seek outcomes.

#### *Assets and Best Practices of Rural Arts-in-Education*

Rural schools should utilize assets to strengthen arts-in-education programs. The most prevalent asset found in the best practices of rural arts programs is the incorporation of community in curriculum development and implementation, teacher training, and partnerships. Clark and Zimmerman (2000) explain, “there is a need for community involvement in successful programs for teaching art in rural areas, where teachers, parents, and community members should be involved actively in developing arts programs that build upon local resources and histories” (p. 33-34). Project ARTS (Arts for Rural Teachers and Students) was a project incorporating community that collaborated with students from rural regions among other classifications in seven rural elementary schools (Clark & Zimmerman, 1997; Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Marche, 1998). The sites chosen faced socio-economic challenges, indicated by the percentages of 55-99% of the students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunches (Clark & Zimmerman, 1997). Students were identified in the third grade, and worked with Project ARTS through the fifth grade. The curriculum included assessment measures and opportunities for demonstration of learning (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000). In addition to meeting the needs of students from rural areas, a major goal of Project ARTS was to involve parents and community members (Marche, 1998).

Project ARTS is a prime example of how rural schools can use an asset-based organizing strategy to develop curriculum. An outcome of Project ARTS states: “to create programs in schools with active community relations and community support [and] to build bases for continued community involvement” (Clark & Zimmerman, 1997). Instead of basing the arts curriculum on values of “middle-class and urban and suburban societies”, Project ARTS integrated the communities in the curriculum (Manifold, 2000). “Each community’s peoples and their histories, local festivals and holiday celebrations, arts and crafts traditions, and other related subjects became the focus of the curriculum at each site” (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 35). Themes were organized around the community and for example, titled “Greater Understanding of Local Communities” and “A Walk Down Main Street” (2000). The themes illustrate that the qualities of rural community were embraced in the content of the arts projects. Students studied the architecture, history of hometowns, and visited churches, all of which are values of rural communities and represented in the art of rural community artists (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000; Manifold, 2000).

The assets in the case of Project ARTS are the community and community members. People from the rural communities participated during the project to offer assistance and volunteer time and skills in implementing arts programs. Community members were the assets with an array of knowledge bases including historians, artists, crafts-persons, parents, and family members (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000). Overall, students were able to “take from, learn about, and act upon” the rural communities by leaving the classroom, incorporating local history, and advocating for the place (Marche, 1998). The students experienced enriched curriculum because they were able to learn respect for themselves and their communities from the communities

(Clark & Zimmerman, 1997). The context of community provides rural schools with a sense of value for traditions and histories that parallels the asset-based organizing strategy.

In addition to the incorporation of community, there are other assets of which rural schools can take advantage. University extension programs to rural regions are effective in providing rural districts with resources for partnerships, and materials. Research demonstrates that “effective teaching and programs [are] related to successful university connections and relaxed school environments” in rural school districts (Stokrocki, 2004). While some rural schools have difficulty utilizing arts partnerships with major arts institutions in urban areas, universities provide a solid alternative for professional arts experiences and educational opportunities. The Wisconsin Idea is an example of a university extension program in which the university is responsible for providing educational opportunities throughout the state (Ewell, 2009). Established by the Governor of Wisconsin and the President of the University of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Idea is a mission “to deliver education to anyone, whether they could get to Madison or not” (Ewell, 2009). The University reaches residents of the state through technology and faculty and staff willingness to accomplish the mission. This university extension program is a good model for arts institutions, universities, and schools to look beyond its immediate boundaries in implementing programs.

Universities are one of the three key players in providing professional development and training for arts teachers in rural schools. In a report by the Arts Education Partnership (2001), universities, public education systems at the state and local levels, and arts and cultural organizations are determined to be the three sectors in “strengthening America’s arts teaching force” and “to ensure that the arts are being well taught in schools” (p. 2). This strategy includes: sharing values and philosophies of education, having leaders with personal experiences in the

arts, creating personal and institutional relationships, and documenting results of improved teaching and learning (Arts Education Partnership, 2001). While these strategies are specific to university partnerships in educating arts teachers, the concepts can be applied to the collaboration of any partners in strengthening arts programs. Sharing values, partnerships with members who are passionate about the arts, and documentation of learning are significant in the Project ARTS case and for rural community cooperation in general (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000). The very nature of universities defines communities and regions, thereby providing another asset for rural schools.

Educators, students, arts administrators, institutions, and community members are the constituents in arts education in rural schools. These sectors are part of the assets rural school districts can utilize in strengthening programs. Brown (1999) asserts, “there is . . . a great role for every community arts organization in the advocacy of arts education in our schools” (p. xxi). Communities should play the role of being an asset for rural arts education programs and consequently rural culture. Pariser and Zimmerman (2004) state:

Community involvement should be a high priority in rural arts programs. . . In such programs, parents, local artists, and other concerned citizens should be actively involved in all aspects of programs designed for rural. . . students. Such community involvement often leads to positive communication among local school administrators, teachers, and parents who understand community values and mores. (p. 395)

The effects of the decision by educators, arts administrators, and institutions to choose to focus on local culture “ripple[s] outward to the community and then reflect[s] back again, inward to the school community, creating an ever-changing pattern of connections and personal relationships

that enrich all who [are] involved” (Marche, 1998). “There are no rules of geography and environment in art making and perceptions are ever changing” (Brown, p. xxiv).

## **Conclusions**

The inherent qualities of arts education in rural schools in regards to government policy and arts partnerships are contradictory to the idea of rural community and asset-based organizing. The problems associated with government policy in appointing control at the local level both in funding and curriculum decisions result in considerable differences in arts education programs. There are funding policies at all levels of government that restrict rural school districts in allocations of money (The Education Trust, Inc., 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). School districts in rural regions tend to have a smaller tax-base and often are economically depressed therefore limiting the amount rural local jurisdictions raise. In the State of Illinois in which policies are in place to alleviate such a dilemma by providing low-income schools with monetary resources to close the funding gap, differences remain among spending in which there is a \$1,000 variable per student among school districts (The Education Trust, Inc., 2006).

Variations in funding allocations extend into the decisions made by school districts in funding specific schools and programs within the districts (Chapman, 2004; The Education Trust, 2006). Local school district control in spending has proven further to result in gaps mainly but not limited to higher poverty schools in which such schools receive a lower percentage of money (2006). These decisions determine uneven advantages in overall school spending for teacher salaries, facilities, and programs (Illinois State Board of Education, 2007; Wester, 2003; The Education Trust, Inc. 2006). As a result, individual districts and schools manage the amount of money allocated to education programs including the study of the arts. Funding and education

policy provides individual districts with the control of what is funded in schools and also what is taught. In Illinois, school districts simply are not held accountable in meeting standards for arts education. Ultimately, districts make decisions regarding the development and implementation of arts curriculum according to funding capabilities and state requirements. As the Illinois Arts Alliance (2005) asserts, rural Illinois schools provide the least amount of arts education opportunities. It is evident that funding and education policies are key indicators of the inequality in arts learning among Illinois students.

In addition to the role of funding and education policies, arts partnerships with schools affect the quality of arts education. Arts partnerships have a long history of enriching arts programs in schools. Arts organizations provide access to artists in the field, high quality performances and exhibitions, professional development for teachers, curriculum design, and a multitude of other benefits. Some schools only provide arts learning opportunities for students through the use of partnerships. Other schools only offer arts education in schools. Some school districts make use of both arts in schools and through partnerships. Many experts argue that the ideal arts programs in schools practice both (Remer, 1996). Rural schools isolated geographically, financially, and by school values are less likely to enrich arts curriculum through arts partnerships.

The circumstances of arts education in rural schools are influenced by government policy and school district procedures in funding, curriculum, and partnership decisions. This framework is broadened by the cultural climate of rural. Defining rural, rural schools, and rural community is important in establishing expectations and recommendations for arts education. There are many ways to define rural including by population, location, economy, and industry. Rural schools and communities have unique challenges related to socioeconomic status, availability of



arts opportunities, authentic curriculum design, and individual cultural values. These factors rely on a system in which decisions are often made in regions far removed from rural life.

An unrealistic solution to strengthening arts programs in rural schools through policy and partnerships is to adapt a top-down approach of assigning control at the national and state levels in all aspects of education. Policymakers determine how the programs are funded, what is taught, and how schools operate. Arts organizations design the arts partnerships, are required to partner with all rural schools, and determine the curriculum. Yet, this answer contrasts with the idea of asset-based organizing and the role of rural community. Asset-based organizing is a matter of developing programs from a grassroots level and involving that which is unmistakably significant to rural life: community. Rural as a sense-of-place and community as a sense-of-being must be identified as assets for strengthening arts programs.

### **Recommendations**

Asset-based organizing questions the idea of needing outside sources to build programs; however, local control is a large part of the problem of local tax-based funding and local arts education policy. The juxtaposing nature of the top-down and bottom-up approaches require a combination of strategies. Therefore, the following recommendations embrace the principle of asset-based organizing while incorporating essential overarching policy changes.

- Tax-based funding, mainly by property taxes, at the local level needs to be amended.

Funding for public education should be allocated according to the amount of students in a district and not the amount of money that flows from that community. School district funding per student should be homogenized to ensure that all students have access to similar resources, facilities, and opportunities.

- There should be more transparency in earmarked spending by school districts and schools to increase accountability in spending and ensure support for arts education.
- Teacher salaries should be based upon cost of living in the region, experience, certification, and quality of teaching while remaining relative to all other teacher salaries in the state and commensurate to qualifications. This proposal will prohibit wealthy districts from recruiting teachers through monetary compensation.
- Teacher training programs should incorporate strategies for teaching in school and community cultures that are uncommon to teacher backgrounds.
- Rural schools should utilize mentoring strategies to recruit high quality teachers and prohibit teacher turnover.
- National and state policies regarding arts education, particularly the standards and outlined objectives should be mandated at all levels, and schools should be held accountable for student learning in the arts according to the standards. This mandate should occur through national requirement, state oversight, and district implementation.
- All districts, particularly those facing pressure to spend more time on non-arts subjects should be trained in forms of arts integration to explore new paths to learning in both arts and non-arts content.
- Experts in arts education outside of departments of education from all regions of the state should collaborate in policymaking, curriculum design, and school assessments.
- Arts administrators must be able to define rural and know how to articulate the needs of rural communities particularly if rural engagement is part of the mission in arts partnerships.

- Institutions, both universities and arts organizations, need to look beyond boundaries of urban-centric ideals, especially if the name of the institution includes rural regions.
- Rural educators must make use of community assets because the students are from the communities and deserve tailored curriculum that is aligned with community values and student needs. This strategy involves exploring the values of each rural school and designing appropriate curriculum that addresses the arts standards but does not involve a packaged “Westernized and sub-urban” set of values.

The State of Illinois is recognized for Chicago, its third largest city in the United States with an urban cultural center and a rich history in the arts. However, the governmental funding and education policies and limitations of arts partnerships primarily to the northern region have resulted in rural areas providing the least amount of arts opportunities for students. These recommendations are aimed at rural schools in southern Illinois in order to strengthen arts programs in education.

### **Areas for Further Research**

In addition to such recommendations, there are four existing areas for further research. 1) Funding for arts education in rural schools is a sub-category to funding discrepancies of public education in general. More research is needed on how to equalize funding across schools nationwide. 2) Additional research is necessary in the effects of federal mandates like No Child Left Behind and funding allocations on the arts in schools. 3) Rural education policy research is a general area of study that presents little existing literature. 4) The final area of research requiring more in-depth study is how to develop authentic programs from a grassroots approach while utilizing arts partnerships from urban regions.

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