

October 2015. Vol. 19, No. 4. — Increasing Community Capacity for Arts Education: The Studio to School Initiative — Kim Leonard and Sonia Worcel

Creating a holistic and broad ranging educational agenda in an era of sparse allocations of educational programming and school budgets is much on the minds of arts and culture sector workers. Indeed, calls for more science and technology; more basics of math, reading and writing; and more creative problem solving and design are found in the daily news. In the midst of these competing educational demands emerges a highly significant question: *how do we create sustainable quality arts education for youth?*

The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) has begun to tackle this question through its Studio to School pilot program. In this issue of *CultureWork*, authors Kim Leonard and Sonia Worcel, researchers at OCF, provide a snapshot of this case-study model within the State of Oregon. They describe the power of creative expression experienced by youth through the arts learning supported in these OCF funded programs. They also explore needs for differentiation in arts learning within specific school settings and suggest initial ways to think successful arts education principles, outcomes, and offerings.

As editors, we hope this articles leads to further dialogue and action about this important component of our national wellbeing—the future of arts education and the overarching educational robustness for our children.

Best regards,
Julie Voelker-Morris
Robert Voelker-Morris
Editors

Increasing Community Capacity for Arts Education: The Studio to School Initiative

[Kim Leonard and Sonia Worcel](#)

[The below links will open in a new browser tab or window.]

Repeated rounds of budget cuts over the past several decades have limited the arts education available within the public K-12 education system in Oregon. The lack of arts education opportunities disproportionately affects students from low-income households who usually cannot afford such opportunities outside of school. Despite the growing disinvestment in arts education, numerous studies published over the past decade link arts education — especially sequential arts instruction — to increased academic success. Studies also show a correlation between arts education and increased self-confidence; social and occupational skills; motivation; and engagement in school and community (1).

[Studio to School](#) is a five-year Initiative of [The Oregon Community Foundation](#) that supports the innovative development of high quality, sustainable arts education programming through partnerships between community based arts organizations and schools. This article describes the Initiative and its current stage of development, and what the Foundation and grantees are learning thus far. It concludes with anticipated next steps and continuing questions.

A Description of the Initiative

The Studio to School Initiative can be described as a three-legged stool; its three legs are 1) funding for the Studio to School projects; 2) a learning community that supports development of the Studio to School projects, partnerships, and ultimately, sustainable arts education programming; and, 3) a robust and responsive evaluation.

Funding: Eighteen Studio to School projects, each a partnership between a community based arts organization and a school, were first funded in spring 2014 with the possibility of up to five years of funding. Each project receives the same amount of funding annually for the design and implementation of arts education programming, though projects vary in type, scope, and reach of programming.

Learning Community: Along with grant support for direct programming costs, all grantees must commit to participate in a learning community that supports collaborative strategies for supporting high-quality, innovative arts education opportunities for elementary and middle school-aged youth. In-person gatherings – called rendezvous – occur two to three times per year. Teams from each grantee project— including school administrators, non-profit program managers, and educators— are required to participate.

Evaluation: The primary purpose of the Initiative evaluation is to support learning by and through the Studio to School projects. While the evaluation will eventually aim to determine whether the arts education programming developed through Studio to School projects is effective, the early stages of the evaluation are focused on how and how well projects are implemented – what it takes to get these efforts off the ground, how they change over time, and what we can learn about the development of arts education programming through the projects.

The theory of change for Studio to School posits that this three-legged stool will result in:

- Communities that are more broadly and deeply engaged in supporting arts education in Oregon;
- A shared understanding of the community, student, and structural needs related to arts education in Oregon;
- The identification of key principles for developing and sustaining high quality arts education in Oregon communities; and,
- Benefits to students, organizations, and communities from access to, and involvement in, high quality arts education programming.

Three major assumptions underlie the design of the Studio to School Initiative.

First, Studio to School establishes **partnerships and collaboration between community arts organizations and schools** as a critical underlying structure. Each project is a partnership between a school and a nonprofit arts organization, and each grantee project consists of a four-person team that participates in the learning community. This team consists of a nonprofit arts organization and school leaders with decision-making power, a classroom teacher, and a community member (who is often a teaching artist, additional teacher, or parent who is particularly engaged in the arts).

Second, it asserts that in order for arts education programming to be truly sustainable (to live through changes in leadership and budgeting challenges, etc.) **grantees must engage the broader community, and in doing so, develop a culture of appreciation (and even demand for) arts education.** This was the focus of the most recent learning community rendezvous, located in Sisters, Oregon, where grantees learned about the ways in which the Sisters Folk Festival has engaged various parts of the Sisters community – arts, business, education, and other local leaders – and explored how they might broaden and deepen those engaged from their local communities.

Third, the Initiative assumes that **there is no one right model for the delivery of arts education, and that each project must develop programming that works within its community.** This may look like adaptation of arts

education models tried elsewhere, or innovative new approaches. Given this, the evaluation supports the development of shared principles for developing and sustaining high quality arts education programming. Rather than developing a single, specific prescriptive model for arts education programming, we seek to generate a set of common principles that may be applied to any group developing arts education programming.

The Studio to School grantees recently completed their first full academic year, during which all grantees successfully implemented arts education programming. Many grantees found cause to adapt their original plans, such as by adjusting timelines or adapting their approach to particular aspects of their programs. As the 2015-2016 academic year gets underway, the grantees are building on what they learned in the first year. So is The Oregon Community Foundation, as we figure out how best to support the grantees and evaluate the Initiative's accomplishments.



A student begins work on a graphic novel.

Early Findings from Year One

Though it is early yet, there are some challenges, successes, and early observations worth sharing – especially with regards to how relationships are developing between the nonprofit arts organizations and schools and how project implementation is progressing. Some of these observations may evolve into shared principles over the next few years as we learn more about what it takes to do this work, and what matters to the Foundation, grantees, their students and their communities.

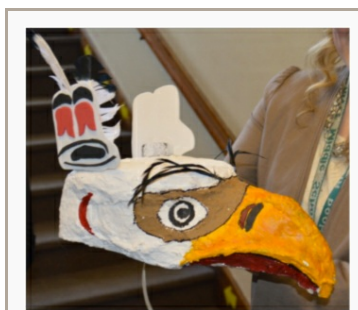
Partnerships and Collaboration

Having all the right people involved is critical to the Studio to School projects' success.

Many Studio to School grantees have highlighted the value and importance of having the right people at the table as they planned and began implementing their projects. A strong project leader, someone to coordinate and cope with logistics, qualified and committed teaching artists, the engagement of classroom teachers, and administrators who support and make space for projects – these were all reported by grantees as necessary for project success. When the right team is engaged, grantees report that this leads to a shared vision and common purpose: a partnership where both the school or school district and the arts organization are “in it for the right reasons.”

“We have to have total administrative buy-in or this wouldn't work.” – Teaching Artist

“Having a great artist is invaluable. Working with [teaching artist] has been such a great experience. The students and I both have learned so much from her.” – Classroom teacher



A student-made mask created with a native teaching artist.

However, grantees have experienced several sizeable challenges related to having and keeping the right people involved. Notably, by the end of the 2014-2015 school year, half of the Studio to School projects experienced a significant change in leadership at either the arts organization or school, and additional changes were anticipated over the summer. Some projects are still reeling from these changes, while others are taking early steps to ensure that their projects will survive through turnover – such as by better sharing knowledge and diffusing workload.

Working in partnership requires significant coordination and communication. Relationship building between arts organizations and schools takes time.

Almost all grantees reported that the time and effort required to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate to develop and implement their projects was far greater than anticipated in year one. Even where strong relationships already existed between arts organizations and schools prior to the Studio to School Initiative, regular meetings and frequent communication are necessary to ensure that progress is made and everyone is on the same page.

Many grantees found they needed to slow things down during year one, often to more deeply or more inclusively plan for project implementation. For some, this meant more meetings early in the school year to be sure new school administrators or other important stakeholders were invested in the project.

“I think the decisions made...to slow down, make sure we are addressing all stakeholders, and develop a process where implementation is driven by needs and capabilities will ultimately ensure success.” – Arts Organization Manager

A survey of the nonprofit arts organizations and schools engaged in each project showed a sizeable increase in the degree to which they were collaborating by the spring of year one (as compared to prior to the Initiative’s start). The Studio to School projects were indeed increasing the degree to which these partners built shared goals, communicated, and shared decision making power.

“There have been a few challenges as this program rolls forward and I think the partners have shown a willingness to communicate and cooperate in the mutually-held goal of providing theater experiences for our kids and for the community. There is certainly a “can-do” attitude present.” – Arts Organization Manager

Grantees have been connecting and collaborating across projects earlier than expected.

One goal for the learning community is to build and support a network of arts education providers throughout the state. The Studio to School project hoped that grantees would connect and collaborate with one another over the course of the Initiative, and this was seen happening by mid-year. The grantee survey captured information about 27 new relationships that developed during the first year of the Initiative; organizations and schools who had not previously communicated, cooperated, or collaborated were beginning to do so.

Delivering Arts Education

Implementing the Studio to School projects has required much more time and effort than anticipated.

Just as partnership development has been a heavy lift, the day-to-day logistical work that includes communicating and coordinating with teaching artists and classroom teachers is a significant undertaking. Several projects have benefited from a designated person with clear responsibility for project coordination. The valuable realization that coordination and logistics require significant resources is reflected in year two budgets for many project—11 grantees have increased their year two budgets in anticipation of continued need for administrative staff support.

Fitting arts education programming into existing school systems and structures can be challenging. School administrator and classroom teacher champions help smooth the way.

Some school administrators concerned about ensuring necessary instructional time for core subjects have struggled to make space for arts education during the school day. This challenge comes in both the form of scheduling – finding space in the school day calendar – and also in physical space. While some projects have successfully refurbished spaces within schools that are now dedicated to arts education, others have lost planned spaces to growing school enrollment or competing school priorities.

Collaboration between classroom teachers and artists, while essential for most of the arts education planned through Studio to School projects, can also be challenging. Some projects have found it difficult to get buy-in from teachers who are also concerned about loss of time for core subjects in favor of arts instruction or are already juggling many other responsibilities. However, some grantees have successfully identified a few “early implementers”, teachers who

can champion arts education, acting as advocates with other classroom teachers.

“We couldn’t have done it without teachers being open to art.... they all saw what happened when art was cut.” – Arts Organization Manager

The Studio to School grantees all provided new and improved arts education opportunities for students in year one.

Despite the challenges experienced, and while not every planned component of each project was fully implemented in year 1, all projects were successful in providing at least some of the arts education they proposed (see the above infographic for an overview of the arts education implemented in year one). The benefits for students engaged in the Studio to School projects are just beginning to appear:

- ***Exposure to different art forms is building excitement for the arts.***

Describing an artist performance at her school, one team member said that it provided a “context for what art is” and exposed students to an available option for future learning. In another project a teaching artist reported that students are talking about their artwork and approaching her in the hallway to ask, “are we having art today?” Students were so excited about a new material she introduced in class that one student asked, “where can I find this?”

“Middle school kids were actually tapping their feet in front of their friends!” – School Administrator

- ***The arts are helping students make connections to and engage with school.***

For example, students at one school were learning about Egypt. They were tasked with writing an expository paper and creating a visual aid to accompany it. At the same time, puppeteers were working with students in the afterschool program. A 6th grader asked the puppeteers to help her make a Queen Nefertiti puppet for her class project.

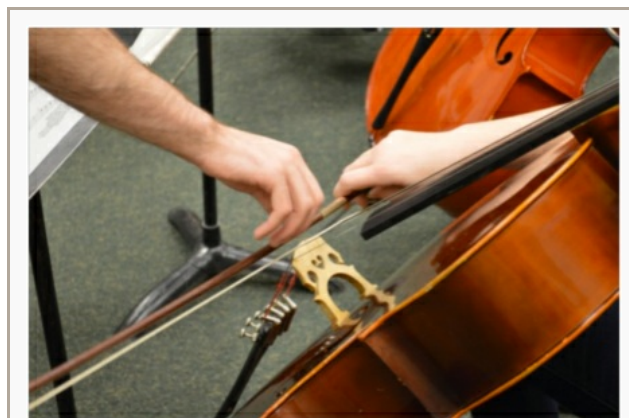
- ***Students are building skill and sticking with band and orchestra across the challenging middle school years.***

In one project, individual and small-group instruction is provided to supplement band and orchestra (most if not all students at their school cannot afford private lessons). This grantee reported that the individual attention in year one helped one student progress enough to try out for the local youth orchestra and that they have had an increase in the percentage of students staying in band and orchestra programs—registration for 7th, 8th & 9th grade bands is significantly higher for the 2015-2016 year than in the past.

The Work Ahead

We are adapting our evaluation work in response to what we are learning so far, what we still wish to learn, and the needs and priorities of the grantees. For example, as we head into the second academic year of the Initiative, the grantees are working to broaden and deepen their community engagement work. As such, this will be an important focus of our evaluation work this year as well. The following continuing questions reflect this and other topics we will learn more about this year.

- **Community engagement:** How and how well are the grantees engaging their communities in their projects? How do grantee projects improve the way that arts education is understood and supported in their communities (beginning with community engagement)?



A professional musician teaches a student a bowing technique during small group lessons that supplement an orchestra program.

- **Project implementation:** What additional challenges surface as projects move into year 2? How are they integrating what they've learned thus into their work? How well are grantees working through, rather than around, the challenges they experience?
- **Arts education delivery and student participation:** What arts education was offered and delivered (e.g. types of sequential instruction), to whom (e.g. number and types of students), and how (format, number of hours, etc.)?
- **Student learning:** How and how well do grantee projects contribute to improved student learning (e.g. acquisition of art skills)?

We look forward to learning and sharing more about what we learn as the Studio to School Initiative moves forward.

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As the Senior Evaluation Officer at The Oregon Community Foundation, Kim Leonard is managing the evaluation of the Studio to School Initiative. With an academic background in Anthropology, Psychology, and Public Administration, Kim has worked in program evaluation and related fields (e.g. learning assessment) for almost a decade. She was recently the president of the Oregon Program Evaluators Network, a local affiliate of the American Evaluation Association, loves to geek out about all things data-related, and is currently working on a book about survey design. She is also a very amateur photographer and a hoarder of yarn and fabric.

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As Vice President of Strategy and Research, Sonia Worcel directs the Foundation's research program (including the Studio to School Initiative evaluation), which provides research and data-driven information to inform OCF's priorities, activities, and operations. Sonia has over 20 years of experience in research, program evaluation, and policy analysis in the areas of early childhood, child welfare, prevention and intervention programs for families and youth, criminal and juvenile justice, and substance abuse treatment and prevention. She holds degrees in Public Policy and Psychology.

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1. President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. (2011, May). Reinvesting in arts education: Winning America's future through creative schools. Retrieved from http://www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/PCAH_Reinvesting_4web_0.pdf

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