

SCHOOL DISTRICT CASE STUDIES

A Case Study:

CSD #25 (QUEENS, NY)

Factors

The Community
The School Board
The Superintendent
District Arts Coordinator(s)

Statistics

Schools (Total): 31
Students (Total): 23,946
Per Pupil: \$4,000
Arts Teachers (Total): 91

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Community School District #25 (CSD #25) in Queens, New York, serves some 24,000 children in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 12 from a multicultural community. Its students come from all over the world, representing more than 100 countries and speaking 95 languages. District #25 is a highly challenged school district. At the same time, it is hugely blessed with the artistic wealth of New York City. It benefits not merely from opportunities for students' "exposure" to the arts, but from the direct involvement of world-class artists in the district's classrooms. Dancers, musicians, actors, visual artists from City Center, Young Audiences, Studio-in-a-School, Carnegie Hall, the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater Foundation, the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, the Asia Society, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, the Museum of Modern Art, the Marquis Studios, TheatreMoves, Columbia University, the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and more play active roles in teaching and learning in this school district.

With such a wealth of resources available to the community, it may come as a surprise for some to learn that until 1991, like most of New York City, the district's elementary schools had no music program and many of its model arts partnership programs were

nonexistent. The flowering of the arts in CSD #25, not to mention the second highest reading and mathematics standardized test scores for a district in the New York City public school system, can be credited to an involved community, a forward-looking school board, and the leadership of a remarkable community superintendent, Dr. Arthur Greenberg.

THE SUPERINTENDENT: TAKING THE COMMUNITY'S CUE

An education leader who believes that the arts are direct links to the physical, intellectual, and social development of children, Dr. Arthur Greenberg interviewed for the position of superintendent in 1990. He indicated to the Board of Education that the first thing he would do was to visit all the schools and ask community members what they wanted to make their children's education stronger. Board members laughed about hiring him on the spot, giving him six months to hit the road and report his findings. After his time in the field and talks with parents (many of whom repeated the same refrain: "This is New York City, cultural Mecca of the world. Where are the arts?"), Greenberg returned to the school board and identified those areas of the curriculum that needed bolstering.

High on his list were the "expressive arts": visual art, dance, drama, and music. The superintendent's resulting "Areas of Emphasis" became the vision for the development of all CSD #25 curriculum initiatives, including the expressive arts.

That vision has become reality through a number of initiatives which, taken together, make for a strong infrastructure to support and to advance teaching and learning in and through the arts. The initiatives include:

- the systematic restoration of the district's elementary school music program (lost in budget cuts in the early 1990s), including a sequential program that supports early childhood teachers' use of music in the classroom, recorder instruction for all third graders, and the opportunity for fourth through sixth graders to learn to play string or band instruments;
- the inclusion of community-based

- volunteers and the creation of a network of highly qualified artist mentors/partners who work with elementary teachers and students on short- and long-term projects in visual arts, music, dance, and drama;
- ongoing professional development for arts specialists and classroom teachers, including CSD #25's Direct Service to Children/Professional Development for Teachers model as well as teachers' individualized plans;
- a team approach to all curriculum initiatives, including the Expressive Arts Program, to ensure that arts activities are integrated across curriculum areas authentically;
- the consistent work on the part of the directors of funded programs and expressive arts to work collaboratively to seek competitive funding for the district to provide innovative arts programs (see sidebar "Finding Funding").

A COORDINATOR'S PIVOTAL ROLE

One of the first moves Greenberg made toward implementing the community's "bring back the arts" consensus was hiring Dr. Sharon Dunn, the district's first arts coordinator in a decade and a half and now special assistant to the chancellor for the entire New York City school system. Under Dunn's leadership and later under her successor team of Arlene Jordan and Pat Lieberman, the district concentrated not only on hiring specialists but also on bringing the value of arts education back to the schools.

To do this, they encouraged "integration" of the arts into the curriculum. They also elected to make a modest start: Dunn created a small pool of money and concentrated on the schools most interested in having arts education (approximately one-third of the district's schools). As interest among District #25 educators has increased, with more classroom teachers voting to add arts specialists to their schools' "teacher cluster," the district arts program and its pool of funds and grants have grown as well.

Superintendent Greenberg's philosophy likens the approach to Tom Sawyer and his fence: Limit initial par-

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CSD #25: FINDING FUNDING

It would be understandable if a student of arts education were to point to the renaissance of the arts in New York City as the cause of CSD #25's recent successes. Indeed, funds received by CSD #25 through the Center for Arts Education (Annenberg III) and Project ARTS initiatives to restore and expand arts education in all schools have been very welcome and well used, constructing, for example, studios at the performing arts junior high school.

However, like communities all across the country, CSD #25 has been supporting the arts through local funding for the past six or seven years. The district has sought and received competitive funding to supplement its operating budget from such organizations and programs as the National Endowment for the Arts, Federal Title VII Grants, New York State Council on the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, New York State Education Department Improving School Services, and Comprehensive Educational Plan Grants. The community of Flushing, New York, has exhibited major support for the arts, making its facilities available for special district arts events throughout the year. In addition, the arts budget has been augmented by arts partners who chose to provide services to CSD #25 through grants that they had won, recognizing that the district had made an extraordinary commitment to arts education.

The annual budget for the district is now more than \$95 million. The allocation for arts education in the 1997-98 school year was approximately \$4.7 million, or 5 percent.



icipation to only those most interested, let others watch the fun, and they'll line up for the chance to paint the fence (bring the arts into their classrooms). In practice, it hasn't been quite so easy for Community School District #25 to rebuild the arts in its schools. For one thing, the district has site-based leadership: Principals have choices, such as whether, how, and how much arts education to offer. For another, integration of the arts into curricula for other disciplines presents a challenge to educators seeking to maintain a high quality of arts education district-wide.

In fact, the researchers for this study who spent several days in the district did find variations in the quality and rigor of arts education. But the district is addressing these inconsistencies through professional development of teachers and also by strengthening the arts specialist programs. Additionally, the district has provided direct assistance to principals who have requested help to "bring back" the arts. District #25's aim is to strengthen the value of the arts throughout the district and give all administrators and educators the means to provide high-quality arts education to all their students.

ARTISTS AND TEACHERS TEAM UP

Because New York is rich in cultural partners, Community School District #25 has been able to develop an intensive professional development program in which artists team with

teachers in short- and/or long-term relationships (sometimes multi-year). Artists work with teachers to develop lessons appropriate to the students' curricula, based on the New York State standards, then coach the teacher in techniques of their particular discipline. They team-teach classes, giving each other feedback. Over time, the teachers learn to incorporate certain artistic skills. The artists learn more about classroom management and curricula, and, in some cases, start taking education courses to gain teacher certification.

CSD #25 is also tapping the talents of New York's institutions of higher learning such as St. John's University and Columbia University. Three elementary schools, for example, are partnering with Columbia arts educators, researchers, and program developers to find ways to incorporate media arts into the traditional arts education curriculum.



Lessons for New York City's Superintendents

"The Arts for Literacy" was the theme of the Fordham University-New York City Superintendent Network's Forum held on one of the days the study's research team visited. Dr. Arthur Greenberg, then superintendent of Community School District #25, is the current chair of the group. Greenberg has a reputation throughout the boroughs for his support of arts education, as does his former arts supervisor, Dr. Sharon Dunn. (Both have since been recruited by Chancellor Rudy Crew for the central administration. Greenberg, whose CSD #25 successor is Michelle Fratti, is now serving as Supervising Superintendent for Executive and New Program Development.)

"You have got to believe in the arts yourself first," Greenberg told his colleagues. "You can't expect your staff to make reform, to bring back the arts, if you won't take the lead."

Greenberg recounted his early work in District #25, espousing what he calls his Theory of Sloppy Change: Begin with schools and personnel committed to the arts and strengthen their programs first.

Columbia University's Dr. Maxine Greene also challenged the superintendents, urging them to clarify their philosophy of arts education, consider its specific application in each of their unique districts, and determine what skills he or she needs to implement it.

Through small group discussions, the superintendents tackled the questions of personal philosophy and planning.

They agreed that each needed to:

- develop a personal definition of "arts" for their district;
- decide their view on "art for art's sake" and state their commitment;
- determine the utility of the arts for work, citizenship, other public values;
- set out a belief system: why the arts count;
- show the connections: to community, among disciplines.

And they agreed on key elements of a formal plan:

- state a vision and mission, write goals and objectives;
- actively communicate with school and community;
- lay out a realistic timeline;
- commit resources to implementation, including:
 - staffing and materials,
 - professional development for arts specialists and others so the arts are integrated,
 - assessment and evaluation procedures to gauge effectiveness.

