

From Anecdote to Evidence:

Assessing the Status and Condition of Arts Education at the State Level

By **Sandra S. Ruppert and Andrew L. Nelson**

Introduction

Among arts and education advocates, concerns about a “narrowing of the curriculum” have grown since the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A Center for Education Policy analysis found that in school districts across the country, the arts and other subjects are being squeezed out of the school day to make room for more math and reading. But beyond these basic grim facts, most of what we know about the current status and condition of arts education in the nation’s public schools is based on sketchy information and anecdotes rather than on solid empirical evidence.

There is a pressing need for better and more comprehensive state level information if the arts are to remain an integral component of what constitutes a well-rounded education for all students. Without it, it will be nearly impossible to make a convincing case for the arts, assess current environments, monitor compliance with NCLB, or ensure equitable access to existing programs. Good policy starts with good data and recently state policy leaders themselves have called for research-based evidence about arts education in their own and other states to help inform their decisions.

The field also recognizes the need. In 2004, the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) issued *The Arts and Education: New Opportunities for Research*, which noted “[r]eliable information is unavailable about student access to arts instruction, about the current and predicted availability of qualified teachers, and about student performance.”

Fortunately, the data-free climate of policy and decision making for the arts in education is starting to change. In a growing number of states, state level education agencies and arts organizations have joined forces with other critical partners to undertake comprehensive statewide surveys of school districts and schools. Among the things they are learning: how much time students spend studying the arts; who provides the instruction they do receive and under what conditions; and how much money is spent on school arts programs. The findings already have produced measurable results in some states, such as a change in the number of arts credits required for high school graduation or an added line item in the state budget earmarked specifically for arts education.

This research and policy brief draws on the experiences in five states, each of which has been the subject of a comprehensive arts education survey in recent years. The states are Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington. Distilled from the “lessons learned,” the brief provides 20 principles designed to inform and guide new and continuing arts education data collection and survey research at the state level. A primary audience is those who may be involved in advancing such efforts in their own states.

In addition to an analysis of relevant written materials from the five states, the brief was informed by the deliberations of a select group of arts education research, policy, and communications experts. At the invitation of the AEP, the group came together in June 2006 for a one-day seminar in Chicago, supported in part through a grant from the Spencer Foundation. Drawing on their direct involvement in the research and survey work in one of the five states, the seminar participants provided valuable insights into the broader context in which the studies occurred as well as into the outcomes that followed.



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The mission of the Arts Education Partnership is to demonstrate and promote the essential role of the arts in enabling every student to succeed in school, life and work in the diverse and global economies and societies of the 21st century.



20 Principles to Inform State Level Arts Education Survey Research

The 20 principles are organized according to four basic research design components: clear research goals and purposes, appropriate methods for data collection and analysis, effective communications strategies, and direct policy and practice implications.

Clear Research Goals and Purposes

A necessary first step is to define a clear set of goals and purposes for conducting a statewide survey of arts education. Key aspects of the process are described in the principles below.

1. Frame research goals within a broader education context.

In most cases, the survey research is part of a larger initiative related to education reform or school improvement efforts. To understand the state context, it helps to remember that NCLB directly affects education policy and practice at the state level. The law also recognizes the arts as a core academic subject, alongside mathematics, language arts, science, and several other subjects. Further, it requires a complete education for every child must include rigorous instruction in all core academic subjects. In addition to the federal law, 44 states and the District of Columbia have policies that define the arts as “core” or as an academic subject in statute or administrative code, according to a 50-state analysis conducted in 2005 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

2. Define the problem to be addressed in policy terms.

Determine opportunities and needs in the policy environment that will help bring about long-term, systemic change, rather than trying to win just the short-term battles. Like the vast majority of states, Kentucky has policies in place that require schools or districts to provide arts instruction for its students. One underlying research question

study leaders in Kentucky addressed in the baseline survey of arts education in the state was this: Are students being underserved in the arts? The answers allow them to draw inferences about levels of access to and participation in arts education programs in light of these policies and to make recommendations. It helps to have an understanding of how policy is made in the state and to ask if there is political support behind the study, and an amenable policy environment in which to conduct it.

3. Gain the support and commitment of state leaders.

Defining the problem in policy terms can make it easier to enlist the support of state leaders who can be influential in moving the study forward. The early buy-in of state arts and state education entities can be especially important. In Illinois, the state principals’ association and the board of education endorsed the research and encouraged survey participation. To ensure the study results have an impact beyond the advocacy level, the overall initiative should include key leadership who can steer the findings into the policy realm. Having an authority, such as a governor, state legislature, or state superintendent formally initiate the effort can add legitimacy to the policy findings and future actions. In Rhode Island, Governor Almond appointed 19 influential leaders from the arts, education, and business sectors to serve on his Task Force on Literacy in the Arts and to issue policy recommendations.

4. Create an organizational infrastructure to guide the work.

Forming a statewide steering committee that can assume “ownership” of the initiative can involve a number of steps: Make the process of organizing the study as transparent as possible and construct it with key stakeholders. Invite other organizations, including funders, to become strategic partners. Consider involving a government relations and/or public relations strategist at the beginning of the project. Their early input can be important to converting the resulting data into effective,

high-impact, clear, concise, and newsworthy message points that will resonate with elected officials, policy leaders, and the media. However, there is no substitute for the solid foundation a competent and credible staff provides, including a project director as the point person who pulls all the pieces together.

5. Articulate explicit purposes for the study.

Going forward, the stated purposes for the study will aid in determining the specific types of data to be collected, how they will be analyzed, and the manner in which they will be reported to appropriate audiences. Achieving a sharp focus may require making tough choices; it is unrealistic to expect the study to be all things to all people. These are among the commonly identified purposes for a statewide survey on the status and condition of the arts at the school or district level:

- **Raise awareness** — Survey results can serve as the basis for a statewide advocacy campaign or for seeking additional support. In Illinois, a stated purpose was to raise awareness among Illinois policymakers of the value of arts education and to advocate for stronger state and local policies, along with corresponding budget appropriations, to ensure that arts education is provided to students statewide.
- **Monitor the general condition of arts education** — The study can serve as a means for establishing a “baseline” for tracking and measuring progress in the state, in some cases, based on compliance with NCLB requirements. The indicators also can be included on school or district level report cards. Kentucky’s first-ever baseline survey was designed to provide a “snapshot” of arts education and to inform the development of future programs and partnership efforts.
- **Promote school or program improvement** — In New Jersey, one purpose for the survey was to provide schools and communities with tools and resources to strengthen student learning in the arts. The findings will be used to identify model arts programs and to serve as the basis for establishing a clearinghouse on arts education where schools can share ideas. In Washington, the foundation that helped support the

research was particularly interested in identifying school-based solutions to shared challenges in the funding, staffing, and scheduling of the arts in the day-to-day curriculum.

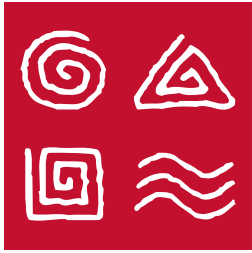
- **Inform policy decisions** — In Rhode Island, the governor-appointed task force was explicitly charged with “mak[ing] policy recommendations on how the arts can have a significant effect on the educational agenda” of the state.
- **Align resources** — While not typically a primary purpose, funding sources and levels for arts education and spending patterns over time can reveal disparities in the level of arts education that schools are able to provide. This information can be useful in advocating for the allocation of new resources as well as for a better investment of existing resources.



NEW JERSEY

A Well-Defined Purpose and Long-Range Planning

The Music for All Foundation, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, New Jersey Department of Education, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey formed the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project with a clear purpose: “to gather, evaluate and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data regarding arts education in the state of New Jersey.” At the project’s inception, these organizations established a five-goal process for collecting and disseminating the data. The goals include: (1) disseminate a statewide survey to all schools; (2) connect this information to other state school and census data; (3) create an online arts education research center; (4) serve as a national model of state arts education research; and (5) create an ongoing program. By thinking through the collection and distribution of the data before beginning their research, the Arts Education Census Project developed a well-defined purpose that will guide its research and provide benchmarks that can be used to measure progress.



Appropriate Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

Once the goals and purposes for conducting survey research are established, the next step is to design the study itself, which can entail determining the scope of work, the methodology to be employed, and a timeframe and budget for executing it. The conclusions and impact of the study will depend largely on a carefully crafted and successfully implemented research design. Some principles that contribute to a well-designed study are described below.

6. Work with an oversight committee to design and monitor the survey.

Some form of oversight committee or advisory group offers an important opportunity to involve representatives from the education, arts, art education, higher education, business, government, or civic communities in the study. Among other functions, committee members can provide a “fresh set of eyes” and useful feedback during a pilot phase of the survey. Kentucky utilized a project oversight committee of state and local partner agencies for the initial design and construction of the written survey instrument. The committee’s primary focus was to identify relevant categories for exploration and inclusion in the study. In Washington, a consortium of arts educators, school administrators, arts agency personnel, and teaching artists helped to define key attributes of quality for the arts education components the researchers would investigate.

7. Seek research expertise early on.

Individuals with expertise in qualitative or quantitative research methods can provide invaluable assistance in the development of an appropriate and robust survey instrument. Typically, they also can perform sophisticated statistical analyses and assist in the interpretation of results. In Illinois, the research firm employed was able to devise an index that included measures for ranking arts education by district and county. Research analysts also organized a presentation of the data. To locate outside help, prepare a request for proposals (RFP) and distribute it to various research firms that specialize in practice-oriented or applied research.

8. Select the right survey tool and measures for the job.

Take care in identifying the indicators that will be assessed in the survey and, in most cases, tracked over time. For better or worse, it is generally understood that “what gets measured is what gets valued.” As shown below, what gets measured tends to be those indicators that are quantifiable and can be easily understood and interpreted by a wide audience. They also are more amenable to presentation in tabular form and most allow for school or district

12 Commonly Used Indicators to Assess the Status and Condition of Arts Education

- Time/frequency provided for arts instruction within school schedules
- Number and range of arts course offerings
- Percent of students participating in arts courses
- Number of credits in the arts required for high school graduation
- Percent of certified or licensed teachers to teach arts education
- Availability of professional development workshops and teacher planning time
- Frequency of arts-based field trips, residencies and extra curricular activities
- Presence of designated arts classrooms and use of technology in arts learning
- Evidence of alignment of arts instruction with state standards
- Presence of documented arts curricula
- Type of assessment tools for measuring student arts performance
- Amount of school and outside funding for arts programs

level comparisons. Decide the best way to collect responses — via the web, a paper-based survey, or both ways. Increasingly, online surveys are becoming the norm; if using an online survey bear in mind that human and technological aspects have to work in tandem. To supplement the quantitative data, consider gathering qualitative data through one-on-one or group interviews using a prepared question guide or survey protocol to gain insights into people's attitudes and perceptions about issues.

9. Identify the correct data source to answer questions.

Potential sources of information about the status and condition of arts education in a state are numerous. Who receives the survey and who should respond to it depend on what researchers want to know. Appropriate respondents for statewide data collected at the school or district level might include principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, arts consultants, or superintendents. Although the surveys in New Jersey and Washington went to chief school administrators and principals, it was recommended that they engage school or district arts staff in the process of information gathering. In Illinois, researchers used two slightly different versions of the same questionnaire — one designed for principals and the other for superintendents. Given the similarity in the findings, however, researchers question whether the effort involved in analyzing two separate data sets was worth the extra investment of time and resources. Some of the most difficult information to extract may be arts funding amounts and sources as they often are woven into multiple budget line items, or contributed by “soft” resources that can change from year to year.

10. Take steps to ensure an adequate response rate.

Among the actions that study leaders can take to increase the survey response rate are these steps:

- In the introduction to the questionnaire, inform respondents of the reasons for the study and who will see the results
- Let respondents know what information they will need to gather in advance in order to complete the survey
- Include a glossary that gives clear definitions of

even commonly used terms, like “school day” and “curriculum,” and include detailed instructions for completing the questions

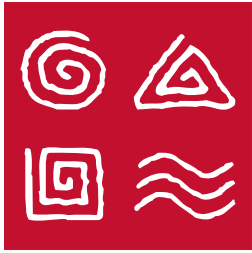
- Address the concerns of respondents up front: Assure them the survey results will not be used against them
- Keep the length of time needed to complete the survey short — 20 minutes is considered reasonable
- Provide letters of support or other validation from state leaders
- Send e-mail reminders or make follow-up calls as the response deadline approaches
- Be willing to apply pressure when needed. To ensure that data were gathered from all 2,400 schools in the state, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education mandated participation in the online survey.



KENTUCKY

Achieving a High Survey Response Rate

Even though they were not mandated to do so by the state Department of Education, 77% of Kentucky school districts completed the arts education survey that was developed by the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning with funding from the Kentucky Arts Council. The Kentucky Commissioner of Education distributed the survey to all 176 of the state's district superintendents via email, and superintendents also had the option of obtaining a hard copy version from the Collaborative. To make the survey process as efficient as possible, superintendents were told in advance what information they would need to have available in order to fill out the questionnaire. Two weeks before the survey deadline, the Commissioner sent a reminder email to the superintendents, and the survey deadline was then extended by two weeks to enable telephone calls to a sampling of non-respondent districts, which increased the response rate by 16%.



WASHINGTON STATE

Gathering Quantitative and Qualitative Data

When conducting their statewide arts education survey, researchers for Washington's Arts Education Resources Initiative developed a methodology that allowed them to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the state's schools. After distributing an online survey to all of Washington's K-12 principals, the researchers employed a collaboratively-defined "markers of arts education quality" tool to identify 32 schools across the state that exhibited key attributes. During these site visits, they interviewed principals, teachers, and arts specialists. The interviews allowed researchers to gather in-depth information about specific school-based solutions to commonly perceived challenges, such as tight building schedules, fluctuating funding resources, and arts curricula documentation processes, which cannot be easily collected in an online survey. The result of this methodological approach is a detailed body of evidence that not only paints a picture of arts learning in Washington schools, but potentially links schools wishing to maximize arts education programs with those that already have created viable solutions.

Effective Communications Strategies

Audience issues — how, what, and to whom information gets communicated — play a significant role in determining the relevance and usefulness of the survey results. Following are principles for developing an effective communications strategy that will help in reaching target audiences with information that makes sense out of oftentimes complex data.

11. Develop a communications plan to disseminate findings.

Treat the release of survey results like a campaign. Set aside sufficient resources for production and multiple means of communication with visuals that make it easy for elected officials and others to

absorb information. When developing a communications plan, think about how you can graphically convey the information for maximum impact. Often more data are collected than can actually be reported; it is not necessary to report the results of every survey question. Determine what is most relevant and newsworthy and highlight those findings in your report and communication efforts. Be cautious, however — any graph or data organizer can tilt a story. Consider doing a press conference launch of the results. It not only gets the attention of policymakers, but it also can be an opportunity for them and for schools to actively participate in the study and become a partner in future efforts.

12. Define target audiences.

Study leaders need to plan how they will communicate with key messages developed specifically for identified target audiences. Because most individuals can absorb only a handful of major findings that illustrate the status of the arts, create graphic and visual representations that send a message at a glance. Determine what kinds of indicators will resonate with particular audiences. For example, the sort of information that teachers, arts supervisors, superintendents, and principals need to evaluate and plan for their arts education programs may be different from what arts-active parents need to select a school with an arts-rich environment for their children or what advocates need to make the case for the arts with state education policymakers. In Washington, two distinct, but complementary, documents were created: one designed as an advocacy tool while the other contained in-depth research details and action steps.

13. Tap into existing data collection efforts.

In many cases, the data gathered through a statewide survey of the arts in education can be supplemented with information drawn from other sources. Part of the plan in New Jersey, for example, is to mesh survey results with existing educational and census databases to create the New Jersey Arts Education Information and Research Center. Using specially designed technology, the system will have the capacity to sort information according to what people want to know, generate individual reports, compare schools and districts, and geographically display the levels of arts education across the state.

14. Turn complex data into useful information.

To ensure the findings are easy to understand and interpret, study leaders need to be able to weave complex data together into timely information that people can use to make decisions. In Illinois, an index was created that scored the schools in each zip code based on 11 arts education measures. Researchers set up the variables so they could identify disparities in many different ways, including socioeconomic, geographic, or racial categories. The findings showed significant disparities were attributable to size; that is, the number of students the school or the district served, and whether the school was in a rural or urban setting.

15. Offer comparisons, but exercise caution in passing judgment.

In presenting statewide results, the “big trends” are often of most interest to general audiences. However, when tracking geographic disparities within the state, for example, it is necessary for comparative purposes to disaggregate the data into smaller units

ILLINOIS

Developing a Communications Plan to Publicize Survey Results

When Illinois Creates, a statewide coalition led by the Illinois Arts Alliance, began its statewide arts education survey of Illinois schools, it hired a public relations firm to develop a communications plan that would allow them to share the findings of the survey not only with school leaders and policymakers, but also with the media and public at large. After the state superintendents and principals completed the questionnaire, a press release summarizing the research findings was issued and a series of press conferences were held throughout the state. As a result of the firm’s proactive efforts, stories were placed in almost every major print, television, and radio outlet, including the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. The public relations firm also offered editorial assistance in the publication of the Illinois Creates’ *Arts at the Core: Every School, Every Student* report, which cogently describes the survey results.

of analyses, such as at the county, school district, school, or zip code level. Consider carefully the use of ratings and scales when it might lead to making judgments about “winners” and “losers.” The news can effectively alienate particular audiences you want to reach. In Illinois, even though the scores were low for some districts, study leaders identified places where things were working well within each district. Further, the study results offered recommendations for improving arts education in the state.

Direct Policy and Program Implications

Sound policy depends on the availability of information that supports good decision making. The findings can and should lead to recommendations that have direct and actionable implications for policy and practice. Following are some ways in which data or information generated through a statewide survey can serve as an advocacy and policy tool to effect change for arts education at the school or district level.

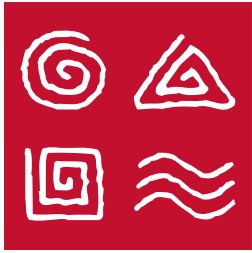
16. Use the results to serve as a wake up call.

Hearing the hard cold facts about the status and condition of arts education in the state can be a way to catch and keep the attention of key constituencies. In Illinois, based on geographic comparisons, the finding that the state ranked below national averages sent a particularly powerful message to the state’s education leaders. The state superintendent of education called the survey research a “wake up call” and vowed to use his “bully pulpit” to increase arts education in the schools. In Washington, the study stimulated a new evidence-based conversation among state leaders and educators about how to realize the long-range and short-range goals to support arts education curricula, professional development, and assessments.

17. Examine the policy implications.

The value of the survey results depends on how they are applied to the task of making or interpreting policy. In New Jersey, the findings will gauge how well individual elementary, middle, and high schools are adhering to a state mandate to provide a well-rounded arts education. In Rhode Island, as a result of the





statewide survey and other activities undertaken by the Task Force on Literacy in the Arts, study leaders were able to advocate for and successfully change the arts graduation requirement so that it now applies to all students, not just the college-bound. Additionally, schools in the state of Washington have been advised of how they can use data generated by the survey to argue for a line item in the district budget or for seeking support for arts programs.

18. Have a plan for technical assistance.

If possible, the state department of education should allow schools access to the data related to them and support the schools with needed assistance after the research findings are published. Providing this support may require better coordination of programming and allocation of resources in conjunction with more effective training and support to those who deliver these services. Based on the 2005 ECS state-by-state analyses, a handful of states require local districts to assess the arts; however, only Kentucky currently includes assessment in the arts as a component of its statewide assessment system. Partners there plan to use the survey findings as the basis for the development of a school-based self assessment instrument geared toward improving the delivery and quality of arts education programs. In Illinois, the state board of education created a grant program for arts education that will provide school districts with planning dollars to improve and enhance their arts education programs.

19. Reframe the issues around equitable access to a high quality arts education.

New ways of framing the policy issues to focus on fair and equitable access to a high quality and well-rounded education for all students can emerge from the survey research work. For example, study leaders in New Jersey wanted to know “who has access and who doesn’t” to arts instruction and learning experiences in light of the state’s mandate to provide a well-rounded arts education. In Rhode Island, arts learning is considered an integral component of the state’s “all kids to high standards” education agenda. Yet, the study found a lack of equity in physical and programmatic access to arts learning opportunities. In Illinois, researchers looked at meaningful correlations with drop out rates, attendance patterns, per pupil operating

expenditures, and other indicators to help make a persuasive case for arts education.

20. Build the capacity for implementation and sustainability.

Going forward, study leaders can be instrumental in the development of new community-based structures designed to implement the recommendations generated by the survey research. The study findings themselves can serve as a community building tool. In spite of Rhode Island being arts rich, there was no statewide coordination of arts learning for children and youth across the sectors of home, school, and community. Based on recommendations of the task force, the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network was created to coordinate the effort. Established as a public/private partnership, the network facilitates public engagement, assists in aligning resources, and facilitates dialogue and action between and among its partners. No existing organizations in the state had the capacity to address these challenges.

RHODE ISLAND

Using an Arts Education Survey as a Springboard for School Reform

Using questionnaires to gather baseline arts education data was only the beginning of the work of Rhode Island’s Literacy in the Arts Task Force. After surveying state schools, institutions of higher learning, and community organizations, the Task Force shared the survey results with these entities, allowing them to view the results and better understand the status of arts education in the state and their own work. The surveys and the dissemination of their findings were the catalyst for the formation of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network. This is a structure that can act as an advocacy organization to support and connect arts learning in home, school, and community, in order to promote equal access to arts learning in and out of school for all Rhode Island children and youth. The network uses five regional representatives to move its agenda forward and successfully advocated for a change in state graduation requirements that mandates that all students demonstrate proficiency in an art form before graduation.

Conclusion

Most of our current knowledge about the status and condition of arts education in the nation's public schools is drawn from anecdotes rather than empirical evidence. However, an increasing number of states either have undertaken or are in the process of conducting a comprehensive statewide survey of the quality and quantity of arts instruction and learning experiences in their school districts and schools. This research and policy brief examines the recent experiences of five such states — Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington — to distill the lessons learned in hopes that it will spur other states to action. The brief offers 20 principles, organized according to four basic research design components, which can serve to inform and guide their efforts.

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20/20 CHECKLIST

Principles for Assessing the Status and Condition of Arts Education at the State Level

Here are 20 principles — 20 actions to consider — in creating a vision for a state level research survey to assess the status and condition of arts education in your state.

- Frame research goals within a broader education context
- Define the problem to be addressed in policy terms
- Gain the support and commitment of state leaders
- Create an organizational infrastructure to guide the work
- Articulate explicit purposes for the study
- Work with an oversight committee to design and monitor the survey
- Seek research expertise early on
- Select the right survey tool and measures for the job
- Identify the correct data source to answer questions
- Take steps to ensure an adequate response rate
- Develop a communications plan to disseminate findings
- Define target audiences
- Tap into existing data collection efforts
- Turn complex data into useful information
- Offer comparisons, but exercise caution in passing judgment
- Use the results to serve as a wake up call
- Examine the policy implications
- Have a plan for technical assistance
- Reframe the issues around equitable access to a high quality arts education
- Build the capacity for implementation and sustainability





Appendix

Profiles of State Level Surveys on the Status and Condition of the Arts in Education in Five States

ILLINOIS

In 2004, the Illinois Arts Alliance (IAF) and the Chicago Community Trust launched Illinois Creates, an arts education initiative designed “to advocate for stronger state and local policies and corresponding budget appropriations to ensure that arts education is provided to students statewide.” In spring 2005, Illinois Creates and the research firm Metro Chicago Information Center performed a statewide study aimed at gaining an understanding of the status of arts education in the state and bringing to light barriers to high quality arts education. The research project included two questionnaires, one that was mailed to all 881 Illinois superintendents and one that was sent to each of the state’s 3,892 public school principals. Thanks in part to the endorsement and encouragement of the Illinois Principals Association and the Illinois State Board of Education, 234 superintendents (26.5%) and 751 principals (19.2%) across the state completed the survey, giving the researchers a sound representative sample of Illinois arts education practices.

In collaboration with Cypress Research Inc., Illinois Creates analyzed the survey results and compared them to State Board of Education data for schools and districts in order to ensure their validity. The results of the study were published in the 2005 report, *Arts at the Core: Every School, Every Student*. This publication summarizes the research findings and includes an index of arts education levels that scores schools in each state zip code based on 11 arts education measures. The report also offers eight recommendations for improving arts education in the state.

Since its inception and the completion of the research study, Illinois Creates has become a strong coalition of nearly 300 education, business, and

civic organizations and schools that works to raise arts education awareness to Illinois policymakers and the public at large about the importance of arts education as a core learning area.

http://www.artsalliance.org/ed_research.shtml

KENTUCKY

In 2005, the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) contracted the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning to conduct the first-ever statewide survey of arts education in Kentucky schools in order to “establish a set of baseline data which will inform the design of future KAC arts education programs and partnership efforts aimed at making the arts integral to education in the commonwealth.”

Distributed to the superintendents of all 176 Kentucky school districts, the survey was based on the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education’s 2001 report, *Status of Arts Education in Ohio’s School Districts*, and included six major categories of investigation: (1) Teaching, Support Personnel and Parent/Community Involvement; (2) Curriculum and Instruction; (3) Arts Core Content for Assessment and Program of Studies; (4) Residencies, Field Trips, Extra-Curricular Activities, Use of Resources; (5) Facilities and Technology; and (6) Use of State-Level Arts Resources. Respondents were emailed the survey and had the option of completing it online or in hard copy form. Of the 176 districts, 135 completed the survey for a 77% return rate that represented 100 of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

The Collaborative for Teaching and Learning published the survey results in a 2005 report entitled *Status of Arts Education in Kentucky Public Schools*. Survey data are being used in a variety of ways, including in the early planning of a new school arts self-assessment process to assist Kentucky schools with assessing their current comprehensive school arts program, against a set of performance standards, to determine where gaps exist and to plan for program improvement.

<http://artscouncil.ky.gov/>

NEW JERSEY

In 2004, the Music for All Foundation (MFA), working in partnership with the New Jersey State

Council on the Arts (NJSCA), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey (PTNJ), launched the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project, with additional support provided by NAMM, the International Music Products Association, the D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, and David Bryan of Bon Jovi. Building on the NJSCA's and PTNJ's 1996-98 Mapping Project, the Arts Education Census Project is working to "gather, evaluate and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data regarding arts education in the state of New Jersey." In April 2006, the NJDOE circulated online the New Jersey Visual and Performing Arts Survey to all 2,408 schools in the state. Two surveys were disseminated — one for schools that include grades K-6 and one for those serving students in grades 7-12. Both surveys included qualitative measures that examine arts education policies and instruction, as well as quantitative measures regarding student participation, enrollment, teachers, and certification. Ninety-eight percent of New Jersey schools and 100% of the state's school districts completed the online survey.

The next step in the Arts Education Census Project's plan is to join its survey results with existing educational and census databases in the state to create the New Jersey Arts Education Research and Information and Research Center (NJAERIC). The Center will offer researchers arts education data as well as detailed information regarding New Jersey school and state demographics, thereby providing "a more comprehensive view of each school, district, region, and the state." The Center will serve as an online clearinghouse for information about arts education in the state and will be the rallying point for the creation of a statewide arts education advocacy group to take the results of the Census Project and create actionable strategies to advance arts education across New Jersey. One of the goals of the NJ Arts Education Census Project is to serve as a national model that will encourage other states to perform similar studies.

<http://www.music-for-all.org/NJAEC/>

RHODE ISLAND

In 1999, Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Almond issued an Executive Order calling for the creation

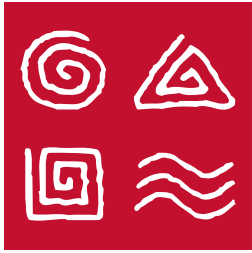
of The Governor's Task Force on Literacy in the Arts. In the Executive Order, the Governor charged the Task Force "to examine the relationship between education reform and the arts, and to make policy recommendations on how the arts can have a significant impact on the educational agenda of Rhode Island." As a joint effort of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Task Force was composed of 19 leaders from state arts, education, and business communities appointed by Governor Almond. In order to provide a foundation for its efforts to assess arts education in Rhode Island, the Task Force established the following four areas of inquiry: (1) What role can and do the arts play in overall education reform?; (2) What is the status of arts learning in schools and in community organizations? What is given, to whom, by whom, and to what effect?; (3) What is the status of teacher preparation and training, both for arts educators and classroom teachers, and for artists and community educators?; and (4) Is there a role for home and community in arts learning?

To address these questions, the Task Force reviewed current arts education scholarship, met with national arts education scholars, and held dialogue sessions with teachers, arts practitioners, parents, and students from around the state. The Task Force then surveyed state K-12 school districts, institutions of higher learning, arts educators, and community organizations in an effort to gather baseline arts education data. The results of these surveys were distributed to a variety of respondents, and the Task Force gathered their feedback regarding the data.

The culmination of the Task Force's efforts was the publication of the 2001 report, *A Framework for Action* and the creation of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network. The report summarized the findings of the Task Force's research efforts and identified three goals for literacy in the arts to be realized by 2008. Using five regional representatives, the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network works to support and connect arts learning in home, school, and community settings and has advocated for a change in state graduation requirements that mandates students demonstrate proficiency in an art form before graduation.

<http://www.riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.php>





The Arts Education Partnership is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic and government organizations that demonstrates and promotes the essential role of arts education in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools. The Partnership includes more than 100 organizations that are national in scope and impact. It also includes state and local partnerships focused on influencing education policies and practices to promote quality arts education.

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WASHINGTON

As a project of the Washington State Arts Commission (WSAC), the Arts Education Resources Initiative (AERI) was created in 2004 "to help schools step up to the challenge of bringing high quality arts education to all their students." A key component of the AERI project is the findings of a survey of Washington schools that was performed to gather baseline data regarding arts education practices and "to learn approaches and identify solutions that support implementation of arts education so students can meet state standards."

With funding from Washington Mutual, AERI researchers Gerri Spilka and Susy Watts developed an online survey, which was distributed to all K-12 principals in the state. Twenty-one percent of principals completed the survey, and their responses provided data regarding such issues as the intensity of student arts experience in schools, the amount of external support available for arts curricula development, school staffing and professional capacity to offer arts learning, and arts assessment practices.

After conducting the survey, WSAC, the researchers, and the statewide Arts Implementation Task Force (AITF) met and developed characteristics and attributes that mark a quality arts education. The researchers then visited 32 schools that exhibited at least one of these attributes and conducted interviews with principals, curriculum supervisors and coordinators, arts specialists, members of boards of education, general classroom teachers, and artists-in-residence. These interviews allowed researchers to gather both quantitative and qualitative data and added more detail to the findings of the survey.

Based on the survey and interview results, AERI published a 2006 booklet entitled *Arts for Every Student*, which describes the elements of effective, sustainable arts education in six areas: (1) Curriculum; (2) Assessment; (3) Teaching Capacity; (4) Collaboration; (5) Scheduling; and (6) Funding. In addition, the report provides action items and markers of quality for each of these areas and highlights the arts education practices of some of the surveyed schools.

<http://www.arts.wa.gov/aeri.html>

AEP Research and Policy Seminar on Principles for Conducting State Level Research on the Arts in Education

Sponsored by
The Spencer Foundation

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Chicago, Illinois

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From Anecdote to Evidence:

Assessing the Status and Condition of Arts Education at the State Level

By **Sandra S. Ruppert and Andrew L. Nelson**

Introduction

Among arts and education advocates, concerns about a “narrowing of the curriculum” have grown since the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A Center for Education Policy analysis found that in school districts across the country, the arts and other subjects are being squeezed out of the school day to make room for more math and reading. But beyond these basic grim facts, most of what we know about the current status and condition of arts education in the nation’s public schools is based on sketchy information and anecdotes rather than on solid empirical evidence.

There is a pressing need for better and more comprehensive state level information if the arts are to remain an integral component of what constitutes a well-rounded education for all students. Without it, it will be nearly impossible to make a convincing case for the arts, assess current environments, monitor compliance with NCLB, or ensure equitable access to existing programs. Good policy starts with good data and recently state policy leaders themselves have called for research-based evidence about arts education in their own and other states to help inform their decisions.

The field also recognizes the need. In 2004, the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) issued *The Arts and Education: New Opportunities for Research*, which noted “[r]eliable information is unavailable about student access to arts instruction, about the current and predicted availability of qualified teachers, and about student performance.”

Fortunately, the data-free climate of policy and decision making for the arts in education is starting to change. In a growing number of states, state level education agencies and arts organizations have joined forces with other critical partners to undertake comprehensive statewide surveys of school districts and schools. Among the things they are learning: how much time students spend studying the arts; who provides the instruction they do receive and under what conditions; and how much money is spent on school arts programs. The findings already have produced measurable results in some states, such as a change in the number of arts credits required for high school graduation or an added line item in the state budget earmarked specifically for arts education.

This research and policy brief draws on the experiences in five states, each of which has been the subject of a comprehensive arts education survey in recent years. The states are Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington. Distilled from the “lessons learned,” the brief provides 20 principles designed to inform and guide new and continuing arts education data collection and survey research at the state level. A primary audience is those who may be involved in advancing such efforts in their own states.

In addition to an analysis of relevant written materials from the five states, the brief was informed by the deliberations of a select group of arts education research, policy, and communications experts. At the invitation of the AEP, the group came together in June 2006 for a one-day seminar in Chicago, supported in part through a grant from the Spencer Foundation. Drawing on their direct involvement in the research and survey work in one of the five states, the seminar participants provided valuable insights into the broader context in which the studies occurred as well as into the outcomes that followed.



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The mission of the Arts Education Partnership is to demonstrate and promote the essential role of the arts in enabling every student to succeed in school, life and work in the diverse and global economies and societies of the 21st century.



20 Principles to Inform State Level Arts Education Survey Research

The 20 principles are organized according to four basic research design components: clear research goals and purposes, appropriate methods for data collection and analysis, effective communications strategies, and direct policy and practice implications.

Clear Research Goals and Purposes

A necessary first step is to define a clear set of goals and purposes for conducting a statewide survey of arts education. Key aspects of the process are described in the principles below.

1. Frame research goals within a broader education context.

In most cases, the survey research is part of a larger initiative related to education reform or school improvement efforts. To understand the state context, it helps to remember that NCLB directly affects education policy and practice at the state level. The law also recognizes the arts as a core academic subject, alongside mathematics, language arts, science, and several other subjects. Further, it requires a complete education for every child must include rigorous instruction in all core academic subjects. In addition to the federal law, 44 states and the District of Columbia have policies that define the arts as “core” or as an academic subject in statute or administrative code, according to a 50-state analysis conducted in 2005 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

2. Define the problem to be addressed in policy terms.

Determine opportunities and needs in the policy environment that will help bring about long-term, systemic change, rather than trying to win just the short-term battles. Like the vast majority of states, Kentucky has policies in place that require schools or districts to provide arts instruction for its students. One underlying research question

study leaders in Kentucky addressed in the baseline survey of arts education in the state was this: Are students being underserved in the arts? The answers allow them to draw inferences about levels of access to and participation in arts education programs in light of these policies and to make recommendations. It helps to have an understanding of how policy is made in the state and to ask if there is political support behind the study, and an amenable policy environment in which to conduct it.

3. Gain the support and commitment of state leaders.

Defining the problem in policy terms can make it easier to enlist the support of state leaders who can be influential in moving the study forward. The early buy-in of state arts and state education entities can be especially important. In Illinois, the state principals’ association and the board of education endorsed the research and encouraged survey participation. To ensure the study results have an impact beyond the advocacy level, the overall initiative should include key leadership who can steer the findings into the policy realm. Having an authority, such as a governor, state legislature, or state superintendent formally initiate the effort can add legitimacy to the policy findings and future actions. In Rhode Island, Governor Almond appointed 19 influential leaders from the arts, education, and business sectors to serve on his Task Force on Literacy in the Arts and to issue policy recommendations.

4. Create an organizational infrastructure to guide the work.

Forming a statewide steering committee that can assume “ownership” of the initiative can involve a number of steps: Make the process of organizing the study as transparent as possible and construct it with key stakeholders. Invite other organizations, including funders, to become strategic partners. Consider involving a government relations and/or public relations strategist at the beginning of the project. Their early input can be important to converting the resulting data into effective,

high-impact, clear, concise, and newsworthy message points that will resonate with elected officials, policy leaders, and the media. However, there is no substitute for the solid foundation a competent and credible staff provides, including a project director as the point person who pulls all the pieces together.

5. Articulate explicit purposes for the study.

Going forward, the stated purposes for the study will aid in determining the specific types of data to be collected, how they will be analyzed, and the manner in which they will be reported to appropriate audiences. Achieving a sharp focus may require making tough choices; it is unrealistic to expect the study to be all things to all people. These are among the commonly identified purposes for a statewide survey on the status and condition of the arts at the school or district level:

- **Raise awareness** — Survey results can serve as the basis for a statewide advocacy campaign or for seeking additional support. In Illinois, a stated purpose was to raise awareness among Illinois policymakers of the value of arts education and to advocate for stronger state and local policies, along with corresponding budget appropriations, to ensure that arts education is provided to students statewide.
- **Monitor the general condition of arts education** — The study can serve as a means for establishing a “baseline” for tracking and measuring progress in the state, in some cases, based on compliance with NCLB requirements. The indicators also can be included on school or district level report cards. Kentucky’s first-ever baseline survey was designed to provide a “snapshot” of arts education and to inform the development of future programs and partnership efforts.
- **Promote school or program improvement** — In New Jersey, one purpose for the survey was to provide schools and communities with tools and resources to strengthen student learning in the arts. The findings will be used to identify model arts programs and to serve as the basis for establishing a clearinghouse on arts education where schools can share ideas. In Washington, the foundation that helped support the

research was particularly interested in identifying school-based solutions to shared challenges in the funding, staffing, and scheduling of the arts in the day-to-day curriculum.

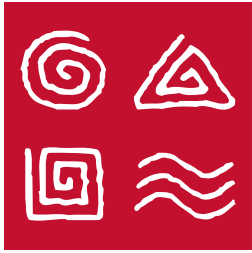
- **Inform policy decisions** — In Rhode Island, the governor-appointed task force was explicitly charged with “mak[ing] policy recommendations on how the arts can have a significant effect on the educational agenda” of the state.
- **Align resources** — While not typically a primary purpose, funding sources and levels for arts education and spending patterns over time can reveal disparities in the level of arts education that schools are able to provide. This information can be useful in advocating for the allocation of new resources as well as for a better investment of existing resources.



NEW JERSEY

A Well-Defined Purpose and Long-Range Planning

The Music for All Foundation, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, New Jersey Department of Education, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey formed the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project with a clear purpose: “to gather, evaluate and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data regarding arts education in the state of New Jersey.” At the project’s inception, these organizations established a five-goal process for collecting and disseminating the data. The goals include: (1) disseminate a statewide survey to all schools; (2) connect this information to other state school and census data; (3) create an online arts education research center; (4) serve as a national model of state arts education research; and (5) create an ongoing program. By thinking through the collection and distribution of the data before beginning their research, the Arts Education Census Project developed a well-defined purpose that will guide its research and provide benchmarks that can be used to measure progress.



Appropriate Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

Once the goals and purposes for conducting survey research are established, the next step is to design the study itself, which can entail determining the scope of work, the methodology to be employed, and a timeframe and budget for executing it. The conclusions and impact of the study will depend largely on a carefully crafted and successfully implemented research design. Some principles that contribute to a well-designed study are described below.

6. Work with an oversight committee to design and monitor the survey.

Some form of oversight committee or advisory group offers an important opportunity to involve representatives from the education, arts, art education, higher education, business, government, or civic communities in the study. Among other functions, committee members can provide a “fresh set of eyes” and useful feedback during a pilot phase of the survey. Kentucky utilized a project oversight committee of state and local partner agencies for the initial design and construction of the written survey instrument. The committee’s primary focus was to identify relevant categories for exploration and inclusion in the study. In Washington, a consortium of arts educators, school administrators, arts agency personnel, and teaching artists helped to define key attributes of quality for the arts education components the researchers would investigate.

7. Seek research expertise early on.

Individuals with expertise in qualitative or quantitative research methods can provide invaluable assistance in the development of an appropriate and robust survey instrument. Typically, they also can perform sophisticated statistical analyses and assist in the interpretation of results. In Illinois, the research firm employed was able to devise an index that included measures for ranking arts education by district and county. Research analysts also organized a presentation of the data. To locate outside help, prepare a request for proposals (RFP) and distribute it to various research firms that specialize in practice-oriented or applied research.

8. Select the right survey tool and measures for the job.

Take care in identifying the indicators that will be assessed in the survey and, in most cases, tracked over time. For better or worse, it is generally understood that “what gets measured is what gets valued.” As shown below, what gets measured tends to be those indicators that are quantifiable and can be easily understood and interpreted by a wide audience. They also are more amenable to presentation in tabular form and most allow for school or district

12 Commonly Used Indicators to Assess the Status and Condition of Arts Education

- Time/frequency provided for arts instruction within school schedules
- Number and range of arts course offerings
- Percent of students participating in arts courses
- Number of credits in the arts required for high school graduation
- Percent of certified or licensed teachers to teach arts education
- Availability of professional development workshops and teacher planning time
- Frequency of arts-based field trips, residencies and extra curricular activities
- Presence of designated arts classrooms and use of technology in arts learning
- Evidence of alignment of arts instruction with state standards
- Presence of documented arts curricula
- Type of assessment tools for measuring student arts performance
- Amount of school and outside funding for arts programs

level comparisons. Decide the best way to collect responses — via the web, a paper-based survey, or both ways. Increasingly, online surveys are becoming the norm; if using an online survey bear in mind that human and technological aspects have to work in tandem. To supplement the quantitative data, consider gathering qualitative data through one-on-one or group interviews using a prepared question guide or survey protocol to gain insights into people's attitudes and perceptions about issues.

9. Identify the correct data source to answer questions.

Potential sources of information about the status and condition of arts education in a state are numerous. Who receives the survey and who should respond to it depend on what researchers want to know. Appropriate respondents for statewide data collected at the school or district level might include principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, arts consultants, or superintendents. Although the surveys in New Jersey and Washington went to chief school administrators and principals, it was recommended that they engage school or district arts staff in the process of information gathering. In Illinois, researchers used two slightly different versions of the same questionnaire — one designed for principals and the other for superintendents. Given the similarity in the findings, however, researchers question whether the effort involved in analyzing two separate data sets was worth the extra investment of time and resources. Some of the most difficult information to extract may be arts funding amounts and sources as they often are woven into multiple budget line items, or contributed by “soft” resources that can change from year to year.

10. Take steps to ensure an adequate response rate.

Among the actions that study leaders can take to increase the survey response rate are these steps:

- In the introduction to the questionnaire, inform respondents of the reasons for the study and who will see the results
- Let respondents know what information they will need to gather in advance in order to complete the survey
- Include a glossary that gives clear definitions of

even commonly used terms, like “school day” and “curriculum,” and include detailed instructions for completing the questions

- Address the concerns of respondents up front: Assure them the survey results will not be used against them
- Keep the length of time needed to complete the survey short — 20 minutes is considered reasonable
- Provide letters of support or other validation from state leaders
- Send e-mail reminders or make follow-up calls as the response deadline approaches
- Be willing to apply pressure when needed. To ensure that data were gathered from all 2,400 schools in the state, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education mandated participation in the online survey.



KENTUCKY

Achieving a High Survey Response Rate

Even though they were not mandated to do so by the state Department of Education, 77% of Kentucky school districts completed the arts education survey that was developed by the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning with funding from the Kentucky Arts Council. The Kentucky Commissioner of Education distributed the survey to all 176 of the state's district superintendents via email, and superintendents also had the option of obtaining a hard copy version from the Collaborative. To make the survey process as efficient as possible, superintendents were told in advance what information they would need to have available in order to fill out the questionnaire. Two weeks before the survey deadline, the Commissioner sent a reminder email to the superintendents, and the survey deadline was then extended by two weeks to enable telephone calls to a sampling of non-respondent districts, which increased the response rate by 16%.



WASHINGTON STATE

Gathering Quantitative and Qualitative Data

When conducting their statewide arts education survey, researchers for Washington's Arts Education Resources Initiative developed a methodology that allowed them to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the state's schools. After distributing an online survey to all of Washington's K-12 principals, the researchers employed a collaboratively-defined "markers of arts education quality" tool to identify 32 schools across the state that exhibited key attributes. During these site visits, they interviewed principals, teachers, and arts specialists. The interviews allowed researchers to gather in-depth information about specific school-based solutions to commonly perceived challenges, such as tight building schedules, fluctuating funding resources, and arts curricula documentation processes, which cannot be easily collected in an online survey. The result of this methodological approach is a detailed body of evidence that not only paints a picture of arts learning in Washington schools, but potentially links schools wishing to maximize arts education programs with those that already have created viable solutions.

Effective Communications Strategies

Audience issues — how, what, and to whom information gets communicated — play a significant role in determining the relevance and usefulness of the survey results. Following are principles for developing an effective communications strategy that will help in reaching target audiences with information that makes sense out of oftentimes complex data.

11. Develop a communications plan to disseminate findings.

Treat the release of survey results like a campaign. Set aside sufficient resources for production and multiple means of communication with visuals that make it easy for elected officials and others to

absorb information. When developing a communications plan, think about how you can graphically convey the information for maximum impact. Often more data are collected than can actually be reported; it is not necessary to report the results of every survey question. Determine what is most relevant and newsworthy and highlight those findings in your report and communication efforts. Be cautious, however — any graph or data organizer can tilt a story. Consider doing a press conference launch of the results. It not only gets the attention of policymakers, but it also can be an opportunity for them and for schools to actively participate in the study and become a partner in future efforts.

12. Define target audiences.

Study leaders need to plan how they will communicate with key messages developed specifically for identified target audiences. Because most individuals can absorb only a handful of major findings that illustrate the status of the arts, create graphic and visual representations that send a message at a glance. Determine what kinds of indicators will resonate with particular audiences. For example, the sort of information that teachers, arts supervisors, superintendents, and principals need to evaluate and plan for their arts education programs may be different from what arts-active parents need to select a school with an arts-rich environment for their children or what advocates need to make the case for the arts with state education policymakers. In Washington, two distinct, but complementary, documents were created: one designed as an advocacy tool while the other contained in-depth research details and action steps.

13. Tap into existing data collection efforts.

In many cases, the data gathered through a statewide survey of the arts in education can be supplemented with information drawn from other sources. Part of the plan in New Jersey, for example, is to mesh survey results with existing educational and census databases to create the New Jersey Arts Education Information and Research Center. Using specially designed technology, the system will have the capacity to sort information according to what people want to know, generate individual reports, compare schools and districts, and geographically display the levels of arts education across the state.

14. Turn complex data into useful information.

To ensure the findings are easy to understand and interpret, study leaders need to be able to weave complex data together into timely information that people can use to make decisions. In Illinois, an index was created that scored the schools in each zip code based on 11 arts education measures. Researchers set up the variables so they could identify disparities in many different ways, including socioeconomic, geographic, or racial categories. The findings showed significant disparities were attributable to size; that is, the number of students the school or the district served, and whether the school was in a rural or urban setting.

15. Offer comparisons, but exercise caution in passing judgment.

In presenting statewide results, the “big trends” are often of most interest to general audiences. However, when tracking geographic disparities within the state, for example, it is necessary for comparative purposes to disaggregate the data into smaller units

ILLINOIS

Developing a Communications Plan to Publicize Survey Results

When Illinois Creates, a statewide coalition led by the Illinois Arts Alliance, began its statewide arts education survey of Illinois schools, it hired a public relations firm to develop a communications plan that would allow them to share the findings of the survey not only with school leaders and policymakers, but also with the media and public at large. After the state superintendents and principals completed the questionnaire, a press release summarizing the research findings was issued and a series of press conferences were held throughout the state. As a result of the firm’s proactive efforts, stories were placed in almost every major print, television, and radio outlet, including the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. The public relations firm also offered editorial assistance in the publication of the Illinois Creates’ *Arts at the Core: Every School, Every Student* report, which cogently describes the survey results.

of analyses, such as at the county, school district, school, or zip code level. Consider carefully the use of ratings and scales when it might lead to making judgments about “winners” and “losers.” The news can effectively alienate particular audiences you want to reach. In Illinois, even though the scores were low for some districts, study leaders identified places where things were working well within each district. Further, the study results offered recommendations for improving arts education in the state.

Direct Policy and Program Implications

Sound policy depends on the availability of information that supports good decision making. The findings can and should lead to recommendations that have direct and actionable implications for policy and practice. Following are some ways in which data or information generated through a statewide survey can serve as an advocacy and policy tool to effect change for arts education at the school or district level.

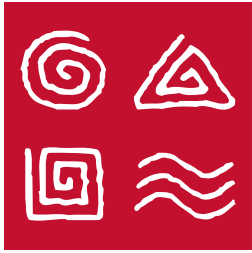
16. Use the results to serve as a wake up call.

Hearing the hard cold facts about the status and condition of arts education in the state can be a way to catch and keep the attention of key constituencies. In Illinois, based on geographic comparisons, the finding that the state ranked below national averages sent a particularly powerful message to the state’s education leaders. The state superintendent of education called the survey research a “wake up call” and vowed to use his “bully pulpit” to increase arts education in the schools. In Washington, the study stimulated a new evidence-based conversation among state leaders and educators about how to realize the long-range and short-range goals to support arts education curricula, professional development, and assessments.

17. Examine the policy implications.

The value of the survey results depends on how they are applied to the task of making or interpreting policy. In New Jersey, the findings will gauge how well individual elementary, middle, and high schools are adhering to a state mandate to provide a well-rounded arts education. In Rhode Island, as a result of the





statewide survey and other activities undertaken by the Task Force on Literacy in the Arts, study leaders were able to advocate for and successfully change the arts graduation requirement so that it now applies to all students, not just the college-bound. Additionally, schools in the state of Washington have been advised of how they can use data generated by the survey to argue for a line item in the district budget or for seeking support for arts programs.

18. Have a plan for technical assistance.

If possible, the state department of education should allow schools access to the data related to them and support the schools with needed assistance after the research findings are published. Providing this support may require better coordination of programming and allocation of resources in conjunction with more effective training and support to those who deliver these services. Based on the 2005 ECS state-by-state analyses, a handful of states require local districts to assess the arts; however, only Kentucky currently includes assessment in the arts as a component of its statewide assessment system. Partners there plan to use the survey findings as the basis for the development of a school-based self assessment instrument geared toward improving the delivery and quality of arts education programs. In Illinois, the state board of education created a grant program for arts education that will provide school districts with planning dollars to improve and enhance their arts education programs.

19. Reframe the issues around equitable access to a high quality arts education.

New ways of framing the policy issues to focus on fair and equitable access to a high quality and well-rounded education for all students can emerge from the survey research work. For example, study leaders in New Jersey wanted to know “who has access and who doesn’t” to arts instruction and learning experiences in light of the state’s mandate to provide a well-rounded arts education. In Rhode Island, arts learning is considered an integral component of the state’s “all kids to high standards” education agenda. Yet, the study found a lack of equity in physical and programmatic access to arts learning opportunities. In Illinois, researchers looked at meaningful correlations with drop out rates, attendance patterns, per pupil operating

expenditures, and other indicators to help make a persuasive case for arts education.

20. Build the capacity for implementation and sustainability.

Going forward, study leaders can be instrumental in the development of new community-based structures designed to implement the recommendations generated by the survey research. The study findings themselves can serve as a community building tool. In spite of Rhode Island being arts rich, there was no statewide coordination of arts learning for children and youth across the sectors of home, school, and community. Based on recommendations of the task force, the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network was created to coordinate the effort. Established as a public/private partnership, the network facilitates public engagement, assists in aligning resources, and facilitates dialogue and action between and among its partners. No existing organizations in the state had the capacity to address these challenges.

RHODE ISLAND

Using an Arts Education Survey as a Springboard for School Reform

Using questionnaires to gather baseline arts education data was only the beginning of the work of Rhode Island’s Literacy in the Arts Task Force. After surveying state schools, institutions of higher learning, and community organizations, the Task Force shared the survey results with these entities, allowing them to view the results and better understand the status of arts education in the state and their own work. The surveys and the dissemination of their findings were the catalyst for the formation of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network. This is a structure that can act as an advocacy organization to support and connect arts learning in home, school, and community, in order to promote equal access to arts learning in and out of school for all Rhode Island children and youth. The network uses five regional representatives to move its agenda forward and successfully advocated for a change in state graduation requirements that mandates that all students demonstrate proficiency in an art form before graduation.

Conclusion

Most of our current knowledge about the status and condition of arts education in the nation's public schools is drawn from anecdotes rather than empirical evidence. However, an increasing number of states either have undertaken or are in the process of conducting a comprehensive statewide survey of the quality and quantity of arts instruction and learning experiences in their school districts and schools. This research and policy brief examines the recent experiences of five such states — Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington — to distill the lessons learned in hopes that it will spur other states to action. The brief offers 20 principles, organized according to four basic research design components, which can serve to inform and guide their efforts.

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20/20 CHECKLIST

Principles for Assessing the Status and Condition of Arts Education at the State Level

Here are 20 principles — 20 actions to consider — in creating a vision for a state level research survey to assess the status and condition of arts education in your state.

- Frame research goals within a broader education context
- Define the problem to be addressed in policy terms
- Gain the support and commitment of state leaders
- Create an organizational infrastructure to guide the work
- Articulate explicit purposes for the study
- Work with an oversight committee to design and monitor the survey
- Seek research expertise early on
- Select the right survey tool and measures for the job
- Identify the correct data source to answer questions
- Take steps to ensure an adequate response rate
- Develop a communications plan to disseminate findings
- Define target audiences
- Tap into existing data collection efforts
- Turn complex data into useful information
- Offer comparisons, but exercise caution in passing judgment
- Use the results to serve as a wake up call
- Examine the policy implications
- Have a plan for technical assistance
- Reframe the issues around equitable access to a high quality arts education
- Build the capacity for implementation and sustainability





Appendix

Profiles of State Level Surveys on the Status and Condition of the Arts in Education in Five States

ILLINOIS

In 2004, the Illinois Arts Alliance (IAF) and the Chicago Community Trust launched Illinois Creates, an arts education initiative designed “to advocate for stronger state and local policies and corresponding budget appropriations to ensure that arts education is provided to students statewide.” In spring 2005, Illinois Creates and the research firm Metro Chicago Information Center performed a statewide study aimed at gaining an understanding of the status of arts education in the state and bringing to light barriers to high quality arts education. The research project included two questionnaires, one that was mailed to all 881 Illinois superintendents and one that was sent to each of the state’s 3,892 public school principals. Thanks in part to the endorsement and encouragement of the Illinois Principals Association and the Illinois State Board of Education, 234 superintendents (26.5%) and 751 principals (19.2%) across the state completed the survey, giving the researchers a sound representative sample of Illinois arts education practices.

In collaboration with Cypress Research Inc., Illinois Creates analyzed the survey results and compared them to State Board of Education data for schools and districts in order to ensure their validity. The results of the study were published in the 2005 report, *Arts at the Core: Every School, Every Student*. This publication summarizes the research findings and includes an index of arts education levels that scores schools in each state zip code based on 11 arts education measures. The report also offers eight recommendations for improving arts education in the state.

Since its inception and the completion of the research study, Illinois Creates has become a strong coalition of nearly 300 education, business, and

civic organizations and schools that works to raise arts education awareness to Illinois policymakers and the public at large about the importance of arts education as a core learning area.

http://www.artsalliance.org/ed_research.shtml

KENTUCKY

In 2005, the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) contracted the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning to conduct the first-ever statewide survey of arts education in Kentucky schools in order to “establish a set of baseline data which will inform the design of future KAC arts education programs and partnership efforts aimed at making the arts integral to education in the commonwealth.”

Distributed to the superintendents of all 176 Kentucky school districts, the survey was based on the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education’s 2001 report, *Status of Arts Education in Ohio’s School Districts*, and included six major categories of investigation: (1) Teaching, Support Personnel and Parent/Community Involvement; (2) Curriculum and Instruction; (3) Arts Core Content for Assessment and Program of Studies; (4) Residencies, Field Trips, Extra-Curricular Activities, Use of Resources; (5) Facilities and Technology; and (6) Use of State-Level Arts Resources. Respondents were emailed the survey and had the option of completing it online or in hard copy form. Of the 176 districts, 135 completed the survey for a 77% return rate that represented 100 of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

The Collaborative for Teaching and Learning published the survey results in a 2005 report entitled *Status of Arts Education in Kentucky Public Schools*. Survey data are being used in a variety of ways, including in the early planning of a new school arts self-assessment process to assist Kentucky schools with assessing their current comprehensive school arts program, against a set of performance standards, to determine where gaps exist and to plan for program improvement.

<http://artscouncil.ky.gov/>

NEW JERSEY

In 2004, the Music for All Foundation (MFA), working in partnership with the New Jersey State

Council on the Arts (NJSCA), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey (PTNJ), launched the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project, with additional support provided by NAMM, the International Music Products Association, the D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, and David Bryan of Bon Jovi. Building on the NJSCA's and PTNJ's 1996-98 Mapping Project, the Arts Education Census Project is working to "gather, evaluate and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data regarding arts education in the state of New Jersey." In April 2006, the NJDOE circulated online the New Jersey Visual and Performing Arts Survey to all 2,408 schools in the state. Two surveys were disseminated — one for schools that include grades K-6 and one for those serving students in grades 7-12. Both surveys included qualitative measures that examine arts education policies and instruction, as well as quantitative measures regarding student participation, enrollment, teachers, and certification. Ninety-eight percent of New Jersey schools and 100% of the state's school districts completed the online survey.

The next step in the Arts Education Census Project's plan is to join its survey results with existing educational and census databases in the state to create the New Jersey Arts Education Research and Information and Research Center (NJAERIC). The Center will offer researchers arts education data as well as detailed information regarding New Jersey school and state demographics, thereby providing "a more comprehensive view of each school, district, region, and the state." The Center will serve as an online clearinghouse for information about arts education in the state and will be the rallying point for the creation of a statewide arts education advocacy group to take the results of the Census Project and create actionable strategies to advance arts education across New Jersey. One of the goals of the NJ Arts Education Census Project is to serve as a national model that will encourage other states to perform similar studies.

<http://www.music-for-all.org/NJAEC/>

RHODE ISLAND

In 1999, Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Almond issued an Executive Order calling for the creation

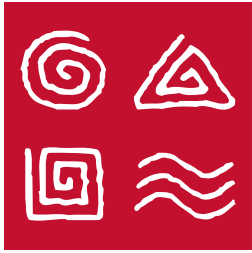
of The Governor's Task Force on Literacy in the Arts. In the Executive Order, the Governor charged the Task Force "to examine the relationship between education reform and the arts, and to make policy recommendations on how the arts can have a significant impact on the educational agenda of Rhode Island." As a joint effort of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Task Force was composed of 19 leaders from state arts, education, and business communities appointed by Governor Almond. In order to provide a foundation for its efforts to assess arts education in Rhode Island, the Task Force established the following four areas of inquiry: (1) What role can and do the arts play in overall education reform?; (2) What is the status of arts learning in schools and in community organizations? What is given, to whom, by whom, and to what effect?; (3) What is the status of teacher preparation and training, both for arts educators and classroom teachers, and for artists and community educators?; and (4) Is there a role for home and community in arts learning?

To address these questions, the Task Force reviewed current arts education scholarship, met with national arts education scholars, and held dialogue sessions with teachers, arts practitioners, parents, and students from around the state. The Task Force then surveyed state K-12 school districts, institutions of higher learning, arts educators, and community organizations in an effort to gather baseline arts education data. The results of these surveys were distributed to a variety of respondents, and the Task Force gathered their feedback regarding the data.

The culmination of the Task Force's efforts was the publication of the 2001 report, *A Framework for Action* and the creation of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network. The report summarized the findings of the Task Force's research efforts and identified three goals for literacy in the arts to be realized by 2008. Using five regional representatives, the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network works to support and connect arts learning in home, school, and community settings and has advocated for a change in state graduation requirements that mandates students demonstrate proficiency in an art form before graduation.

<http://www.riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.php>





The Arts Education Partnership is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic and government organizations that demonstrates and promotes the essential role of arts education in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools. The Partnership includes more than 100 organizations that are national in scope and impact. It also includes state and local partnerships focused on influencing education policies and practices to promote quality arts education.

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WASHINGTON

As a project of the Washington State Arts Commission (WSAC), the Arts Education Resources Initiative (AERI) was created in 2004 "to help schools step up to the challenge of bringing high quality arts education to all their students." A key component of the AERI project is the findings of a survey of Washington schools that was performed to gather baseline data regarding arts education practices and "to learn approaches and identify solutions that support implementation of arts education so students can meet state standards."

With funding from Washington Mutual, AERI researchers Gerri Spilka and Susy Watts developed an online survey, which was distributed to all K-12 principals in the state. Twenty-one percent of principals completed the survey, and their responses provided data regarding such issues as the intensity of student arts experience in schools, the amount of external support available for arts curricula development, school staffing and professional capacity to offer arts learning, and arts assessment practices.

After conducting the survey, WSAC, the researchers, and the statewide Arts Implementation Task Force (AITF) met and developed characteristics and attributes that mark a quality arts education. The researchers then visited 32 schools that exhibited at least one of these attributes and conducted interviews with principals, curriculum supervisors and coordinators, arts specialists, members of boards of education, general classroom teachers, and artists-in-residence. These interviews allowed researchers to gather both quantitative and qualitative data and added more detail to the findings of the survey.

Based on the survey and interview results, AERI published a 2006 booklet entitled *Arts for Every Student*, which describes the elements of effective, sustainable arts education in six areas: (1) Curriculum; (2) Assessment; (3) Teaching Capacity; (4) Collaboration; (5) Scheduling; and (6) Funding. In addition, the report provides action items and markers of quality for each of these areas and highlights the arts education practices of some of the surveyed schools.

<http://www.arts.wa.gov/aeri.html>

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