

Strengthening State-Level Arts Education Partnerships

- Arts Education Partnership
- The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
- National Assembly of State Art Agencies
- National Endowment for the Arts

Partnerships that can advance arts education for every student in a state are especially valuable.

Introduction

In 1999, the Arts Education Partnership published *Learning Partnerships: Improving Learning in Schools with Arts Partners in the Community*, a guide prepared at the request of the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts. Its purpose: to offer guidance to community leaders from the arts, education, business, civic and government sectors who seek to combine their talents and resources in partnership to address the arts and arts education needs of the young people of their community. The Arts Education Partnership promotes those partnerships in particular that engage multiple sectors of the community in an effort to provide arts education to students throughout an entire public school district or in a significant cluster of schools in the district.

Partnerships that can advance arts education for every student in a state are especially valuable. Therefore, the relationship among a state's arts agency, department of education and alliance for arts education are particularly important. These three entities represent statewide sources of funds, technical assistance and information. In a number of states, their collaboration at the state level has created or strengthened the leadership forums, events and activities through which other key partners and arts education leaders work in common purpose to improve teaching and learning of the arts at the community level.

The State Arts Agency arts in education coordinators have been meeting regularly and communicating as a professional development network for more than ten years through a collaboration between the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Kennedy Center has invested significant resources for more than twenty years in developing the leadership network of its state Alliances. The National Council of State Arts Education Consultants has met in the past from time to time but has had no ongoing central source of funding and coordination to support its development as a network.

Therefore, the Arts Education Partnership, in cooperation with four of its national partners, convened arts education consultants from state departments of education across the country on April 12 and 13, 2000, in Washington, D.C. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts provided the primary financial and institutional support for the meeting. Among its educational programs, the Kennedy Center coordinates the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network. The National Endowment for the Arts provided additional financial support. Representatives from these organizations as well as from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies joined the state arts education consultants for the discussions.

The meeting had three primary purposes as reflected in the agenda. One purpose was to chart a course for strengthening the state arts education consultants' leadership development network. A second purpose was to elicit guidance on how best to advance the working relationship of professionals in this network with their State Arts Agency colleagues and state Alliance colleagues. A third purpose was to consider how best to advance fully inclusive arts education partnerships in each state that could make a beneficial difference in the teaching and learning of the arts.

In a pre-meeting session, state arts education consultants received an overview of standards and assessment implementation projects of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Following a reception at the Kennedy Center and welcomes from the meeting sponsors, CCSSO Executive Director Gordon Ambach reviewed current priorities of his association, which include supporting the capacity of the federal government to play an appropriate leadership role in education improvement. Arts Education Partnership Director Dick Deasy then outlined the meeting agenda as follows:

- **Overview of the goals of the National Council of State Arts Education Consultants (NCSAEC)**
Leader: Cherry Gardner for NCSAEC
- **Exploring how State Departments of Education, State Arts Councils and State Alliances for Arts Education can strengthen statewide partnerships**
Overview: Derek Gordon for the Kennedy Center and Jonathan Katz for NASAA
- **What are the strengths of current partnerships? How can partnerships be made stronger? What are the challenges?**
Facilitators: Dee Hanson (KS), Gina May (WA), Martin Rayala (WI), Scott Shuler (CT)
- **Review of Survey of States on Status of Assessment**
- **Small Group Discussions of State Arts Education Consultants**
- **Action Steps for Communication Among State Arts Education Consultants**

To facilitate intensive analysis and discussion, the 46 attendees formed four smaller groups.

Meeting Agenda and Format

The evaluator's simple question is, "What happened to the kids?"

Discussion Summary

"Diverse" is the best word for describing the participants' experiences with partnerships. Some had been involved with effective partnerships for quite a while, some were working with partnerships in the developmental stage. Others had once participated in partnerships but had seen them decline, and one or two individuals reported no partnership involvement whatsoever.

From this gamut of experience, the representatives' discussions ranged widely and instructively. Their observations provide insights into why partnerships help advance arts education at the state level, why some partnerships are working well, why others are not, how to overcome obstacles, how to make a good partnership better, and what's next on their action agenda for improving arts education statewide and nationwide.

An effective, sustainable partnership makes documented progress toward fulfilling its goals. Different members of the partnerships may have complementary, subordinate goals, but improved student learning is the essential measure of good partnerships. The evaluator's simple question is, "What happened to the kids?"

– Learning Partnerships: Improving Learning in Schools with Arts Partners in the Community (1999, Arts Education Partnership)

How partnerships advance arts education at the state level

Partnerships, the state arts education consultants concurred, can help organizations:

- pool resources and ideas
- facilitate communication
- share workloads
- focus and prioritize
- expand their funding base and options
- bring a diversity of attributes, expertise, and perspectives to the challenge at hand
- gain political clout
- strengthen professional development

Arts education partnerships have a lot in common with marriage. Different entities come together with shared hopes and dreams and a willingness to work together for the common weal. But no matter how hard they both might try, if the partners are not "of one mind," or willing to yield some of their ground for the greater good, if they are not able to communicate without shouting or trust one another to do the right thing, they will spend more of their time wrangling over the problems of the partnership than resolving the problems of arts education.

The state arts education consultants cited many different examples of how state-level partnerships fail, but these factors were at the root of most troubles:

- **the lack of a full-time arts education consultant employed by the state education agency (SEA).**
Many of the arts education consultants wear multiple hats in the state education agency, overseeing not only a range of arts disciplines, but other curricular or programmatic areas as well. Many are very new to their roles and must focus on learning the expectations and processes of the state education bureaucracy. Not all state education agencies encourage staff to spend time on partnering.
- **misconceptions and mistrust due to differing institutional cultures, different understandings of what constitutes quality arts education, and a lack of sustained, effective communications.**
This problem results in multiple visions and goals and duplicated efforts. It is exacerbated by weak communication among state parties, their leaders and supporters statewide.
- **leadership burnout, which the consultants report is very common in all state agencies and which threatens the continuity of strong partnerships.**
State-level partnerships, they noted, cannot depend on any one individual for leadership.
- **limited access to training in new leadership skills,**
even though changing conditions in education (demography, technology, accountability) demand these skills from arts educators.
- **limited time and money**
to engage in the partnership process and the ability to see it through.

Why Partner?

Why Do Some Partnerships Fail?

There is another underlying obstacle which is very difficult for partners to remove in order to move forward. That is the difficulty in establishing the requirement that students and teachers must study the arts...

- **the common misperception that a partnership, once formed, will automatically work.**

- **lack of a basic model for successful partnerships.**

Without such a model or best practices, the state arts education consultants say there is no efficient way to develop a way to discuss common issues, such as the meaning of “arts education” and proof of content growth. They also point to difficulties in establishing working relationships, defining what is meant by “partnership,” and determining appropriate level of participating and accountability.

- **complicating cultural and environmental factors.**

Among the most problematic cited by the representatives are bureaucratic structures, traditional ways of handling situations, the inevitability of staff changes, resistance to state assessment, school reform issues, and internal and external political situations.

There is another underlying obstacle which is very difficult for partners to remove in order to move forward. *That is the difficulty in establishing the requirement that students and teachers must study the arts*, which would give the arts education agenda needed leverage. Graduation requirements, college admission requirements, and teaching licensing and certification standards must be adopted by policy bodies.

Successful partnerships, the participants observed, are strong in (1) resources, (2) communications and partnership relations, and (3) effectiveness and impact.

Resources:

The participants saw strong partnerships as bringing together abundant and diverse resources. These not only give partnering organizations an increased volume of materials to call upon but also result in a multiplied knowledge base from the diverse perspectives and attributes that each brings to the table.

More effective resource utilization also allows the partners to focus on the areas in which they have expertise and experience and not spend time in areas in which they have more limited information. Funding potential also increases as a wider variety of sources and streams can be explored.

Communications and Partnership Relations:

The arts education consultants described the partnerships they found particularly effective as collaborative support groups that allow for easy access to members and others within the alliance. These partnerships also produce clear and consistent information and allow members to develop consensus on issues and efforts.

Greater Effectiveness and Impact:

By pooling resources, building strong relationships, and working together, participants reported that partnership can succeed in bridging the gap between artists and those certified in arts education, creating the public perception of a strong arts community, and increasing influence and momentum.

They see effective and supportive partnerships evolving from partners who:

- **develop a common vision and align their message and efforts to address the learning needs of students as these are defined in national and state arts education standards.**

Their vision is rooted in what students need to learn and be able to do and the optimum conditions for that learning to occur.

- **establish processes that clarify conflicting or competing perspectives and needs and help forge a common agenda.**

- **insist that arts education should be the responsibility of educators.**

They must fight for policies that provide the resources and personnel to schools to ensure quality teaching and learning for all students. Educators should not be “let off the hook” by the implication that student learning needs can be met solely by arts programs provided by community organizations. Partnerships must involve education decision makers.

- **provide curriculum, assessment, and teaching methods to the artists and administrators of arts and cultural organizations working with schools.**

Again, there should be no implication that these organizations bear the responsibility for developing curriculum and assessments. Schools must provide the personnel and resources for this work to be done primarily within the education systems. Artists and administrators from the community need a solid grounding in

Why Do Other State-level Partnerships Succeed?

What Steps Can Partners Take to Increase the Odds of a Partnership's Success?

these areas so they can cooperate with and support the schools more effectively.

While partnerships can have different purposes, the consultants find they are more likely to have maximum impact only if their influence is focused on **key leverage points**.

Partnerships that are broad and inclusive, incorporating influential groups able to make an impact on policy, also tend to have impact. The consultants recommended that all influential players, especially education decision makers, help in shaping the vision and activities of the partnership.

Partnerships also have a greater than average chance of success if the grant makers in the partnership provide support for **collaborative planning** that engages teachers and administrators from the schools and artists and administrators from community organizations. The aim: to insure the development of quality programs that align with school standards and expectations.

They should begin, the consultants agreed, by starting with individuals first, engaging in one-on-one conversations before formalizing a partnership.

Prospective partners should learn more about the **day-to-day work of effective partnerships** and not focus solely on their success stories, which tend to leave out important information about challenges.

In fact, they said, **developing a model** for successful state partnerships could facilitate the partnership process. If states and organizations could draw on others' experiences, they would not have to start from scratch and would be able to focus their energies more effectively.

All participants agreed that it is critical to **choose your partners well**. Although they reported differences as well as similarities in their states' situations, they agreed that diverse sources – school boards associations, PTAs, state superintendents, business roundtables, deans of schools of education – can yield strong partners.

In addition to the State Arts Agency and state Alliance for Arts Education, those entities and fields they suggested as partnership candidates are:

- arts centers
- cultural organizations
- local arts agencies
- other states
- politicians
- state intermediary agencies
- other government agencies
- business
- funders
- museums
- parent groups
- professional associations
- universities

The consultants believe it is essential to:

- **establish a shared vision** among state agencies to balance arts education and arts-in-education and also to balance arts learning and learning in other subjects.
- **achieve equity in funding**—most state partnerships get most of their funding from one partner.
- **create statewide communication networks** (labels, e-mail, broadcast faxes, telephone trees) and perhaps link in to national networks (such as web sites, listservs, chats, etc.).
- **come together in regular meetings** to keep all partnership members informed and focused and to prevent the duplication of efforts.
- **conduct virtual meetings** via phone and e-mail (chat rooms) as well as teleconferences when meeting in person is not possible.
- **bring state leaders groups together regularly**; once or twice a year is recommended.
- **convene the state arts education consultants** as a group, perhaps in pre-sessions at the annual meetings of the National Art Education Association, MENC - The National Music Education Association, American Alliance for Theatre Education, or National Dance Education Organization.
- **build infrastructures of support, such as mentoring, for arts education consultants, many of whom are relatively new to their roles**. The culture and priorities of the state departments of education can isolate a consultant or limit the personal and professional support needed to grow and be effective.
- **try to gain more direct funding from the national level** to ensure that state Alliances for Arts Education keep staff full time and able to participate actively in statewide partnerships and conduct public information and public engagement activities to promote the adoption of effective arts education policies and practices.
- **advocate to make funding available for arts education from the U.S. Department of Education** (either as a special earmarked source of funding, or to make sure that arts programs are eligible for federal funding awards).
- **seek additional funding, such as another set of national Leadership Fund grants** (that fund state-level partnerships), especially to promote the adoption of effective arts education policies at the state and local level.
- **market state partnerships** and involve partners as important players at the state level.
- **make sure to give full recognition to all partners**, especially those providing funding support.
- **develop leaders among all partners, across the partnership.**
- **train state partnership leaders**. Leadership training is vital, and so is guidance on how to nurture partnerships. The arts education consultants feel that bringing artists, arts educators, arts organizations, and teachers together for leadership training is important in order for everyone to understand their commonalities and to focus on a shared vision. Bringing these diverse areas together also leads to a greater spirit of collaboration.
- **appraise all partners of available funding (federal and otherwise) and, as much as possible, commit to the same level of partnership support.**

Prospective partners should learn more about the day-to-day work of effective partnerships and not focus solely on their success stories,

What Steps Can Successful Partnerships Take to Succeed in Improving Arts Education for All Students?

- **increase funding and enable funds to reach those best positioned to advance arts education.**

State Arts Agencies fulfill a mandate to support artists and arts organizations, but getting funds and other resources to schools and educators will be key to success in advancing arts education. State consultants suggested that arts education advocates work collaboratively to broaden funding support for the work of state Alliances for Arts Education beyond what is provided by the Kennedy Center and each State Arts Agency so that the Alliances can provide more resources for arts education at the state and local levels.

- **urge national organizations to help their state affiliates understand the educational contexts in the individual states and the context and organizational culture in which state arts consultants work.**

- **stay focused on “what students should know and be able to do” in the arts, i.e. the arts standards should be a central focus for partnerships.**

Making a state arts education partnership work well is critical to its success, but it is important, the state consultants say, not to forget a partnership’s reason for being: **making arts education an essential part of each student’s education.**

The consultants set forth the following objectives as priorities for state arts education partnerships:

- **To make the arts a high priority within comprehensive educational improvement and reform efforts in the states and within the systems of statewide assessment and accountability.**

What gets measured and reported, the consultants point out, sets priorities for school districts, putting increased pressure on the arts to maintain their place in the curriculum.

- **To access and/or develop information on the status and condition of arts education in their states, including engaged time by students, qualifications of the teaching force, etc.**

One state is using the questions from the latest national *Fast Response Statistical Survey* to conduct a state survey and develop this information.

- **To recruit, prepare, and continue professional development of teachers of the arts.**

Aligning teacher licensing, pre-service education, and professional development is difficult but crucial. Arts associations can and do conduct professional development seminars, but, according to the state arts education consultants, they could use assistance and partners in making sure they are doing this broadly across states.

- **To achieve quality teaching in order to achieve quality implementation of state arts standards.**

Assessment is a powerful tool for determining that standards are being reflected in teaching practices. Other methods also are needed, particularly in states where there are no arts assessments. Absent

these methods, states have standards without accountability. The consultants want to ensure that teachers are keeping portfolio and performance assessments in order to show schools and local educators what assessment is and how to do it.

Partnerships also can – indeed *should* – bring **students** together to share and learn what other students are doing in the arts. Partnerships can create opportunities to share student work in all arts fields and recognize student success and teacher success. Incentives and rewards are needed.

The consultants cited the following areas for collaborative partnership projects:

- translating vocabulary into common terms
- addressing mismatch between standards and requirements/expectations
- sharing information about assessments (NAEP, SCASS, classroom-level) with various constituencies
- developing strategies to be proactive in other assessment-driven climates
- connecting to larger initiatives
- collaborating with universities
- developing strategies that go beyond the arts
- advocating arts education at the pre-K and kindergarten levels
- promoting dance and theater to achieve equity with music and the visual arts and thus provide students with a more comprehensive arts education
- focusing advocacy work on local school boards and administrators

...it is important, the state arts consultants say, not to forget a partnership’s reason for being: making arts education an essential part of each student’s education.

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the state level,
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