

Success Story: Everyday Arts for Special Education



2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education – Priority Area 1: Raise Student Achievement and Success

“EASE takes a one-size-fits-not approach, adapting the curriculum to meet specific needs of the classrooms and students in our partner schools.” – Stefanie Singer, EASE Project Director, Urban Arts Partnership



Photo courtesy of EASE.

Arts Education Partnership partner organizations work to promote opportunities for high-quality, arts-based and arts-integrated learning opportunities for all students in every classroom. [Inclusion of the arts in state plans](#) under the Every Student Succeeds Act elevates the critical role that arts teachers play in a well-rounded education for students with disabilities, and yet, Jenna Gabriel, manager of special education at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, highlights that across all art forms, [research](#) shows that the vast majority of arts educators are not adequately prepared for this important work.

Since 2010, Everyday Arts for Special Education has delivered an arts-integrated program designed to strengthen student academic and behavioral Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals through social emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and inclusive and differentiated instruction. EASE provides educators with a research-based curriculum, strategies, professional development workshops and coaching to support their instructional practices for students with diverse learning and behavioral needs. EASE intends to improve teacher effectiveness through training by using arts-based teaching strategies and enhance the use of arts-integrated approaches to increase students’ social-emotional learning and academic achievement.

EASE has trained over 1,000 teachers in the two largest special education districts in the country. Preliminary results from 2014-15 school year data and 2015 school year data show that:

- Eighty-four percent of students mastered communication goals indicated in their IEP.
- Seventy-five percent of students demonstrated increased motivation, attention span, self-confidence and positive risk-taking.
- Eighty percent of students mastered socialization goals indicated in their IEP.
- Seventy-five percent of students improved their selected academic goals indicated on their IEP.

Initially implemented in New York City, a Los Angeles school district has since replicated the EASE program, with a focus on inclusive policy changes within their district. In both cities, students made statistically significant improvements towards their IEP goals, as well as significant gains in communication and socialization skills.

Current Locations: New York City, Los Angeles

Populations Served: Pre-K Through Third grade students

Conditions for Success: The willingness of school district partners to accommodate the requirements of EASE's unique professional development model plays an important role in the program's success. Though potentially challenging for school leaders to accommodate, allowing for an EASE Coach to utilize a planning period once a week and releasing teachers for off-site professional development multiple times over the course of the year are essential to the effectiveness of the program. EASE has benefited from multi-year grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education, and collaborated with organizational and institutional partners, such as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts VSA division for training and coaching.

In developing this multi-year training model for EASE, sustainability was a primary focus. Teachers who advance through three years of the program gain the knowledge and experience needed to further train other teachers, paraprofessionals and parents at their schools or district-wide. This train-the-trainer model, part of the original program design, has resulted in a sustained community of practice, teachers taking on positions of leadership and possibilities for teachers to facilitate trainings at the district level. A focus on sustainability has helped to ensure that the program meets the needs of partner schools. The EASE program works diligently to fully understand the population that each school serves, have appropriately trained staff who meet these needs, and respond to the needs of school partners. This approach allows programs to align with other priorities at the school and district level.

Questions to Consider:

- How can community arts organizations partner with schools and districts to strengthen their professional development models for arts education?
- How will you build evaluation and research into program design?
- Are there creative funding streams, such as federal professional development grants, that schools and districts can use to support this work?
- How does the professional development and experience that invested teachers receive transfer to their classroom pedagogy?

Learn More:

[EASE at Urban Arts Partnership.](#)

[AEP's 2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education.](#)

[ArtsEdSearch studies on the intersection of the arts and special education.](#)

[ArtsEdSearch studies on teacher professional development and student success.](#)

Ed Note Guest Blog Post: ["Supporting Students With Disabilities by Preparing Arts Teachers."](#)

About AEP Success Stories

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is guided by [The Arts Leading the Way to Student Success: A 2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education](#). To achieve its goal to expand access to high-quality arts learning opportunities for all students, AEP gathers detailed information on Success Stories with the potential to be replicated in communities across the country.

Updated: Sept. 5, 2018.