Identifying Promising Approaches for Providing Arts Education Via Community Partnerships

SWOT Analysis Summary

A diverse group of DC arts education professionals met on January 26, 2011 for the Arts Education Convening hosted by the DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative.

Laying the foundation for advancing a comprehensive, high-quality arts education plan begins with a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges we face doing this work in Washington, DC, 2011. Arts Education Convening Participants worked together to establish a shared understanding of the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder their progress.

Small group sessions worked under the framework of, *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges.* The first two categories of *Strengths and Weaknesses*, are internal factors while the latter, *Opportunities and Challenges*, are external.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of general themes within the community of arts and humanities education providers as a whole, identified by the analysis notes taken in the four SWOT break-out groups. The themes identified are:

STRENGTHS

- **Organizational Capacity**: The arts and humanities education community is comprised of solid institutions with strong programs; curriculums are strong and flexible, able to adjust to meet the needs of teachers and schools. Organizations are confident about their human resource capacity: teaching artists and program administrators are well-trained.
- **Solid networks**: The arts and humanities education community as a whole has developed solid networks and partnerships, and shares a common purpose in serving students and teachers.
- **Funding**: Funders (government, foundation, private) have a positive track record of funding arts education in the District.

WEAKNESSES

- **Organizational Capacity:** Within larger organizations, the education department may be small, and not the priority of the organization as a whole.
- **Communication and Messaging**: The community does not communicate effectively to outside constituencies (parents, school administration, policy-makers) regarding the importance of arts and humanities education, or what programs are available to students and teachers. Better, more consistent messaging needs to be developed and delivered. Likewise, the community should develop better mechanisms for internal communication, to ensure we stay on track with our shared purpose.
- **Advocacy**: The community needs more folks devoted solely to advocacy, functioning outside of the arts organizations, to lobby at the local and national levels.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Location:** The District is the nation's capitol, and an international city. It's rich with cultural and has historical resources. Location creates opportunities in other categories.
- **National and local climate**: Parent and teacher interest in arts and humanities education, the Creative Economy, STEM movement in education, 21st Century Learning Skills focus, the ASCD

Whole Child Initiative all create opportunities for the arts and humanities education community to develop partnerships, build programs/curriculums, leverage existing funding resources and find new funding sources.

- **Partnerships:** Because of the location, partnerships with non-arts and humanities organizations are abundant. Unique and creative partnerships can strengthen programs, enhance impact/reach, and leverage funding.

CHALLENGES/THREATS

- **Funding**: Not enough support for program evaluation to ensure continued program excellence and relevance to the needs of students/teachers. Lack of long-term funding results in too much energy and resources within an organization being devoted to finding program support. Competition amongst organizations for too few funding sources. Funding trends can be tenuous.
- **Partnerships**: Partnerships with schools can be challenging if priorities do not match between the cultural organization and the school or school district-one example is how testing impacts program partnerships. Access to data to improve programs and leverage programs is often unavailable from schools or school districts. School-based management of OST programs at schools is often fragmented, making partnership difficult. School and school district turn-over weakens partnerships.
- **Communication/Messaging:** Negative public perception about the importance of the arts and humanities in the curriculum. Better messaging (see weaknesses-internal) will help alleviate this external challenge.
- **Human Resources-Teacher training:** Lack of adequate training for classroom teachers impacts their comfort level at integrating arts and humanities in the curriculum, or working with partners. Specialists need easier paths to certification.

Data Collection Summary

In order to ensure a comprehensive strategic plan will be grounded in *reality*, we must inventory the current education partnerships in DC schools. Effective data collection is a critical step and provides a valuable baseline for measuring progress in future years. These break-out groups identified useful data categories and how the information can really make a difference in the landscape of DC arts education.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of general themes within the community of arts and humanities education providers as a whole, identified by the analysis notes taken in the four Data Collection break-out groups.

Break-out groups began by identifying what data they wanted to collect. In essence, what did the participants want to know about arts and humanities education in DC schools? The themes identified are:

CURRENT ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Presently, arts education programming is unevenly distributed across the city. In order to reach underserved students and schools, while also avoiding duplicating services, the DC arts and humanities community needs to inventory current arts programming. This data will answer the following questions from the break-out sessions:

- What types of providers are working in the schools (artists, volunteers, school staff)?
- Where are the "holes" in the school's arts programming per school/ward?
- How can we identify and reach the schools that have the least access to the arts?
- How can we boost communications so that there is cross fertilization and coordination across arts education providers both in and out of school?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Current arts education funding trends are an important factor in determining and achieving a better arts education for DC public school children. Break-out sessions identified the need for more readily accessible funding information. The following questions were asked in the break-out sessions:

- What are the state, federal, local and individual funders for arts organizations?
- How are allocated funds being spent?

Having identified what data needs to be collected, break-out groups then discussed how they would then leverage the subsequent information, how the data would be put to use.

CREATING AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

More information brings more awareness and understanding of arts education. Arts educators can leverage this awareness to create more support for the cause. Below are a few strategies outlined in the break-out sessions:

- Gather data that shows impact of arts education: graduation rates, attendance rates, positive school climate as well as individual student progress over time. The Collaborative can break

down defensive walls of organizations—help facilitate a process to share our data, funding information and teacher information
- Awareness building: create a case to parents, individual donors, and the media. Once gaps in resources and access are identified and need established based on evidence of effectiveness/impact, mobilize parent and community advocates.

SECURING MORE FUNDING

Arts Educators can then use this data to increase and secure funding, and develop a strategic, data-driven approach to providing services.

IMPROVING PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Arts educators can take the new wealth of information to evaluate and improve their current program offerings. Community partnerships can be strengthened as well as more successful collaboration between organizations and DC schools. More data could be used in the following ways:
- Use case studies to make our programs better.
- By looking at other programs that collaborate with the DCPS, we can evaluate their successes and borrow their models.
- Provide equitable access to the arts for all schools.
- Connect teachers to offered programs.
- Make sure we are not duplicating our services.