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Improving arts access through multisector collaborations

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ABSTRACT

Schools in the United States have encountered substantial cuts to arts education, prompting them to partner with arts organizations to provide arts learning opportunities. Arts education advocates see potential benefits and drawbacks to these arrangements. While they can provide schools with valuable resources, such arrangements could further reduce the status and oversight of the arts in schools by outsourcing to external providers. One strategy that may provide benefits without these potential drawbacks is the facilitation of partnerships through multisector collaborations. From our research in Houston, we find that multisector collaborations can be effective at improving student arts access through partnerships that address schools' needs, while also helping schools secure arts resources and facilitating efforts that are more mutually beneficial.

KEYWORDS

Arts education; education policy; public-private partnerships

Introduction

The decline of the arts in U.S. schools since the late twentieth century has inspired creative solutions for their preservation (Remer, 1996; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008). The most recent edition of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), presents opportunities and incentives for schools to restore arts learning opportunities lost in the wake of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001). These developments have led to increases in schools' partnerships with arts organizations, cultural institutions, and teaching artists as an increasingly popular strategy for addressing deficits (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Perille, 2016). Partnerships can provide schools with arts education resources and expertise they otherwise lack. Studies of these efforts have found them to be effective at increasing students' arts learning opportunities and improving educational outcomes (e.g., Bowen & Kisida, 2022; Gibson, 2016; Silk, 2016). However, some arts education scholars and advocates are wary that partnerships could entice policymakers to outsource arts learning as a cost-cutting measure that ultimately diminishes the status of the arts in schools (Hall & Thomson, 2021; Hanley, 2003; Heilig et al., 2010; Hickmore, 2019; Robinson, 2015; Wolf, 2000).

Arts organizations can help improve the quantity, quality, and diversity of schools' arts learning opportunities. Studies have found that they can successfully promote positive educational outcomes (Bowen & Kisida, 2022; Ludwig et al., 2017; Silk, 2016). These opportunities can also expand pathways for teaching-artists that increase the diversity of students' experience. However, a potential tradeoff is the substitution of arts organization program offerings for full-time certified arts teachers (Bernard, 2020; Hanley, 2003; Robinson, 2015). Substitutions could lead to net reductions in arts learning opportunities and diminish the presence and influence of the arts in everyday schooling (Hall & Thomson, 2021). Arts partnerships often take place as simple transactions, where artists, organizations, and cultural institutions effectively act as arts education vendors. These vendor-like exchanges could make for less-sustained arts learning with programs, especially if they are misaligned with schools' educational objectives (Jones, 2020; Rowe et al., 2004).

Our studies and engagement with arts partnerships suggest that their benefits are too great to forgo, but that they function better as complements, rather than substitutes, to regular, in-school arts instruction. Cultivating sustainable relationships between schools and outside arts organizations, cultural institutions, and teaching-artists that ensure their mutual needs are met

is challenging. An increasingly popular strategy that can be effective at facilitating more symbiotic relationships is the formation of multisector arts education collaboration efforts. These long-term efforts bring together school leaders, arts organizations, cultural institutions, teaching-artists, and other arts education stakeholders, including government officials, philanthropic organizations, researchers, and parent organizations. Such collaborations can help identify and leverage mutual benefits while addressing potential tradeoffs.

Multisector collaborative efforts can improve alignments between partnership program offerings and school objectives through regular engagement with arts education stakeholders. Regular and consistent engagement and communication promotes a sense of shared mission to improve students' arts access. As a result, these coordinated efforts lead to remarkable increases in arts learning with special attention to addressing inequities.

Developing and maintaining multisector collaborative efforts is challenging, but when arts education stakeholders work together in these longer-term, sustained endeavors, they can achieve their shared mission to improve arts education for students and stave off potential negative tradeoffs. In this article, we provide additional background on arts partnerships, give an overview of the initiation and development of multisector arts education collaborations, further discuss controversies and policy-relevant tradeoffs, and use the case of Houston to share insights and firsthand experiences about how these efforts promote arts access.

Policy context

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) has the potential to improve the state of arts education. It has placed the arts alongside reading and math when defining a "well-rounded education." This classification largely maintains the status of arts education, as the arts were considered a "core subject" under similar language under *No Child Left Behind* (Zubrzycki, 2015). The *Every Student Succeeds Act* also returned authority over setting accountability standards and indicators of academic success back to the states. This federal legislation requires states to broaden their measures of school quality and effectiveness and to rely less heavily on math and reading standardized test scores (Batel, 2017; Jochim, 2017). As a result, the majority of states have adopted measures that are better aligned with arts learning objectives; four states (Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, and Michigan) now hold schools accountable for whether students have access to arts instruction (English, 2017; Erwin et al., 2021; Portz & Beauchamp, 2022).

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* also includes Assistance for Arts Education, intended to promote arts education, with an emphasis on "disadvantaged students and students who are children with disabilities." Among other items, the program offers grants for "outreach activities that strengthen or expand partnerships among schools, local education agencies, communities, and centers for the arts," and encourages coordination between "public or private cultural agencies, institutions, and organizations, including museums, arts education associations, libraries, and theaters" (ESSA, Section 4642.b.1). This assistance, coinciding with increased local autonomy and expansion of school accountability measures, could enhance the ability for districts and schools to explore the opportunities to form partnerships with community-based arts organizations.

The rise of arts partnerships

An emphasis on accountability testing in "core subjects" became widespread with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), requiring states to issue assessments with sanctions for schools that fail to make "adequate yearly progress." The implementation of *No Child Left Behind* has been linked with decreases in time and resources for the arts and other non-tested subjects (Bassok et al., 2016; Government Accountability Office, 2009; West, 2007). Schools with higher percentages of lower socioeconomic status, Black or African-American, and Hispanic or Latine student populations have also been shown to have lower levels and steeper negative trends in access to arts education (Government Accountability Office, 2009; Stringer, 2014). The loss of these opportunities has a ripple effect. Arts experiences during childhood are strongly predictive of adulthood arts participation and engagement, meaning that decreases have lasting effects (Kisida et al., 2014; Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011; Reay, 2009).

Partnering with local arts organizations has become an increasingly common strategy for addressing these declines in schools (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Perille, 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics' (2009–10) national survey of school arts resources found that 42% of U.S. public schools partner or collaborate with cultural or community organizations, 31% with individual artists, 29% with museums, and 26% with performing arts centers (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011). Partnerships vary in their objectives and scope and employ a broad range of disciplines, strategies, and modalities for providing arts learning opportunities, including field trips, teacher-artist residencies, in-school artist performances, before/after school program offerings, and teacher professional development (Bowen & Kisida, 2017).

Multisector arts education collaboration efforts

The notion of multisector, concerted efforts to facilitate sustainable, long-term alliances between schools and arts organizations dates (at least) to 1992 with the formation of the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education. Chicago has served as the model collaborative effort and provided lessons for a new crop of school-community partnerships (Bowen & Kisida, 2017). These collaborations typically consist of arts organizations and cultural institutions, school administrators, policymakers, philanthropists, and arts education advocates (Perille, 2016). They employ a broad range of strategies, including increasing public school arts education funding and course availability through public advocacy, outreach efforts to build community support, awarding grants to schools and classroom arts instructors, city-wide data collection, and cultivating partnerships with cultural organizations that provide instructional services (Bodilly & Augustine, 2008; Gibson, 2016; Perille, 2016). Similar collaborations have taken place in Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Madison, New Orleans, and Seattle (Bowen & Kisida, 2017).

Studies of arts partnerships have primarily examined their impacts on the provision of educational resources. These investigations have found that partnerships are effective at increasing arts resources and providing enriching learning experiences in schools with arts education deficits. These coordinated efforts have expanded the number of outside school-arts organizations, cultural institutions, and teaching-artists working with schools, increased student arts course enrollments, and increased arts education funding (Bowen & Kisida, 2022; Gibson, 2016; Perille, 2016; Silk, 2016).

Studies have also investigated challenges and concerns regarding the development and implementation of arts partnerships. Cooperative efforts between a myriad of stakeholders require navigations through diverse, sometimes conflicting, motivations and objectives to accomplish shared goals (Fahy & Kenny, 2022). Schools and arts organizations often struggle to form relationships that go beyond simple transactions (Rowe et al., 2004). Evidence of this struggle has been reflected in schools showing a lack of interest in working with outside arts organizations, cultural institutions, and teaching-artists beyond the provision of their programs, with communications being usually confined to resolving logistical matters with program operations (Rowe et al., 2004).

A critical ingredient to the success of arts partnerships has been the use of coordinators who are knowledgeable of school needs and arts organization resources

(Bodilly & Augustine, 2008; Fahy & Kenny, 2022; Rowe et al., 2004; Silk & Augustine, 2017). These coordinators serve as intermediaries that maintain regular communications with school leaders and arts organizations to serve as hubs of information about respective needs, objectives, and available resources. A key outcome is the cultivation of long-term relationships with leaders across different sectors (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Fahy & Kenny, 2022).

The Houston context

Houston's multisector collaboration efforts formally commenced in 2013. This initiative has included Houston Independent School District (HISD) administrators, a broad set of more than 50 cultural institutions and arts education organizations, representatives from the mayor's office, local philanthropies, researchers, and a "backbone" organization that has facilitated the collaborative efforts. Their continued focus has been increasing arts access for students, with an emphasis on closing opportunity gaps. A critical early step was the collection of school-level arts educational resource data throughout HISD. The coalition assessed arts educational resources for each of HISD's elementary and middle schools in terms of the number of certified arts specialists, before- and after-school arts programs, and the number of partnerships with outside arts organizations, cultural institutions, and teaching-artists. This inventory revealed that 29% of HISD's 209 elementary and middle schools had no full-time arts specialist; 30% did not provide any arts programming outside of regular school hours; and 39% had either one or no arts partnerships with community arts organizations (HISD, 2014).

The findings from the school inventory motivated stakeholders to prioritize an initiative that would provide arts learning opportunities through partnerships for HISD elementary and middle schools with the lowest levels of arts resources. These partnerships would provide teaching-artist residencies, on-campus and off-campus professional artist workshops and performances, after-school programs, and field trips. Schools' participation in this initiative was voluntary, and to be considered, principals had to commit to its mission, engage in strategic arts planning with directors, designate an arts liaison to coordinate programs, participate in teacher and principal arts-integration professional development, and attend peer-network mentoring sessions. Principals were required to commit between \$1 to \$10 per student from their budget and a private local philanthropic institution provided a \$1:\$1 match for their financial commitment.

Fifty-five percent of the students that these schools served were designated as “economically disadvantaged” by the Texas Education Agency’s Public Education Information Management System, meaning that their household income was at or below the federal poverty line, they were eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or other public assistance, were recipients of a Pell Grant or comparable state program of need-based financial aid, were eligible for programs assisted under Title II of the Jobs Training Partnership Act, or were eligible for food stamps. Thirty-three percent of the students enrolled in these schools were free- or reduced-price lunch eligible (but did not meet the State’s definition of “economically disadvantaged”). In terms of racial/ethnic demographics, 31% of these school students were identified as African-American, 62% Hispanic, and 3% white. Seven percent of students were receiving special education program services, and 36% were participating in English Language Learner programming. Thirty-three percent of these students were identified as “proficient,” or meeting state-recommended standards in reading, and 33 were proficient in math. Prior to participating in the initiative, these schools had, on average, one full time equivalent arts teacher, and 2.8 partnerships with arts organizations and institutions.

Assessing partnership tradeoffs and benefits of multisector collaborations

Evidence for benefits

In this section, we review findings from our randomized controlled trial investigation paired with qualitative feedback we received from school and arts leaders to identify and assess major tradeoffs that result from these multisector collaborative efforts. In addition to a wealth of student- and school-level administrative data, our research team was granted access to conduct three 90-minute, in-person focus groups with purposive samples of school principals (5), teachers (6), and arts organization administrators (3), two years into their engagement in this initiative. In these focus group sessions, we asked participants to discuss and interact with each other about providing arts learning opportunities at their schools, obstacles for providing these opportunities, and their experiences from engaging in this multisector collaboration.

Student effects

A substantial portion of the evidence we have on the effectiveness of arts education comes from evaluations of effects on student outcomes. This evidence

demonstrates that arts learning provided through school partnerships with arts organizations can have positive educational impacts. Arts exposure provided through a museum’s school partnership program improved students’ critical thinking about works of art, historical empathy, tolerance, attitudes toward art, and desire to acquire cultural capital (Bowen et al., 2014; Greene et al., 2014; Kisida et al., 2014; Kisida et al., 2016). Live theater attendance positively affects historical empathy, tolerance, and social perspective taking (Greene et al., 2018; Kisida et al., 2020). The arts education literature also finds evidence of improved attendance and disciplinary outcomes (Bowen & Kisida, 2023; Erickson et al., 2022; Lacoé et al., 2020). Similarly, El Sistema’s afterschool music program has been found to positively affect students’ self-control and behavior (Alemán et al., 2017).

From our investigation of Houston’s multisector collaborative effort, we found that randomly assigning increases in arts educational opportunities, provided through partnerships, improved student discipline, writing achievement, and emotional empathy. Moreover, students enrolled in elementary schools, which where the primary focus at the time of this investigation, also experienced positive effects in their school engagement, college aspirations, and cognitive empathy (Bowen & Kisida, 2022).

Increasing arts resources

In terms of impacts on inputs, Houston’s multisector collaborative initiative succeeded in substantially increasing schools’ arts resources and partnerships. In the five years that followed the piloting of the initiative, the collaborative effort raised over \$1 million to provide arts partnerships for over 90,000 students, with a strong emphasis on students enrolled in Title I schools (Arts Connect Houston, 2021; Bowen & Kisida, 2022). According to campus inventory data, schools averaged an increase of five arts partnerships (Bowen & Kisida, 2022). In addition to funding from a philanthropic organization to support the provision of arts learning opportunities, the initiative also facilitated regular communication between teams of directors and school principals to assist schools with selecting and scheduling partnership programs.

These partnerships made it possible for schools to increase variety in their educational offerings. Cuts to arts funding have meant declines in how many arts teachers schools employ, and reductions in arts teachers constrain personnel expertise and diversity and, consequently, decrease the types of arts learning opportunities that schools can provide their students. A school may be forced to choose between arts teachers with

expertise in music and visual arts at the expense of providing students opportunities to engage in theater or dance. In addition to expanding arts disciplines made available to students, we found evidence of increased the modalities and diversity in the forms and types of arts learning experiences that students receive relative to what their schools can provide on their own.

Houston's multisector collaborative efforts assisted in ensuring that students received a diverse array of arts learning experiences. The collaborative's director and staff encouraged principals to budget for a diversity of programs such that all major arts disciplines were included: dance, music, theater, and visual arts. As a result, fifty-four percent of these experiences were primarily theater-based, 12% dance, 18% music, and 16% visual arts; 33% of these experiences were provided through teaching-artist residencies, 31% were on-campus professional artist performances, 27% were field trip experiences, and 9% were programs provided outside of regular school hours (Bowen & Kisida, 2022).

The principals and teachers in our focus groups were all in agreement about the incredible, diverse array of learning opportunities these efforts provided and their influence on student engagement. One arts teacher emphasized how these partnerships provided experiences that they would not have likely otherwise encountered:

Our kids, you know, low SES background and then we're about 98% Hispanic and the kids would not have had the means nor the opportunity to be exposed to the arts in this way. They've never been to the ballet, they've never heard opera. They just wouldn't have had the opportunity without this program. It's amazing. It's so exciting to see it. I wish I had that when I was their age, it's really made an impact on them. They come to school and they said, "We have ballet today!?" Or they'll come back and tell stories of what they did.

In addition to schools' interest in expanding their arts educational offerings, arts leaders discussed how this collaborative effort provided efficient communication and identification for where resources could be used. One arts organization administrator, from a newer organization that was having difficulty finding school partners, discussed how the collaborative helped ensure that available resources were put to good use:

We received funding from a foundation that required us to spend this money on free programming, so we needed to be out doing things. That required us to go to schools, go to community centers. Eventually that money is going to run out. So being a part of Arts Access for us is a really great opportunity for us to have more access to schools and that we contact the schools and tell them about our programming.

Exposing school leaders to new modalities: teaching-artist residencies

Teaching-artist residencies, the most selected experience by participating schools, most closely approximated the role of a full-time arts specialist. Teaching-artists from participating arts organizations established longer-term relationships with schools and provided arts instructional content to entire grades on a weekly or semi-weekly basis. Residencies were especially popular in elementary schools, as they were less likely to have full-time arts specialists prior to the initiative.

Principals and teachers in our focus groups discussed how they were not very familiar with teaching-artist residencies prior to engaging in this initiative. Many of them noted how these partnerships helped them expand the types of arts offerings beyond what their teachers could cover independently; one principal articulated this sentiment in their description of teaching-artist residency benefits:

Many schools either can't afford the teacher for that particular content, or they just don't have the program. So the way that I presented it to my teachers, was that because we were one school that did not have a visual art or drama teacher. So the way I presented it to my teachers, was that this was going to enhance our programs here.

Many principals and teachers were initially reluctant about these experiences because they tend to involve greater time commitments, but they came to recognize the benefits of these longer programs. During a conversation about the different program types, one teacher stated:

I think that's where the biggest impact with us as well, would be the residencies because they're there for several days, and they teach the same group of kids several times throughout the week, or it's over a two-week period sometimes. So they develop a relationship with the teaching artist as well. They can delve a little bit deeper into some of the topics when they spend more time with them, as opposed to going out maybe on a field trip or have a performance come in for a short time. I just think the overall impact for the teachers, and the students is maybe a little better with the residencies.

This evidence suggests that multisector successes in expanding arts educational offerings may also positively influence school principal and teachers' perspectives on a broader variety of arts learning opportunities.

Promoting arts educator diversity

Providing arts learning opportunities through partnerships can also increase the diversity of teachers within schools. A chronic challenge of the teacher

labor market is the remarkable lack of diversity relative to the students they serve (Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Elpus, 2016). The student population in the U.S. continues to become increasingly diverse; the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) reported that 46% of students were white, 15% Black, and 28% Hispanic. However, the arts teacher workforce has remained homogenous over time, with 91% of arts educators identifying as white (non-Hispanic) (Elpus, 2016). By partnering with arts organizations, a greater diversity of teaching artists can provide arts learning opportunities and engage with students.

Evidence from our Houston evaluation corroborates the contention that partnerships promote student engagement with a more diverse population of teaching artists. While many participating arts organizations provided broad and diverse coverage of ancient, contemporary, and modern art forms that one would expect from major art museums and performance centers, many of the small- to medium-sized providers focus on specific cultural heritages. Smaller or less-established arts organizations tend to lack the resources necessary to foster school partnerships, and, therefore, benefit from these collaboratives' efforts that improve their networking and exposure (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). In Houston, these smaller or less-established providers include arts organizations that specialized in African dance and drumming, Asian dance, Aztec dance, Brazilian music and dance, Chinese art, Mexican ballet folklórico, hip-hop music and dance, and Hispanic literature (see Table 1 for a comprehensive list of participating organizations with their program offering types). Principals and arts teachers from our focus groups were very positive about the remarkable cultural diversity in arts program opportunities; one teacher described diversity in terms of cultural exposure and the impact it has on students:

The kids are embracing other cultures. Before, they're encapsulating their own little community, and they don't step out of the community. So now you have people coming in and exposing them. We have African drumming and ballet folklórico, and so they're starting to experience other cultures and some of their traditions and their music and their dance. They're becoming more well-rounded.

Partnership concerns

Arts organizations can bring remarkable resources to schools, but these partnerships could also pose unintended consequences. Relying on arts organizations could lead to outsourcing, where arts organizations

become substitutes for regular school arts teacher instruction (Hickmore, 2019; Wolf, 2000). There is no causal evidence to suggest that partnerships with arts organizations have led to net reductions in students' arts learning opportunities. We also did not receive feedback from our focus groups to corroborate such concerns from their partnership experiences, though the absence of such feedback could be partially attributed to the fact that these schools were lacking in arts learning opportunities prior to their participation in this initiative. However, there is evidence from other studies to suggest that schools have partnered with arts organizations as a means for replacing full-time certified arts teachers; this loss would presumably mean a substantial decrease in arts course offerings (Heilig et al., 2010; Rabkin, 2013).

Reducing the number of full-time certified arts teachers not only has the potential to minimize school arts offerings, but it could also further relegate the influence the arts can have on school climate and operations. A primary function of teachers is providing instruction. However, teachers are also critical to the cultivation and maintenance of school climate and school priorities. Teachers regularly engage with peer teachers, administrators, students, and parents, and teachers from different disciplines bring unique perspectives and experiences to their school communities. Prior studies indicate that arts learning can improve school engagement, which may be attributable to features unique to these educational experiences (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Therefore, the full-time presence of arts teachers in schools and regular interaction with students could be a critical ingredient to the positive engagement effects found with regular arts instruction.

Substituting certified teachers with instruction from arts organization teaching-artists also raises accountability concerns. Arts organizations teaching artists are typically not required to be certified, and this lack of certification may pose concerns regarding instructional quality and achieving desired educational outcomes (Heilig et al., 2010; Rabkin, 2013). The concern is that, while teaching artists may possess remarkable expertise in their field, this expertise does not necessarily translate into better educational outcomes that matter to policymakers. For example, in their evaluation of the Los Angeles initiative to increase partnerships between schools and arts organizations, Rowe et al. (2004) found that arts organizations often did not develop programs aligned with school needs and objectives. Therefore, partnership programs may help schools meet necessary standards but still fall short when it comes to producing educational outcomes valued by administrators and policymakers.

Table 1. Participating arts organizations, disciplines, & modalities.

Arts organization	Discipline(s)	In-school residency	Workshops	On-campus performance	Off-campus performance	Field trips	After-school programs
Alley Theater	Theater	X		X			
American Festival for the Arts	Music	X					X
Aperio, Music of the Americas	Music	X			X		
Apollo Chamber Players	Music			X			
Arts Lyrica	Music		X	X			
Art League Houston	Visual Arts	X					
Arte Publico Press	Literary Arts		X				
Brave Little Company	Theater	X	X				
Brazilian Arts Foundation	Dance, Music		X				
Break Free Hip Hop School	Dance, Music		X			X	
City ArtWorks	Visual Arts						X
Contemporary Arts Museum Houston	Visual Arts					X	
Da Camera of Houston	Music	X	X			X	
Dance of Asian America	Dance		X			X	
Ensemble Theater	Theater	X				X	
Express Children's Theater	Theater	X				X	
Fly Dance Company	Dance, Music	X	X			X	
FotoFest	Visual Arts	X				X	
Hobby Center for the Performing Arts	Theater, Dance		X			X	
Houston Aztec Dance	Dance, Music	X					
Houston Ballet	Dance	X	X				
Houston Center for Photography	Visual Arts	X					X
Houston Chamber Choir	Music		X				
Houston Grand Opera	Music		X				
Houston Symphony	Music		X		X		
Impande Ye Africa	Dance, Music					X	
Interactive Theater	Theater						
Independent teaching artists	Multi-Disciplinary	X	X				X
JAWAD & Joseph	Music		X				
Marionette Playhouse	Theater	X	X				
Main Street Theater	Theater	X	X			X	
Mercury Chamber Orchestra	Music		X		X		
METdance	Dance		X				
Mixteco Ballet Folklorico	Dance		X				
Multicultural Education & Counseling Through the Arts	Multi-Disciplinary	X				X	X
Musiqqa	Music	X	X		X		
Museum of Fine Arts Houston	Visual Arts						
Nameless Sound	Music		X				
Open Dance Project	Dance	X	X				
Prelude Music Foundation	Music	X					
Psophonia	Dance	X					
Puppet Pizzazz	Theater	X	X				
River Oaks Chamber Orchestra	Music						X
Society for the Performing Arts	Music, Dance	X					
Society for the Performing Arts	Music, Dance, Literary Arts	X					
Texan-French Alliance for the Arts	Multi-Disciplinary	X					
Theater Under the Stars	Theater	X				X	
Tom's Fun Band	Music						
Writers in the Schools	Literary Arts	X					
Young Audiences of Houston	Multi-Disciplinary	X	X			X	X

Multisector collaboratives offer solutions

Increasing arts status in the district

Sustained multisector collaborations appear to provide formidable defenses against arts partnership concerns. By working together, multisector collaboration-facilitated partnerships can complement and bolster efforts to improve students' arts access. The Houston case demonstrates how these efforts can bring about major systemic change that counters concerns regarding reductions in sustained in-school arts education and misalignments between arts program and schools' learning objectives.

Four years after the launch of the initiative, HISD added a Fine Arts Department; one had not been in operation for over 30 years (HISD, 2017). Collaborative efforts would also be reflected in then successfully moving the Fine Arts Department up the district's organization chart to be able to report directly to the Chief Academic Officer, ensuring that its director would be involved in greater district-level academic decision-making. Two years after the restoration of the Fine Arts Department, with the data the collaborative had collected on school-level arts resources, HISD's superintendent hired 30 new arts teachers to ensure that no elementary schools would be without a full-time arts educator (HISD, 2019). While most school districts continue to face cuts in arts teaching, HISD has increased its number of employed certified arts teachers by 13% over the past five years.

Improving school-arts organization programming and dynamics

From our focus groups, we also heard from stakeholders about how collaborative efforts shaped how they designed their programs; changed the perspectives and dynamics of working together; and eased implementation. Many of the more established arts organizations were already aware of the benefits and advantages that came with assessing school needs and aligning program objectives with state standards. However, smaller and newer organizations were less familiar, leading to a district-led, collaborative-sponsored professional development opportunity about how to design and frame programs in terms of the school district's learning objectives:

[The initiative] did a workshop last summer where they brought in HISD. We learned to do program design because they were telling us a lot of those teachers are looking for very specific themes when they're selecting programming. For instance, one of our residencies was about writing personal narratives. The HISD representative was like, 5th grade has to do this. If I'm an English teacher, I'm going to want this in my class because this is something they need

to be able to do. On our end, we're still trying to align ourselves with [the Texas state standards], but essentially it does align in that we're incorporating all forms of art and education. We're teaching, it just physically hasn't been lined up together.

Arts teachers explained how this development improved communications and discussions about program objectives, appropriate grade alignment, and identifying programs that would best serve their school needs:

When you call at the beginning of the year and you have to set up all your programs, they're very good at telling you, "Well, this would be good for this grade level," or, "They tie in core content with this one." They're very informative.

In addition to increasing the development of partnership programs to better serve school needs, the collaboration also appeared to positively affect how schools and arts organizations approached partnerships. An administrator from an organization with more experience working with schools described how the collaborative changed from the notion of being viewed as a vendor to being more of a true partnership:

We've discovered that when we approach the principal or the coordinator and explain to them the benefit of really buying into this, all of the things that enable the children to recognize, whether it's their listening skills or ability to focus, their ability to listen, take direction, process it. When we buy into, dare I say, their world and the benefit rather than oh, they're just drawing pictures or they're just moving their feet, so that there is a stronger sense of oh, this can be a partnership. It can be win/win rather than an "us and them" approach."

Finally, all arts administrators strongly agreed that sustained partnerships improved their ability to effectively implement their school programs. When asked about how the collaboration affected program implementation, one administrator discussed the benefits of operating in the context of longer-term partnerships:

Which is what is great about sustained partnerships, to go back to your point from before is that it takes practice. When it's a new relationship, you're getting to know each other; and you're getting to know what the needs are. If you can go back again and again, then it's known that this is what happens when this program comes.

Discussion & Conclusion

The steady decline of the arts in U.S. schools and recent federal legislation have increased school arts partnerships as a means for restoring arts learning opportunities. Arts education advocates unite behind their desire to improve the state of arts education but question whether arts

partnerships will ultimately do more harm than good (Hanley, 2003; Heilig et al., 2010; Wolf, 2000). Based on evidence from Houston, we find that multisector collaborations appear to be an effective strategy for promoting and leveraging the benefits of school arts partnerships and have positive effects on students. The collaborations also address concerns about protecting sustained, school-provided arts learning opportunities and ensuring that school and arts learning objectives are aligned. In the case of Houston, these efforts appear to have improved, rather than undermined, the health of school-provided arts learning and resources.

Developing and maintaining these collaborative efforts is incredibly difficult and likely explains why these endeavors are not more common. Collaborators from different sectors can provide resources that others lack, but they also often have objectives that can conflict. However, when united in the mission to improve arts education, undertaking these challenging efforts appears to provide worthwhile benefits.

It is worth noting that, while they have much in common in terms of their missions and strategies, multisector collaborations vary substantially in their operations. We primarily rely on the case of Houston for the basis of our findings and recognize that this setting may pose questions regarding the generalizability of these results to other contexts. Future studies should investigate whether particular components of multisector collaborative efforts are critical to achieving their desired effects. Such analyses would prove useful for improving existing multisector collaboratives and informing the development of future efforts.

These findings and considerations have implications for how policymakers promote school arts partnerships. Government programs that promote partnerships, like the federal Assistance for Arts Education program, does not provide much funding or guidance for their format or structure. Consequently, these partnerships may not advance the state of the arts in schools as intended. Policymakers should consider incentivizing the development and support of multisector arts education collaboratives, as well as evaluations of these efforts, to provide greater assurances for delivering effective, sustainable partnerships that improve arts access.

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