

## Transitional Times for Arts Education in Arizona

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1934 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, co-founder of the Museum of Northern Arizona, wrote that “a thorough art education, starting when we are very young, is of the greatest benefit to every human being...” Colton published her ideas in *Art for the Schools of the Southwest—An Outline for the Public and Indian Schools* and put them into practice through the Treasure Chest, an outreach program which brought art education to many of Arizona's rural and reservation students for the first time. In the more than 60 years since Colton's plan, many Arizona arts professionals, educators, and policy makers have continued her advocacy and expanded on her ideas. As a result, awareness of the arts—both as complex disciplines worthy of in-depth study and significant vehicles for learning in other areas—has increased and undergirded efforts to make the arts as much a part of the K-12 experience as science for the states’ now more than 650,000 students. The past decade, in fact, has been the state’s most significant period of development for arts education. Over that time, many parents and school district officials have lent their support as state arts and education agencies, advocacy and professional organizations, and higher education have spoken in favor of arts education and backed their words with action.

The step-by-step efforts of particularly the Arizona Commission on the Arts, Arizona Department and State Board of Education, Arizona Board of Regents, and the state's three universities have resulted in the adoption of state “Essential Skills” in four arts disciplines and “core” status for music and visual art in grades 1-8, plus arts requirements for high school graduation, assessment, admission to state universities, and certification of new elementary and special education teachers. Collaborative research grants for university and public school faculty have been created also.

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#### Vision 2000 Goal Areas

- Delivery Systems
  - Assessment
  - Advocacy
  - Resource Development
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Late in 1994, hundreds of Arizona arts and education professionals and advocates came together to plan for the next stage of development in arts education. Based on a desire for equal access to all the arts for all students, their product, *Vision 2000*, is a comprehensive plan which includes goals for programs, assessment, advocacy, and resources. Specific players are assigned responsibility for implementation of

concrete strategies. A partnership comprised of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, Arizona Alliance for Arts Education, Arizonans for Cultural Development, and Arizona Department of Education has distributed *Vision 2000* widely and is leading its implementation.

With the approval of the various state-level policies and the creation of a vision for the future, the spotlight has shifted to the state's more than 220 independent school districts and 1,000 elementary, middle, and high schools. Indeed, *Vision 2000* acknowledges that local activities and support are now primary.

To help determine how best to support and monitor local development, the Arizona Commission on the Arts contracted with the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University through the Arizona Arts Education Research Institute to provide an overview of the status of arts education in Arizona. This report presents information from 55 school districts and a group of "opinion leaders" throughout Arizona. It also provides some comparisons with *The Status of Arts Education in Arizona Public Schools* (1988), *Arts Education in American Public Schools* (1991), and *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools* (1995).

The 55 school districts that participated in the arts education survey included large and small, rich and poor, arts-oriented and not. Half of the responses came from metropolitan areas, half from rural locales. The information was collected in late 1995 and early 1996 through a two-part survey that was initially mailed to all district superintendents. Postcards and telephone contacts were used to encourage participation. While not statistically representative of all of the state's school districts, this broad-based bellwether group's feedback provides insights into today's education environment, a sense of how arts education is faring in Arizona, and direction for statewide organizations. The 11 opinion leaders interviewed for this project were drawn from state policy making bodies, school districts, advocacy bodies, the arts community, and higher education.

### **Transitional Times**

Readers who have been involved in arts education for some time will not want to wait any longer for the answers to the obvious questions. Is arts education improving in Arizona? Have local situations improved since the landmark 1988 study of the status of arts education in Arizona?

Survey responses and interviews suggest that:

- Signs of development appear along with indications of the status quo. For example, the implementation process has started for the graduation and admission requirements. Arts integration appears to be making a mark, and curriculum has progressed in some districts. But, a tremendous range still exists among the state's school districts in terms of capabilities, programs, and commitment to the arts. The arts have moved forward in some places, but the general state of affairs across the state appears to be as yet largely unchanged. That means that arts education has also not declined substantially.
- Four out of ten bellwether respondents thought that the overall status of arts education in their districts was better now than five years ago and another third thought it was about the same. Participants were concerned about the next five years, however. Most expected arts education in their districts to remain the same or deteriorate by the year 2000. This discouraging outlook may signal that the "sense of possibility" that is evident now may be at risk among those who should be leaders in changing arts education at the local level.
- Significant support for arts education among school personnel and parents endures, and that reservoir of good will remains one of the state's greatest assets.
- Funding, staffing, and curriculum were identified by respondents as their districts' most critical needs over the next three years, especially with new state standards and assessments coming on line. These issues are essentially the same as those suggested in the 1988 survey of Arizona school districts.
- Competition with other education priorities and a local atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity caused study participants to view arts education as continually vulnerable to funding cuts, neglect, and other situations such as student population growth.
- Local sources of external funds (*i.e.*, PTOs, local arts agencies, community groups) are used most often to supplement district funds. However, the many varied arts resources available to rural and urban communities still appear to be underutilized. The foundations for community-school partnerships appear to have been laid in some places, but the potential for collaborative action has not been realized generally.
- Arizona, as viewed in terms of the bellwether districts, stacks up reasonably well in comparison to schools nationally in terms of the provision of visual art and music and a number of other areas.

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Comparisons illustrate the slow but steady pace of change in arts education nationwide.

Unquestionably, this is a pivotal transition period for arts education in Arizona. Support for arts education is strong. Policies are in place, and *Vision 2000* provides clear direction for the future. But, the changes and resources needed in many schools to provide “equal access to all the arts” for all students remain substantial and elusive. Arts education in Arizona is probably best described as going in the right direction on a long, challenging road.

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*“Over 9 in 10 Americans simply feel that education of the young will not be complete if the arts are excluded from the curriculum, made optional, or made an ‘extra’ activity after school. By majorities of close to 10:1, the people are convinced that the arts provide an exciting and deeply enhancing experience in education which not only adds greatly to the confidence of young children, but also makes the process of education much more exciting and interesting for those students. And, they feel the arts give them skills useful in later life.”*

—Americans and the Arts, 1992

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### **Reservoir of Good Will**

Between 1973 and 1992, the American Council for the Arts (ACA) sponsored six major public opinion surveys on the arts. Data over the two decades show that Americans have traditionally favored arts education and that their support has remained at high levels over time. In the most recent survey, nine out of ten respondents (91%) agreed that it is important for children “to be exposed to theater, music, dance, exhibitions of painting and sculpture, and similar cultural events.” Nearly 90 percent of parents with school age children said they wanted their children to have more experience with the arts than they had as young people. In addition, more than 60 percent said that learning about the arts and gaining skills in the arts disciplines were very important. Two-thirds considered the arts as important as “learning history or geography,” with over half put learning in the arts on a par with science, reading, and math.

Although difficult to harness at times, the power of parental and public support for arts education is one of the field's greatest assets. In 1992, ACA's survey analysis reviewed the commitment to arts education: “Over 9 in 10 Americans simply feel that education of the young will not be complete if the arts are excluded from the curriculum, made optional, or made an ‘extra’ activity after school. By majorities of close to 10:1, the people are convinced that the arts provide an exciting and deeply enhancing experience in education which not only adds greatly to the confidence of young children, but also makes the process of education much more exciting and interesting for those students. And, they feel the arts give them skills useful in later life.”

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Arizonans’ support for arts education appears to be consistent with the strong national trend. The bellwether respondents rated more than half of their school colleagues (teachers, administrators, and staff) as supportive or very supportive of arts education. Estimates of parental

support were somewhat higher. Nearly 60 percent of parents were thought to be supportive or very supportive of arts education. Strong support among school personnel and parents is in tune with the quite positive feeling among some district respondents about the current status of arts education. Taken together, respondents' perceptions of support and the past five years do not reflect the decline that many might have anticipated. Rather their opinions relate to continual challenges and necessary improvements and the resources still needed to make permanent, substantial change.

A lack of decline is not usually interpreted as a positive. But in this case, the status quo suggests, despite ongoing traditional challenges, that opportunities still exist for local advocates to make improvements in arts education. In other words, the door is still open for arts education.

However, optimism must be matched with assistance. Respondents identified curriculum, funding, and staffing as the critical needs for the near future. Districts strongly communicated a need—and desire—for substantial help and new resources.

### Bellwether Survey Overview

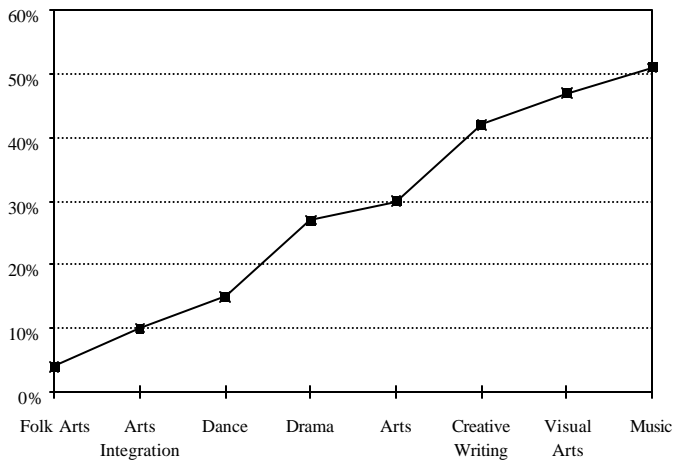
*Vision 2000* acknowledges that “school and district approaches for

quality arts programs must be flexible and built on the needs and resources of the community.” The following summary of responses reflects the differences and similarities among districts and shows why flexibility is vital. Questions which referred to specific arts areas included music, visual arts, creative writing, drama/theatre, dance, integrated arts, and folk arts.<sup>1</sup>

### Mission and Goals

It has been said many times that if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. Fortunately,

### Inclusion of the Arts in District Mission or Goals



Morrison Institute for Public Policy, June 1996

<sup>1</sup> A note of caution is warranted in interpreting information from the bellwether survey. Graphic presentation of data from a small number of districts may tend to overstate some response.

many bellwether districts have maps in the form of mission statements that include the arts. Music was mentioned most often, followed by visual arts, creative writing, the arts, drama, dance, and integrated arts. Folk arts were least represented among districts. A small number of districts mentioned goals for band, choir, and mariachi ensemble.

**Percent of Districts with Written, Sequential Curriculum**

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Percentage with Written Curriculum</b>
General Music	64%
Visual arts	59%
Creative writing	49%
Drama/theatre	34%
Dance	25%
Integrated arts	11%
Folk arts	6%

Morrison Institute for Public Policy, June 1996

**Curriculum Status and Implementation**

Curriculum has been called “the center of people’s experience with public education...It is the curriculum with which people interact on a daily basis and in a most immediate way.” As the role of the arts continues to change, quality curriculum is an essential building block. Respondents named curriculum development as their most critical need nearly as often as funding. For example, one person wanted “a well defined scope and sequence with written curriculum developed and implemented and cooperative units with other curriculum areas.” “Program Development/Curriculum” and “curriculum development and updated texts” were the phrases other respondents used to describe their needs. Those comments were cryptic in comparison to the district representative who said, “Our most critical need is for resources to develop curricula for

all arts courses in alignment with new state standards and standards developed by national organizations.” The process to develop state standards motivated a number of respondents to ask for help “to develop a curriculum for the arts which is responsible to the new State Standards.”

Responses from the bellwether districts indicate that curriculum development has been proceeding in some areas. More than half of the districts reported written, sequential curriculum in music and visual art. Fewer districts have applied resources to disciplines other than the two traditionally supported areas.

**Professional Development and Technical Assistance**

The retraining and development of teachers are constantly part of education reform discussions. In their critical needs, a number of districts listed professional development as a vital step in any effort to improve arts education. A very small number of districts is providing arts training to all teachers at least annually. Visual arts and creative writing are generally the featured disciplines in such training. Music and

visual art teachers are targeted for additional training in far less than half of the districts. Arts inservices for district personnel are rare.

### **Resources For Arts Education**

The funding portion of the questionnaire identified prevalent sources of funding for arts education and provides a general sense of allocations for arts specialists. The financial data again reflect the vast differences among Arizona's school districts. Generally, the range of responses was too great to provide anything more than a reconfirmation of the disparities created by location, population, economic base, and local outlook. However, observations can be made in some areas.

- Music specialists and visual arts specialists remain the most prevalent in districts.
- Besides the district funds regularly used for arts education, external funds are important. Local business donations, student activity funds, and PTO funds are relied upon by half of the bellwether districts. Music and visual arts benefit most from outside funds with music receiving the largest share. External funding is particularly important for arts-related field trips and activities with artists and arts organizations.
- Local arts agencies are the most common source of grants for arts education programs, with cultural organizations the next most frequently mentioned resource. However, far less than half of the responding districts tap these resources.

### **Conclusion**

As stated previously, Arizona appears to be going in the right direction on a long, challenging road. Some signs point toward progress in the past five years, while others indicate that much remains to be done. A feeling of optimism and broad support appear to be the greatest assets in arts education in addition to new requirements and policies. The future depends on the implementation of *Vision 2000*, specifically on how well the arts community and school districts work together to build on local successes, expand commitments, find new resources, and combine mandates with incentives and assistance.

Because cooperation and collaboration are vital to achieving *Vision 2000*, new mechanisms to track local status and the effectiveness of advocacy efforts are needed at the state level. An ongoing information system would make both monitoring and the sharing of information easier for all of the players in arts education.

A five-part information system for arts education is recommended to make local monitoring and assistance easier and more effective and to support the various components of *Vision 2000*. The suggested components include:

- In-depth case studies of local programs and practices throughout Arizona
- Selection—with school district input—of a limited number of quantitative arts education indicators for which data could be gathered annually or biennially
- Questions on existing periodic statewide public opinion surveys
- Completion of an Arizona arts and arts education “census” once per decade to facilitate a better understanding of the status of the arts in the state, including the economic impact, educational status, and issues of importance to the public
- Mechanisms to report and share statewide data

This combination of basic information sources would allow policy makers and practitioners to understand fully what is, and is not, happening in arts education from year-to-year. Considering the long journey Arizona faces to provide the type of arts education described in *Vision 2000*, continuous quality information will be key to sustaining interest and developing new strategies for success.