



THE FOURTH A: ACCESS, ACHIEVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH THE ARTS

SFUSD Strategic Plan & Arts Education Master Plan

San Francisco has the highest average student performance of the large urban districts in California and the widest gap between the district average and the lowest performing students.

— San Francisco Unified School District Strategic Plan (p. 6)

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) 2008 Strategic Plan is a call to action — a call to close the achievement gap and eradicate educational inequalities. As members of the Arts Education Master Plan Advisory Committee, we stand ready to answer that call. The arts offer a uniquely powerful way to address the San Francisco Unified School District’s goals of Access and Equity, Achievement, and Accountability. The Arts Education Master Plan (AEMP), completed by the San Francisco Unified School District in 2006, embodies these shared goals.

Every child has a right to be well-educated.

— San Francisco Unified School District’s Strategic Plan (p.5)

The arts are fundamental to a well-rounded education for all students.

— San Francisco Unified School District’s Arts Education Master Plan (p.4)

The inequities of access and achievement among students in the San Francisco Unified School District as articulated in the district’s Strategic Plan have a history. They are rooted in longstanding biases of class, race and language. The San Francisco Unified School District’s call is to undermine these biases and undo the “predictive power of demographics” (Strategic Plan p. 5).

This effort is nothing less than social change. Arts education can play a critical role in turning demographics from destiny to a vision of renewal and possibility in a child’s life. Using the Arts Education Master Plan as a blueprint, the San Francisco Unified School District employs art as a core piece of its reform effort: in curriculum, professional development and community-building. We believe in the San Francisco Unified School District’s overall goal of social change as described in the Strategic Plan. Therefore, throughout this document we will address the Plan’s stated areas of concern: Access and Equity, Achievement, and Accountability.

Access and Equity

The Strategic Plan stresses the importance of clear expectations: for students, parents and teachers. Schools must be open, transparent and accessible physical spaces, as well as welcoming environments for learning. Teachers must have a clear understanding of their material, their students’ communities, and developmentally appropriate classroom practice. Administration must support

teachers in their efforts to engage and educate (Strategic Plan, p. 7). The arts can create just such a learning environment. The addition of the arts to both a school's curriculum and to teacher and principal professional development ensures that learning is accessible to each student according to his or her specific's specific learning style. The arts provide multiple means through which students can communicate what they have learned.

A growing body of research connects arts education to academic achievement and improved school environments for children from all cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. James Catterall, professor of education at the University of California, Los Angeles, introduces the book *Critical Links*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and National Endowment for the Arts, as follows:

Critical Links shows two clear streams of outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. One is a set of effects related to reading skills — basic reading comprehension for children who have in fact been left behind. An added set of effects for these children is increased achievement motivation.... Research on the arts finds impacts showing both increased attendance and fewer discipline referrals. And the limited number of studies we found addressing special needs populations show that arts activities associate with particularly important outcomes: writing and reading skills, oral language skills, and (of great importance to struggling learners) sustained attention and focus.

Further, the arts play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural competency of teachers and administrators. Through the arts, students explore other cultures as well as their own, and teachers come to know the cultural world of their students. The Arts Education Master Plan (which has been published in English, Spanish and Chinese) calls for powerful professional development in the arts for teachers, principals and arts coordinators. The Strategic Plan calls for equity-centered Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The two can work in tandem to create a broader Professional Learning Community in the arts (through the Visual and Performing Arts office) with a focus on building cultural competency and equity in the classroom.

Having an Arts Education Master Plan has allowed the schools of San Francisco to address student access and equity in arts education in various ways. The Arts Education Master Plan's implementation to date specifies an equitable distribution of Proposition H funding among all schools. It has allowed the district to leverage state funding in order to address schools in need. The Master Plan has also enabled the hiring of more elementary, middle and high school arts specialists, making it possible for all students to have access to quality arts education, while increasing the opportunity of admission to School of the Arts High School, where students are on a special schedule with extended arts classes taking place after lunch to approximate conservatory and pre-professional training in the arts.

Obstacles identified during the creation of the Arts Education Master Plan continue to exist, including not allowing 100% of students equitable access to discrete arts classes. School sites continue to struggle with scheduling, time, space and capacity issues. The Strategic Plan's Balanced Scorecard and expectations placed by the new Matrix will support diminishing the historic power of demographics. Together, these tools of the Strategic Plan will further the Arts Education Master Plan's goal of reaching every student at every school during the curricular day.

In addition, arts instruction in the San Francisco Unified School District is expanding to include traditionally marginalized populations such as special needs students, English Language Learners, and those attending county and community schools. All students in the district deserve accessible and equitable learning environments that are creative and dynamic. Through its efforts, the AEMP has embodied the value of equity in education (AEMP, p. 3).

Achievement

The Strategic Plan aims to engage joyful learners and prepare students to be citizens of the 21st century (p. 7). The arts are a gateway to joyful learning and to responsible citizenship. The arts develop the whole child by engaging her or him in critical thinking, pro-social behavior, problem-solving, and personal expression — the building blocks of an informed and responsible citizenry. The arts also bridge the gap between a student’s formal education in school and informal education at home. Students of the arts learn to express themselves, relate to others, and contribute their ideas and activism to the broader community.

In an ideal learning environment, the arts are taught as a discrete discipline, integrated into the teaching of other subjects and combined with other arts. At Mission Education Center, a school for newcomers, students used visual art to create self-portraits and poetry to deepen those self-portraits across arts media. Students also used found objects to create a skyline of their new home, and journaled about the contrast between their home countries and their lives in San Francisco. They combined their poems to create an end-of-the-year theatrical performance documenting the changes in their families. The arts gave them the tools to express not only their feelings, but also their vision and values for the future through various artistic voices. The arts also gave them the creative space to bring themselves into the classroom.

Addressing this theme, the Arts Education Master Plan notes (p 26):

Learning to take creative risks, thinking in new ways, reflecting, creating, rehearsing, practicing and being persistent are some of the ways our students will benefit from the powerful promise of the Arts Education Master Plan, making them more fully present members of society who know the power of their own voices and the promise of their own creativity.

Achievement in the 21st century will require much more of students than a college degree. They will need a “comprehensive education, something that takes them from aesthetics to algebra without pretending that the two are mutually exclusive” (Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, qtd. in AEMP, p.4). They will also require a grasp of new technologies. Classes in new media arts — music mixing, video production and digital graphics — are also based in the technology of the 21st century, and provide rich, engaging content for the computer labs and classrooms on SFUSD campuses. The Balanced Scorecard and its emphasis on the 21st century learner provide additional scaffolding and impetus for schools to incorporate the arts in the core curriculum as a discrete subject and in arts-integrated language arts, social studies, math and science classes, providing students and teachers a holistic education while equipping them with the necessary tools to compete in the global marketplace.

The arts reach all students; the arts engage all students; the arts develop all students. The arts must therefore play a key role in the district's 21st Century Curriculum Initiative, with the goals of college and career beyond high school.

Accountability

The Arts Education Master Plan Advisory Committee shares the San Francisco Unified School District's commitment to quality education for all San Francisco Unified School District students. Through the Balanced Scorecard and through sustaining implementation of the Arts Education Master Plan, the district is holding itself accountable to its goal of closing the achievement gap. The Balanced Scorecard provides the structured tools of accountability that the Arts Education Master Plan needs for its implementation (AEMP p. 25).

Led by the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) office, the Master Plan is being implemented at both the district and school-site levels through leadership development of principals and arts coordinators, professional development of teachers, increasing the number of credentialed arts teachers working in the district, and building strong partnerships with arts resources and institutions outside of the district. To sustain progress to date and track implementation going forward, the arts must become an integral part of both the district's Balanced Scorecard and each individual school (AEMP, p. 11). If the Arts Education Master Plan is integrated into these scorecards, we can ensure that all are accountable for its implementation. Individual schools will self-assess their progress in achieving equity and access, engaging high-achieving and joyful learners and keeping the district's promises to students and families. The VAPA office can provide direct support in the development of appropriate measures that reflect an expansion of performance standards for both students and schools in keeping with the goals of the Balanced Scorecard.

The Arts Education Master Plan Advisory Committee also supports the district's call for a scorecard that is specific to the Visual and Performing Arts office, carrying forward responsibility for ensuring program quality and continuity, and bringing the arts to every student, every school, every day. When the development of the Arts Education Master Plan was formally supported in 2005, and going forward through its current implementation, specific steps were put forth and have been adhered to. Now, the Visual and Performing Arts scorecard will identify the specific steps of implementation for the Board of Education-approved Arts Education Master Plan, as it is aligned with the Strategic Plan.

Implementation

Both the Arts Education Master Plan and the Strategic Plan recognize the importance of supporting and training teachers to educate every child well. The Arts Education Master Plan's design of principal- and teacher-based professional development focuses on including the arts in every classroom at every level. It also calls for including the arts as core to the curriculum. These two AEMP goals are aligned with the Strategic Plan's Equitable Learning Communities and 21st Century curriculum initiatives.

Artful classrooms are safe, inclusive, dynamic places of learning — exactly the kinds of learning environments described in the SFUSD's 21st Century Curriculum Initiative. The initiative states that learning must be “personalized, relevant, meaningful and engaging for each student,” while at the

same time teaching 21st century skills of creative, critical thinking and technological literacy (Strategic Plan, p. 10). Quality arts learning provides students with exactly this kind of dynamic education.

From Shared Values to Shared Action

The Arts Education Master Plan and the San Francisco Unified School District's Strategic Plan are both the result of extensive stakeholder and community input, as well as data collection and analysis. More than 1,500 people participated in surveys and focus groups — including outreach in Spanish and Chinese — that led to the development of the Arts Education Master Plan. Both documents embody the shared values of educating EVERY child and educating the WHOLE child. Both documents value the tremendous resources of San Francisco, including partnerships with a diverse array of community-based organizations. For both plans, the Arts Education Master Plan's motto applies: *San Francisco Is the Campus*.

Both plans call for districtwide accountability in their implementation. The San Francisco Unified School District's Arts Education Master Plan and Strategic Plan are partners in a broader effort of education reform and social change. The implementation of each plan will support the success of the other. As members of the Arts Education Master Plan's Advisory Committee, we believe that the arts *are* education; they also are a necessary tool for social change. In this spirit, we applaud the district's bold call for change and look forward to participating in it.

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The AEMP Advisory Committee would like to thank Jessica Mele, Keegan Finberg and Kevin Truitt for their support and input in the creation of this paper.

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