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Press Release

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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ARE KEY TO ARTS EDUCATION, NEW REPORT REVEALS

Seattle, WA — ArtsEd Washington today announced the results of an extensive study examining the effectiveness of the organization's Principals' Arts Leadership (PAL) program. Principals and teachers at many of the PAL schools reported increased student engagement in the classroom and significantly decreased behavioral issues throughout the school as a result of the program.

The PAL program was launched in 2004 to inform and support principal-led elementary school teams in the development and implementation of school arts plans to increase arts education. In 2008, data from the Center for Education Policy revealed that 44% of elementary schools across the country were cutting arts and other subjects to make room for additional math and language arts, despite extensive research that the inclusion of arts in school has a highly positive impact on students' motivation, engagement and development of creative competencies—highly prized in today's world.

The PAL research indicates that empowering school principals is a highly effective method to increasing arts education in our schools. The study assessed the PAL program in 16 Washington elementary schools and found increased arts teaching and related benefits to students and the school community, regardless of a school's scale or student population.

Other benefits reported included enhanced and supportive community involvement as a result of the arts focus, including increased turnout at performances and arts events, more classroom volunteers, and greater PTA engagement, as well as the building of new bridges with local businesses and artists.

Principals credit the planning process, cohort support, and access to ArtsEd Washington's knowledge and resources as powerful contributors to creating increased engagement and learning in their schools.

Anchoring Arts Education: Principals' Arts Leadership: An Evaluation of ArtsEd Washington's Elementary School Program was completed at the end of the 2009 school year by AdvisArts Consulting, with support from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and with additional support from 4Culture and The Robert. B. McMillen Foundation. ArtsEd Washington Executive Director Una McAlinden hopes these findings will inspire and support other school leaders in taking similar steps.

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"We've learned what success looks like in schools harnessing the arts to support student learning and how best to catalyze it," McAlinden said. "PAL shows that this works and is a practical way to implement arts programming, no matter a school's size, resources, or current condition."

The PAL program currently supports principals in four counties across Western Washington. ArtsEd Washington is examining ways these findings can galvanize efforts to scale the program for statewide impact. The research results have already begun to garner the PAL program national attention. The findings were presented at the Americans for the Arts Convention in Seattle recently, and will be presented at the Arts Education Partnership forum this week in Boston.

"The Kennedy Center supports this work because it engages the primary school leader and decision maker in planning arts programs," said Barbara Shepherd, Director of National Partnerships for The Kennedy Center. "The program design includes networking opportunities for principals so they can share best practices across school sites. Few initiatives provide such a high level of sustained support for principals."

The report also spotlights best practices from five PAL schools: Carnation Elementary in Carnation, Cherry Valley Elementary in Duvall, Rosa Parks Elementary in Redmond, Southwood Elementary in Enumclaw and Stafford Elementary in Tacoma. These schools were each identified as having a particularly strong and growing focus on arts in academics and the creative lives of students.

"There are lots of good arts programs out there, but they are the spokes," said Doug Poage, principal at Carnation Elementary. "The PAL program is the wheel. It's the vehicle that connected us effectively with our community resources."

To read the full report or the executive summary and to view a list of current participating PAL schools, visit www.artsedwashington.org.

ArtsEd Washington is a non-profit organization working to ensure that arts learning is available to every student in Washington State, in every year of their K-12 education. Founded in 1982, ArtsEd Washington works in partnership with state and local policy-makers, educators, schools and school districts, arts and cultural organizations, parent organizations, local businesses, and concerned community members to raise awareness about the importance of the arts in every student's complete education, and to provide programs that help build the capacity of our schools to provide high-quality arts learning. ArtsEd Washington is a member of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network. For more information, please www.artsedwashington.org.

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