

Anchoring Arts Education: Principals' Arts Leadership

An Evaluation of ArtsEd Washington's Elementary School Program

May 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

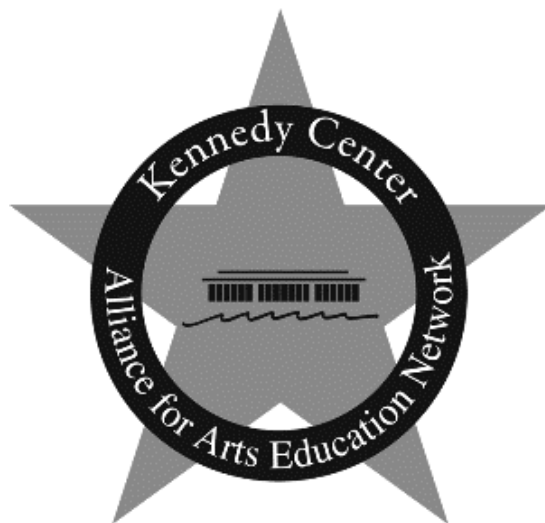
**Report by Claudia Bach and Annette de Soto
AdvisArts Consulting, Seattle**

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ArtsEd Washington

Advancing Arts Education Through Leadership, Partnership, & Communication

<http://www.ArtsEdWashington.org> 206 441 4501

Report prepared by Claudia Bach and Annette de Soto, AdvisArts Consulting
www.advisarts.com 7702 14th Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98117 206.915.0192

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Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

The Principals' Arts Leadership (PAL) program was created by ArtsEd Washington in 2004 to inform and support elementary school teams, led by principals, in the development and implementation of school arts plans to increase arts education. Each school's plan was intended to build on and reflect the unique pathway appropriate to that school's characteristics and community, using existing and new resources.

Since its inception PAL has worked with more than 40 schools, 36 of which have either completed or are still active in the program. PAL schools participate for three core years: During Year 1, schools concentrate on Planning; Year 2 focuses on Implementation; and Year 3 is devoted to devising strategies that will lead to Sustainability. Thereafter school team members become Alumni, with opportunities to remain active in aspects of the PAL program.

How well is PAL achieving what ArtsEd WA set out to do? Was there a transformation experienced by the individuals and schools participating in PAL? What lessons could be learned for improving PAL and for replicating the program in schools and school districts statewide, or beyond? The approaching five year anniversary of the program prompted the desire to assess and evaluate the PAL program to answer these questions and to gain a clearer picture of the underlying aspects of transformation that might be at work for those involved.

The evaluation was focused on sixteen schools that had completed or were about to complete the full three year PAL cycle. One-on-one interviews were conducted on-site with the school principal as well as an on-site interview with members of each school's arts team. The interviews were confidential with all responses non-attributed. Five of these school's principals also participated in additional follow-up phone interviews with the researchers to explore best practices. In total, more than 70 individuals participated in interviews. A four person Evaluation Work Group was formed of Board and community members to advise the ArtsEd WA staff and the consultants throughout the evaluation process.

Key Findings on the Four Stages of Implementation

The research process identified four critical stages of development and implementation in ArtsEd Washington PAL schools that are experienced more or less sequentially with some revisiting of stages along the way as the program matures and evolves. The Findings reflect the information provided by principals and team members on their experiences and knowledge of the PAL program.

Stage 1: Catalytic Spark

The PAL process is built on connecting with or igniting a catalytic spark in a school's leadership. This is the first step and a critical component present in all successful PAL schools. Where principals and key staff members have a personal passion for the arts, and sometimes a significant pedagogical interest and belief in the arts as an effective learning tool, PAL takes root most effectively.

Stage 2: Dynamic Shared Leadership

The second stage is dependent on propelling interest and empowered involvement within a school. This is characterized by the development of an Arts Team where the principal is joined by several key staff members in taking an active role in encouraging interest and building participation within the school community. Successful principals provide a clear vision, take part in developing goals, model risk taking through publicly joining in arts activities, offer flexibility to teachers and pursue fundraising opportunities to support additional arts program requirements. Arts Teams with dynamic single or shared leadership that organize regular planning meetings, and drive activities, lesson plan development and opportunities for incremental growth had the strongest impact and potential for sustainability.

Stage 3: Effective Systems and Tools

A wide range of systems and tools are employed by schools to enhance arts knowledge, skills and capacity, encourage school wide participation and promote community support for arts education. Professional development that provided technical teaching skills and lesson plan development were cited by all schools as fundamental to their success. Many of the most successful methods are explored in greater detail in the report section, *Best Practices from Five PAL Schools*.

Stage 4: Sustainability

Though the principal is frequently the initial driver of the PAL program, a sustainable commitment to arts education requires that school wide cultural change take place in order to continue this commitment beyond the principal's tenure. Schools that distributed planning and integrated lesson development amongst a wider range of teachers and staff members appeared most able to encourage this kind of transformation. In addition, the wider distribution of responsibilities tended to have a multiplier effect as these staff members reached out to volunteers, parents and community members who could advocate for arts education at the school, district and state levels. Schools that are moving towards a cycle of renewing and expanding interest and knowledge are building the strongest base for sustainability.

Findings on PAL Components most Valued by Participants

Principals and Arts Team members were asked to identify existing components of the PAL program that they felt were most valuable to them.

1. **School Arts Plan** -- The development of the School Arts Plan is the most valuable component to participants. It was noted as a difficult but extremely valuable process.
2. **Seed Money** -- The second most valued component is PAL's Seed Money program which is used by schools as a catalyst for clarifying arts priorities and needs and is often a strong incentive to exploring the program initially.
3. The third component considered most valuable differs for principals and Arts Teams.
Peer Networks -- Principals place strong value on PAL's ability to create and support networking among peers.
Training and Professional Development -- Arts Teams highly value PAL's ability to connect their school to training opportunities, the vital link to implementation.

Impact on Students and the Community

The majority of teachers and principals reported a number of visible positive areas of impact they attribute to the school's increased arts education activities. It must be noted that the evaluation did not include data collection with students or representatives of the community. Teachers especially observed that arts education activities (whether stand alone arts instruction or arts integrated with other curriculum subjects) had a high level of engagement for all students and were particularly helpful for students who did not participate fully in other classroom activities. Teachers also reported decreased behavioral issues in the classroom. Several schools reported that their arts focus had a unifying impact, allowing *all* students to participate equally – regardless of their physical, academic or emotional capacities.

Schools also reported increased community involvement as a result of their arts focus: increased turnout from parents and relatives at performances and arts events; increased ability to recruit more volunteers to help in the classrooms with arts related projects; increased outreach to PTAs, district staff and local businesses and artists related to their arts program needs. This had the effect of broadening their reach into the communities they served.

Best Practices from Five ArtsEd WA PAL Schools

The interview process revealed that some PAL schools had greater success than others building strong and integrated or infused arts programs. Five method areas were selected as primary indicators of well-engaged PAL elementary schools. Subsequently, five principals in schools demonstrating strong arts leadership and leadership focus were asked to share their school's experiences regarding these methods. These five schools represent a range of populations and conditions: from a school reporting more than 70% free and reduced lunch eligibility to a school reporting less than 5% eligibility; schools in rural, suburban and more urban areas; a brand new school, a recently reopened school and long-established schools.

METHOD 1 - Creating and maintaining leadership and leadership focus: Schools with the most active programs have active principals and one or more teachers willing and able to lead others in expanding the role of arts.

METHOD 2 – Maintaining internal staff focus: Even with the best leadership from a principal, the teachers carry the weight of expanding the arts in the classroom. Schools that have active arts programs have a wide range of teachers involved in planning and implementing arts goals. Moreover, the most successful schools are those that have the entire staff involved in at least some aspects of arts programming.

METHOD 3 – Annual arts events and programs: Many of the schools hold annual arts events or regular programs to focus attention and celebrate their expanding arts programs. Benefits of these programs include increased participation by all teachers and students, encouraging involvement from parents and community members and greater visibility for arts education at the District level.

METHOD 4 – Identifying human resources for the arts: Many of the schools with successful arts programs are creative in their use of human resources within their school, parent and surrounding communities.

METHOD 5 – Securing on-site professional arts staff: Various ways of addressing arts staffing is reflected by these five schools: some have made a clear commitment to the importance of having such staff and others have forged ahead without such staff.

Recommendations for ArtsEd Washington’s Principals’ Arts Leadership Program

This section focuses on recommendations directed to the leadership of PAL to help shape the future of the program.

Recommendation 1: Create stronger methods and tools to assess readiness for participation in PAL and to ensure that first year PAL schools are at a similar starting point.

The research indicates that schools entering the program with some element of *Catalytic Spark* and some capacity for *Dynamic Shared Leadership* are much more likely to make effective use of and strong progress with the PAL program.

Recommendation 2: Retain and strengthen the Arts Plan component of PAL.

The Arts Plan is a fundamental touchstone of the PAL program. While many principals and arts team leads note that it was often frustrating to develop this tool, they almost universally find it to be of significant value in creating a pathway to change.

Recommendation 3: Maintain or expand PAL’s Seed Money component.

Seed money provided by PAL is a powerful catalyst for participating schools. Relatively small sums of money are able to motivate action, enhance access to training and funding resources and strengthen accountability.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen experiential arts training/professional development opportunities for PAL participants.

The critical link to implementation is the opportunity for strong training to build skills and confidence and stimulate enthusiasm for principals and teachers alike. Schools benefit most when all teachers, and other staff, participate.

Recommendation 5: Provide more tools and guidance related to arts resource development for those principals and schools that want or need them.

Methods, tools and systems that are proven best practices for PAL schools can be documented.

Recommendation 6: Retain ArtsEd WA’s flexibility in addressing each school’s needs while increasing clarity and effectiveness of PAL systems and framework.

Codify PAL systems, frameworks and evaluation in ways that are informative for potential, current, and past PAL participants as well as others in the fields of arts and education.

Recommendation 7: Identify tools and methods to assist alumni schools with sustainability.

The transition period after completing the three year PAL program is a vulnerable time that warrants attention and resources from ArtsEd WA in support of the long term program vision.

Recommendations for Elementary Schools Participating in ArtsEd WA’s Principals’ Arts Leadership Program

This section provides recommendations directed to elementary schools participating in PAL. Many of the recommendations are also applicable to any elementary school that seeks to strengthen the arts in their school.

Recommendation 1: Clarify the principal’s commitment to the role of arts in education, in the school and in the PAL program.

Schools experiencing the greatest success with PAL are those in which the principal has developed and clarified his or her pedagogical thinking as well as interest and passion for the arts.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that the work of the arts in the school is broadly shared and supported.

The principal is a key player but cannot create change alone. A core of individuals who work with the principal on the PAL program is critical.

Recommendation 3: Create and use methods, tools and systems that keep the arts focus visible and dynamic for the school.

Identify and strengthen the school’s distinctive approach to imbed the arts in a more sustainable way in the school community, using the school’s Arts Plan to guide the efforts.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that arts endeavors in the school are celebrated and supported within and beyond the walls of the school.

Identify ways to celebrate students’ artistic efforts and accomplishments within the classroom, the school, the district and in the community.

Next Steps and Conclusion

The completion of this evaluation process is the beginning of another phase to shape the work that lies ahead for ArtsEd WA and for others engaged in the field of arts education. Next steps are outlined here as a point of departure for putting what has been learned to work.

Share what has been learned with the following constituencies: the Principals and Arts Teams who generously participated in the research; other PAL schools in all phases of participation; partners and supporters of PAL and ArtsEd WA in Washington State and nationally; and colleagues in the field of arts education.

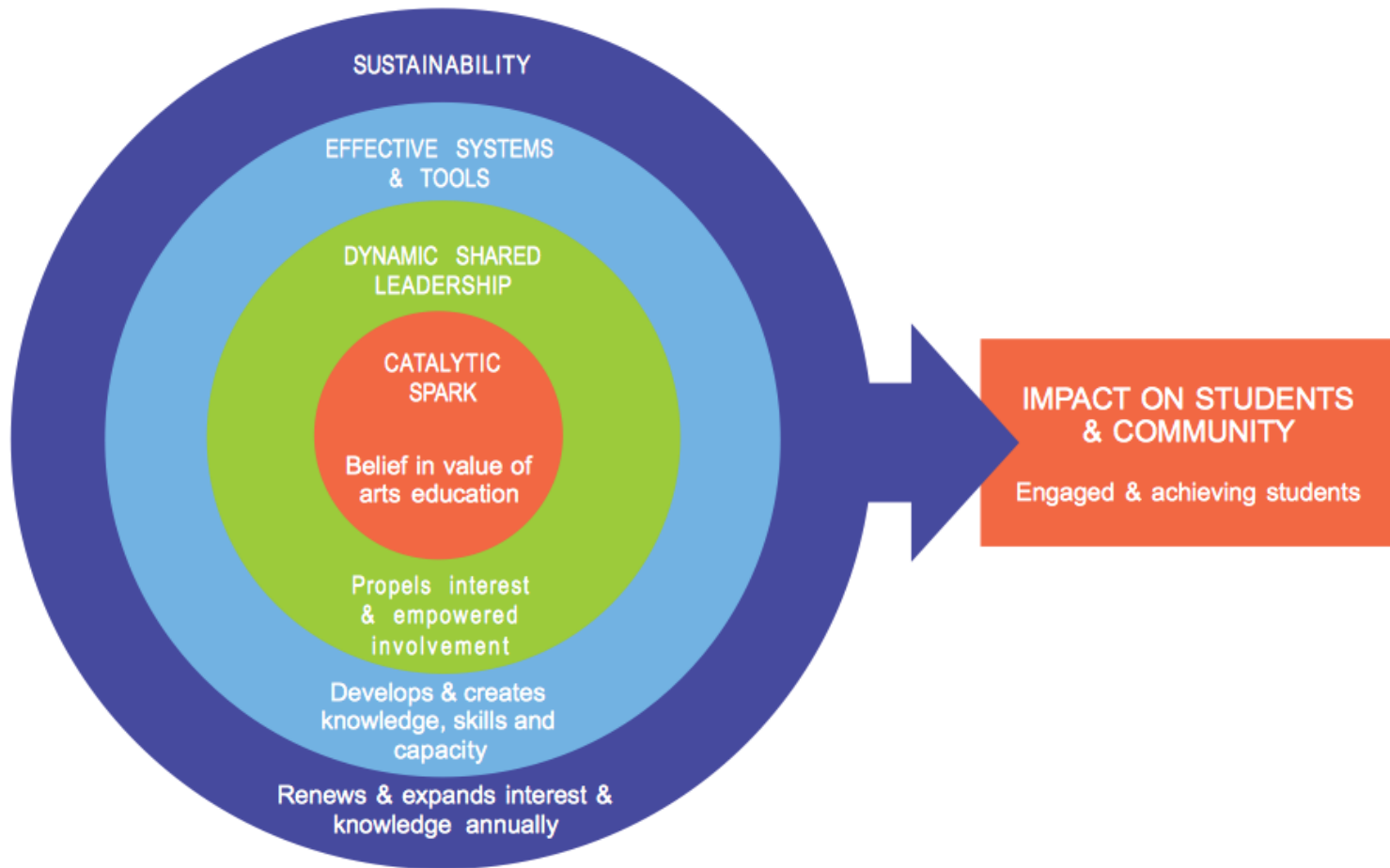
Undertake a PAL planning process, within the context of ArtsEd WA’s larger strategic outlook and planning, as soon as possible. Consider creating a Planning Work Group to review and prioritize the recommendations in this report for short and long term implementation or consideration.

Develop evaluation tools, methods and timelines to build on what has emerged through this process. This evaluation offers the opportunity for ArtsEd WA to revise and streamline its ongoing efforts to gather data and to regularly assess and evaluate PAL.

PAL is well positioned to continue to work hand in hand with elementary schools that are ready and willing to move forward with the arts in their school. Despite the larger economic challenges and the complexities of the public school environment there is much from which to take heart. Principals, working in partnership with Arts Teams, teaching staff and supporters, can anchor the arts in new and increasingly meaningful ways within their learning communities. PAL plays important roles as a resource provider, support system, and a source of inspiration for schools ready to gain the benefits of stronger arts programs.

ArtsEd Washington Principals' Arts Leadership Program

STAGES IN EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION



Participating Schools and Principals

Principals and Arts Team members participated in the evaluation process from the following sixteen schools. * *Denotes Principals who participated in follow-up interviews on best practices and method.*

Alki Elementary, Seattle, Seattle Public Schools, King County
Joanne Hill, Principal

Armin Jahr Elementary, Bremerton, Bremerton School District, Kitsap County
Michael Sellers, Principal

Carnation Elementary, Carnation, Riverview School District, King County
Doug Poage, Principal *

Cherry Valley Elementary, Duvall, Riverview School District, King County
Darcy Becker, Principal *

Evergreen Elementary, Spanaway, Bethel School District, Pierce County
Brad Graham, Principal

Richard Gordon Elementary, Kingston, North Kitsap School District, Kitsap County
Claudia Alves, Principal

Parkwood Elementary, Shoreline, Shoreline School District, King County
Laura Ploudré, Principal

Redmond Elementary, Redmond, Lake Washington School District, King County
Janice Heid, Principal

Rocky Ridge Elementary, Graham, Bethel School District, Pierce County
Leita Earl and Ellen Eddy, Principals

Rosa Parks Elementary, Redmond, Lake Washington School District, King County
Jeff Newport, Principal *

Salter's Point Elementary, Steilacoom, Steilacoom Historical School District, Pierce County
Nilsa Sotomayor, Principal

Southwood Elementary, Enumclaw, Enumclaw School District, King County
Susan Arbury, Principal *

Helen B. Stafford Elementary, Tacoma, Tacoma Public Schools, Pierce County
Cynthia Evans, Principal *

Stillwater Elementary, Carnation, Riverview School District, King County
Amy Wright, Principal

Sunnyslope Elementary, Port Orchard, South Kitsap School District, Kitsap County
Bob Leslie, Principal

David Wolfle Elementary, Kingston, North Kitsap School District, Kitsap County
Ben Degnin, Principal