

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 21,997

4 high schools (grades 9-12)

6 middle schools (grades 6-8 and 7-8)

24 elementary schools (grades K-5, K-6, and K-8)

3 alternative schools¹³

DISTRICT CONTEXT

Hacienda La Puente has long been a divided school district where the teaching of the arts is concerned, particularly at the elementary level. Historically, the schools with principals and active parent teacher associations (PTAs) that valued the arts have been able to fill some of the gaps in arts education for their students, while other schools and their students have missed out. Some Title II schools have received federal money that could potentially be applied to arts education, while inequities have been created in other schools. These factors, along with declining enrollment and No Child Left Behind (NCLB Law) prioritizing, have resulted in a patchwork of uneven arts education offerings at the elementary level.

At the secondary level, the arts are taught by credentialed specialists—though course offerings are inconsistent across schools. In 2003 high school arts specialists reported that their programs were in danger of failing because students were unprepared when they transitioned from middle school and were not signing up for art courses. To address these problems, arts supporters on the Hacienda La Puente School Board pushed for the establishment of a committee to restore the arts to all students, beginning at the elementary level. Upon the recommendation of the school board, a retired principal was hired on a part-time consulting basis to act as the committee chair, or arts point person. Simultaneously, community advocates established the Visual and Performing Arts Foundation to fiscally support the expansion of arts education in the district. The launch of the *Arts for All* initiative was viewed as a timely opportunity to help the arts committee achieve its goal, so the district joined in 2004.

*“A plan is very,
very critical.”*

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

To create a comprehensive plan for arts education, the district arts committee expanded to include 37 diverse stakeholders and was renamed the Community Arts Team (CAT). Members included Hacienda La Puente District administrators, arts specialists, classroom teachers, parents and community arts providers. A notable feature of this team was that approximately half of the members were teachers, including some with no background in

¹³ Alternative schools are addressed in the LACOE case study.

the arts. These teachers brought a broader educational perspective to discussions that made the team more aware of the challenges to implementation.

Working with an *Arts for All* coach, the CAT team created a five-year master plan based on the seven core elements of comprehensive arts education programs: standards-based curriculum, professional development, arts administration and teaching personnel, student assessment and program evaluation, partnerships and collaborations, resources and facilities, and funding. The plan focused primarily on reviving arts instruction at the elementary school level in order to strengthen the feeder system into the middle and high school levels. While the district's intention was to eventually hire arts specialists at the elementary level, this was not immediately possible owing to declining enrollment and a constricted budget. In the meantime, the plan stipulated that all K-5 teachers be provided with standards-based materials and receive training in arts-integrated teaching methods. In this way, the arts would not be perceived as competing for instructional time with other subject areas.

During the planning year, the CAT team also gained approval for a school board policy for arts education, conducted an inventory of school arts resources, and created a system for rolling out the arts plan district-wide. This system involved identifying a visual and performing arts representative at each elementary school to act as a communication liaison with the arts point person.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

After the year of planning and preparation the CAT team received board approval to initiate an ambitious implementation cycle. One art discipline was to be adopted each year, for four years. Theoretically, an adoption was to begin with integration training for teacher

representatives from each elementary school. These lead teachers would then pass on their new understandings to the rest of the staff at their respective schools. In addition, a group of six lead teachers were to receive training in writing standards-based lessons in the chosen discipline; develop a sequential, K-5 curriculum and make it available to all schools via the district website. Legislative block grant money and other district funds were set aside to pay for training for the lead teachers, curriculum writing and compensation for the part-time arts point person.

“With each little bit that we move, a lot of students are getting exposure. We may not be as far along as we like, but the opportunities are more equitable, so it is all worth it.”

The first art discipline selected for adoption was visual art. Lead teachers from 21 of the 24 elementary schools attended a series of The California Arts Project (TCAP) trainings in visual arts instruction during the summer and fall of 2005. During the spring of 2006, six of these teachers wrote sample lessons for each grade level. Simultaneously, all K-5 classroom teachers received

professional development in the supplemental *Art Masters* program, which was offered through a community arts provider from San Diego County. The program, funded by the Auen Foundation, the Los Angeles County Supervisor and the district Visual and Performing Arts Foundation consisted of an art history-based curriculum, art supplies and instructional training for classroom teachers. Functioning as a community partnership, the program invited senior citizens into the classroom to volunteer as instructional aids.

Discovering that their plan to adopt one art discipline per year was too ambitious, Hacienda La Puente spent two years on visual arts instruction. Teachers reportedly still wanted more time to learn about and practice instructional techniques. Even so, the CAT team wanted to move ahead with music, which was next in line for full adoption. An initial plan to equip every K-5 classroom with general music textbooks was derailed by a shortfall in funding. Although every elementary principal was willing to participate, the school board gave teachers the right to vote, to ensure they were not overwhelmed by other classroom responsibilities. Sixteen of 24 schools (66%) agreed to go forward with K-3 adoption. Others declined, stating conflicting priorities, such as concurrent adoptions in other state-tested subject areas. Meanwhile teachers from the 16 participating schools received music textbooks, related materials and training in their use.

In the third cycle (2007-2008), teachers were given the opportunity to receive TCAP training in theatre, and nine teachers participated. Examples of integrated lessons were written by cadres of lead teachers for music and theatre and are currently being vetted by the district curriculum director. Once approved, they will be posted on the district website along with the visual arts lessons that were previously written. Plans for further theatre and dance education workshops are currently on hold awaiting funding decisions and increased teacher buy-in.

As a result of the training teachers received at the elementary level and a greater sense of collaboration across schools, a district-wide visual arts show was organized in 2008. The juried exhibition was sponsored by the Hacienda La Puente Visual and Performing Arts Foundation and attracted broad participation by students from all grades, K-12. Currently, an effort is underway to revitalize a high school band festival, to provide students with increased opportunities to compete and strive for excellence in music. The Foundation lost momentum when an early plan to build the endowment through voluntary automatic paycheck deductions from teachers failed to materialize. The board of directors is currently rethinking its mission and its exclusive focus on arts education.

Inspired by the success of the Beverly Hills Unified School District, the arts point person initiated a district-wide summer arts camp in 2008 as a novel approach to combining arts instruction and fundraising. The objectives of the arts camp were to provide arts instruction for students, supplement pay of credentialed arts specialists who were teaching the courses, and, as the program established itself over time, apply any proceeds from enrollment fees toward other district arts programs. Enrollment information was being distributed at the time of the writing of this report.

Since 2004, the arts point person and individual teachers have also written grants and received additional funding from the County Supervisor, private foundations, and other

community sources. Hacienda La Puente Unified School District has funded the secondary arts specialist salaries, partial costs of professional development and district art events. Taking advantage of a matching grant from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund, the district has also paid half of the point person's consulting fee. Based on a school board decision, all funding from the state legislature block grants were dispersed to schools to be spent as they saw fit.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

One of the driving motivations behind Hacienda La Puente's arts plan was the desire to provide more equitable access to arts instruction for all students. While significant steps have been taken to increase access, the inequality of arts instruction continues to represent a formidable challenge. Some of the other mechanisms and challenges that have impacted the implementation process are as follows:

Mechanisms for Change

- *Arts point person.* As a former principal with a demonstrated passion for the arts, the acting coordinator has much experience in school administration, district politics and arts program implementation.
- *Emphasis on K-12 sequencing.* Arts specialists are now collaborating across schools for the first time to facilitate student transitions from one school level to the next and share instructional ideas.
- *Long-term professional development plan.* While the five-year arts plan is rolling out more slowly than expected, implementation is proceeding in an organized and documented manner, which affords opportunities to reflect on progress and respond to changing circumstances in the district.
- *Collaborative funding.* Hacienda La Puente Unified School District and multiple community entities have provided funding to implement the arts plan. In addition, the arts point person has been instrumental in creating new opportunities for raising funds, such as the district's new summer arts camp.

The main challenges to implementation come from internal district policies and practices. They are listed as follows:

Challenges of Change

- *Academic pressure.* Schools are perceived to be at the breaking point due to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) compliance pressures, creating a difficult climate for adopting new curriculum areas.
- *Overruling the arts plan.* Recommendations on critical implementation strategies have been overruled in favor of other district priorities. For example, the objectives of the plan were ignored in the approval of unfettered distribution of earmarked state funds.

- *Local control.* Allowing teachers authority over whether to adopt arts curricula derailed efforts to ensure equity in access to instruction in all art disciplines.
- *Communication systems.* Constrained access to website posting and inadequate Internet technology support have prevented the sharing of lesson plans and district arts news.
- *Voluntary training.* Since most professional development workshops must be scheduled outside the school day, attendance is unenforceable and inevitably affects equity in instruction.

OUTCOMES

The CAT team reported that one of the most notable effects of the *Arts for All* initiative has been the dramatic improvement in the visibility and valuing of arts education across the district. Due in large part to the arts point person's efforts to follow through on implementing the arts plan, discussions and decision-making around arts education are now embedded activities from the school board level to the classroom. Areas where other notable changes in the quality of the arts program have occurred are listed below:

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. The elementary schools have adopted the supplemental K-5 *Art Masters* program and all teachers have received the curriculum, materials and instructional training to implement it. Two-thirds of schools have adopted a state-approved K-3 music textbook curriculum with materials and training for teachers. In addition, standards-based, integrated lesson plans were written by teams of lead teachers for elementary music, theatre and visual arts. These are to be posted on the district website after they are reviewed and approved by the director of curriculum.

Pedagogy. Integration is the principal delivery mode for all arts instruction at the elementary level. Classroom teachers are the main instructors at this level, with some assistance provided through artist-in-residency programs. Credentialed arts specialists are employed at the secondary level, though the programs are patchwork at best. At the middle schools, where little has changed relative to the district arts plan, all have band specialists, but just one of six sites has a visual arts specialist. Theatre is not an elective per se, but is sometimes taught during language arts. Dance is sometimes available through physical education afterschool clubs. At the high school level, most sites offer electives in theatre, chorus, band and visual arts.

“The District was like a sleeping giant, where the arts were concerned. The Arts for All project has woken them all up.”

Student Assessment. Measuring student outcomes is not a current priority in the district arts plan, though it has been discussed and recommended during professional development workshops. One K-8 elementary school hosted a training workshop on arts assessment and theatre integration that was well received. The CAT team is considering extending the training to other sites as funding permits.

Professional Development. Designated lead teachers from the 24 elementary schools attended a series of TCAP workshops in visual arts (21 teachers) and music (18) and theatre (9) over a three-year period. Theoretically, they were to return to their schools and provide coaching for other teachers on staff. The success of this process has not been documented. In addition, as mentioned above, all elementary teachers received training in the use of *Art Masters*, a supplemental visual arts curriculum. All teachers who adopted the K-3 music program will receive training in how to use those resources as well. It was found that teachers needed more training than was initially planned to gain the necessary confidence to use the new arts curricula materials to best effect.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. The plan is currently being implemented under the direction of a part-time point person who heads the community CAT team. A former principal, she has headed the CAT team since the inception of the planning process in 2004. Despite the considerable size of Hacienda La Puente, the school board will not approve the creation of a full-time arts coordinator position when teachers are currently being laid off due to declining enrollment counts.

Personnel. One choral teacher was added at the high school level, and several middle school band teachers received pay increases to assist with music instruction at select elementary sites. In general, adding arts personnel is not an immediate priority in the district arts plan because of the focus on elementary schools, where classroom teachers currently provide all arts instruction.

Facilities and Equipment. When a district arts education inventory was completed in 2005, schools were sent the legislative block grant funds to spend as they saw fit so the status of facilities and equipment across schools will need to be re-inventoried at some point.

Partnerships and Collaborations. With the immediate focus on curriculum adoption and teacher training in the arts, partnerships and collaborations are considered on a case-by-case basis when opportunities arise. Instructional partnerships have included The California Arts Project, and the Music Center of Los Angeles County and the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Financial supporters have included *Arts for All*, Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe (pork belly funds), Auen Foundation, Toyota Corporation and the Hacienda La Puente Visual and Performing Arts Foundation.

Sustainability

Policy. An arts education policy was approved by the board of education in 2005. The policy states that Hacienda La Puente is committed to implementing and maintaining a comprehensive curriculum that includes sequential, standards-based arts education for all students in all grades.

It specifically refers to the goals of consistent instructional time, qualified and credentialed staff, standards-based professional development, quality instruction through integration and ongoing support of teachers. In addressing budget issues, the policy commits to maintaining equitable funding for art disciplines and for students served; encouraging community partnerships and, when necessary, making equitable funding reductions across all parts of the school curriculum rather than eliminating specific programs.

Funding. Money for arts education comes from a number of sources. Since 2004, the district has paid for arts personnel salaries and professional development matches. Though documentation was not available for review, it is assumed the on-time state legislative funds were spent on materials and supplies as intended. The ongoing block grant is distributed to schools as a supplemental arts budget. Local foundations and advocacy groups (e.g., PTA and booster clubs) have donated funding toward school arts events and curriculum materials. In the past year, funding sources have declined due to the re-organization of the Visual and Performing Arts Foundation and the relocation of the Auen Foundation to another community.

The Chief Financial Officer retains authority over the district arts education budget. Upon request, the arts point person is provided with a report of expenditures in a given year, but is not provided with a set budget for planning. She is able to make requests for purchases based on the district arts plan and the recommendations of the CAT team, but cannot be confident they will be approved.

Evaluation. Beyond conducting the initial resource needs assessment in 2005, program evaluation has not been a priority in the arts plan as the district is still early in the implementation process.

Communication and Advocacy. District-wide communication about arts education news happens primarily through word-of-mouth from the point person to school-level arts representatives and through e-mails to Hacienda La Puente administrators. Professional development opportunities and school events are posted in the district on-line calendar, but it is difficult to access. Currently, there is no newsletter or webpage for the visual and performance arts, and efforts to post lesson plans have been hampered by other Internet technology priorities and the lack of adequate support staff. In terms of advocating to the board of education, the point person is occasionally allowed ten minutes to present a progress report at their monthly leadership meetings and request approval on action items related to the district arts plans.

District Leadership. While the district superintendent and board of education originally spearheaded the drive to restore the arts to the elementary classroom, they have, on occasion, made policy decisions based on other critical curriculum projects. These decisions have slowed the implementation of the arts plan, thereby delaying progress in providing equitable student access to arts instruction. The CAT team perceives this dilemma as an unintended consequence of fiscally conscious decision-making in a challenging environment affected by declining enrollment, a state budget crisis, reactions to the NCLB mandates and a sensitivity to site-based control.

CHANGES IN EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

The CAT team at Hacienda La Puente USD began with high hopes of implementing its sweeping plan for district-wide adoption of curricula and instruction in all four art disciplines within four years. The first cycle of adoption went well with all elementary teachers receiving materials and training in visual arts instruction. Since then, the implementation timeline has faltered due to the expense of equitably serving 24 schools at once and to leadership decisions that placed the impetus for adoption on busy classroom teachers.

While the decisions were meant to uphold local control and ensure teachers were not overwhelmed by multiple curriculum adoptions in any given year, the consequence has been continued inequities in the district infrastructure for arts education delivery: One hundred percent of schools adopted a visual arts curriculum and received training in its use, 66 percent of elementary schools moved forward with music education and 38 percent with theatre education.

According to the Increased Student Access Survey (see Appendix B), indicators that point to a change in students' access to a quality arts education at the elementary level include increased classroom instruction, increased materials, increased integration with technology, and increased access for special populations, increased number of teachers providing instruction and increased student performances and exhibits. Slight improvements to these same areas were reported at the secondary level as well. Factors that have not changed appreciatively since 2004 are access to assemblies and field trips, number of artist residencies, available arts facilities, afterschool programs and arts personnel.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The Hacienda La Puente arts point person identified eight potential topics for further technical assistance support:

- District leadership training
- School board advocacy
- Professional development funding

- Dance training for physical education specialists and classroom teachers
- Teacher training on how to integrate arts into the school day
- Website assistance in posting arts lessons
- Student assessment
- Program evaluation