

Rosemead School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 3,121

4 elementary schools (grades K-6)

1 middle school (grades 7-8)

DISTRICT CONTEXT

Rosemead School District is the smallest of the Vanguard Districts, consisting of four elementary schools and one middle school. The superintendent spearheaded the effort to join the *Arts for All* initiative with the support of the community. Notable among the districts that joined in 2003-2004, Rosemead sent two school board members to receive strategic planning training along with the assistant principal at the middle school, who, five years later, still assumes the role of arts point person along with his current responsibilities.

In 2003, no specialists were employed in Rosemead at the elementary level. Art lessons were taught by classroom teachers who had some interests or qualifications to do so. Visual arts and music were taught by credentialed specialists at the middle school, limited square dancing was taught by a professional caller and there was an afterschool drama club overseen by an English teacher. The neighboring high school fared better with seven arts specialists covering the four art disciplines in 25 art classes, many of which fulfilled the state university admission requirement in the arts. The biggest challenge the district faced was the lack of adequate funding to provide high-quality elementary level instruction in any of the art disciplines. Rosemead joined *Arts for All* seeking new opportunities to support the growth of its arts program.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The initial Community Art Team (CAT) consisted of 22 handpicked representatives from the school community including district administrators, the community liaison, classroom teachers, middle school arts specialists, a high school curriculum leader and arts specialists from the neighboring school district, city parks and recreation staff, a parent, the school board president and the school board clerk. Beyond desiring broad stakeholder representation on the committee, the key criterion for inviting individuals to join was a demonstrable passion for the arts. The involvement of school board members at subsequent planning meetings was interpreted as a demonstration of their buy-in for increasing arts instruction in the schools. The Rosemead administration reflected its commitment by paying for substitutes so teachers could attend the daylong monthly planning meetings.

*“Our main asset?
Hardworking people who
are devoted and dedicated
to doing what’s right for
kids and making kids
well-rounded. That’s
really important.”*

During the first school year, the CAT team worked with an *Arts for All* coach and complete a five-year district arts plan, created and passed a school board policy on arts education and completed an inventory of arts education resources template included in the California Department of Education (CDE) Arts Education Program Toolkit.¹⁷ The arts plan included fundamental components of a quality arts program: standards-based curriculum, instructional methodology, student assessment, partnerships, funding, resources and facilities, and professional development. Two elements that were notably missing were evaluation and communication. In an effort to ensure a sustained commitment to arts education, a key statement was included in the board policy: “As the arts are a core subject, in times of budget setbacks, the board maintains that reductions must be distributed equitably across subject areas, rather than eliminating any specific programs.” This commitment reportedly helped save the arts program when the district’s annual budget was later reduced due to declining enrollment.

The CDE Toolkit-based inventory extended to the nearest high school in the neighboring district in order to align a sequential K-12 arts program. A benefit of the school-by-school inventory was that once the data were compiled, the CAT team was able to base its planning decisions on available resources and realistic ideas on how to improve equity in students’ access to arts instruction. The findings indicated the need for better facilities for theatre and visual arts, more equipment and supplies for all four major art disciplines, a sequential, standards-based K-12 curriculum and professional development for the elementary classroom teachers.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

At the completion of planning, the configuration of the CAT team changed as implementation committees were formed around three strategic directions: curriculum, professional development, and funding. The first step toward implementation was partnering with The California Arts Project (TCAP) to provide introductory training on standards-based teaching in the four art disciplines. This effort, in turn, provided the five schools with insights on creating individual arts plans that included an arts budget based on their annual allotment of the legislative block grant funds. The district also provided schools with discretionary funds for arts education. When formulating their plan, schools used the district arts plan as a guide and then made independent decisions about how they would proceed and what resources they needed.

During the 2005-2006 school year the curriculum subcommittee identified essential standards for each of the art disciplines by selecting a manageable number from among the California Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards. With the goal to first increase arts instruction at the elementary schools, the middle school visual arts and music specialists wrote sample lesson plans to be taught at each grade level and provided classroom teachers with training in using them.

¹⁷ See description at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/vp/vapaguidance.asp>.

When the California legislature approved the one-time allocation for arts education, Rosemead adhered to its district arts plan and used the money to purchase visual arts and music curricula in the form of state-approved textbooks, supplemental reference libraries and musical instruments for the 2006-2007 school year. The CAT team took care to synchronize arts instruction with an existing instructional system to avoid overwhelming the teachers. For example, the CDE-approved visual arts and music textbooks were purchased from the same company that published the reading curriculum, allowing for purposeful integration across subject areas without changing the basic delivery structure. Teachers received orientation training in the use of the new materials. In addition, by bringing each school principal into the curriculum selection process, they received an orientation to the district's new arts education plan.

The textbook adoption ran into a stumbling block when it was discovered that teachers needed considerably more training and practice time than was initially allotted, in order to use the materials as they were intended. The CAT team has decided to temporarily postpone launching theatre and dance education programs at the elementary level and instead, continue providing professional development in visual arts and music. Nonetheless, progress has been made in the middle school dance program with square dance now taught to all seventh and eighth graders for four weeks by a professional dance caller. In addition, the middle school physical education specialist now provides an introduction to ballroom dancing each year for all students.

“Not everyone is a visionary, and you need a vision to be willing to stick with this through the difficult ramp-up time.”

In the funding subcommittee, district administrators wanted to provide a pipeline for supplemental resources, so they established the Rosemead Education Foundation in 2005. Its mission was to support a range of special programs in the five schools. As of spring 2008, the Foundation had yet to organize fundraisers or provide financial assistance for school arts.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

The CAT team noted the importance of the planning process as a way to create a district-wide focus on arts education not present prior to joining *Arts for All*. The planning coach was also acknowledged as an instrumental support during the planning process. However, some team members had difficulty justifying the creation of action plans at a time when there appeared to be no funding available to implement them. The team was unaware of statewide lobbying efforts to ensure legislative support for arts education, and later said that this would have given them more confidence in the potential success of their arts plan early on. Other mechanism and challenges to implementation were as follows:

Mechanisms of Change

- *Engaged superintendent and school board members.* Their involvement on the CAT team was a clear demonstration of their commitment to arts education for principals and teachers.
- *A planning team made up entirely of arts advocates.* The power of commonality continually fed the motivation of the CAT team.
- *Dedicated, hardworking classroom teachers and arts specialists.* Instructors were willing to put in the time and energy to launch the program and learn new ways of teaching.
- *Program evaluation.* Rosemead District has conducted two needs assessments with schools to guide decision-making on implementation priorities, resource purchases, and professional development.
- *Alignment of instructional systems.* By purchasing music and visual arts textbooks from the same publisher of their reading program, they avoided subjecting teachers to a new pedagogical approach. It also facilitated integration across subject areas. This was considered important for obtaining teacher buy-in.
- *Local resources.* The district used its middle school arts specialists to prepare supplemental curricula at the elementary level before block grant funding became available for materials.

Challenges to Change

- *Lack of arts specialists.* Due to its small size and budget constraints, it is unlikely the district will be able to afford arts specialists at the elementary level, at least in the foreseeable future.
- *Training time.* With other educational priorities in play, finding adequate time for professional development in the arts is an ongoing problem.
- *Unrealistic expectations.* The new visual arts curriculum required more training than was originally planned for, meaning the instructional uptake was slowed.
- *Instructional time.* The district is challenged in finding time to include instruction in four arts forms during the elementary school day.
- *No arts coordinator.* The lack of a full-time arts coordinator who is unencumbered by other job duties translates into an inability to take full advantage of grant opportunities or other forms of assistance offered through the *Arts for All* initiative.

OUTCOMES

On the whole, district administrators on the CAT team believe their district plan is working to increase both the quality and quantity of arts instruction in their five schools, starting with visual arts and music. Nonetheless, they found their original timeline for VAPA adoption proved too ambitious with teacher training taking longer to accomplish than originally projected. The most notable changes reported as direct effects of the *Arts for All* initiative were as follows:

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. With a focus on elementary schools, the first disciplines selected for curriculum adoption were music and visual arts. Essential standards were selected, sample lessons were created for each grade level by the middle school specialists, and state-approved textbooks were purchased that dovetailed with the language arts curriculum. General music textbooks were provided for grades K-6, as grades seven and eight already had them. Visual arts textbooks were provided for grades K-8. The initiative has also resulted in greater communication and planning with the nearby high school and has made administrators far more aware of the need to adequately prepare students to successfully transition into the higher level arts courses.

Pedagogy. All K-6 students now have access to standards-based music and visual arts instruction in the general classroom. However, the quality and quantity of instruction is undocumented. Owing to the cycle of textbook adoptions in other subject areas, the arts are intended to be taught through integration more than as discrete subjects. To this end, the sample lessons prepared for each grade level prior to the purchasing of textbooks were based on integrated instruction. The PTA Council has also provided supplemental visual arts instructional materials for all elementary schools.

Middle school students have access to arts and music instruction through courses taught by arts specialists and also through integrated instruction in other subject areas. A professional square dance caller and the physical education teacher now provide dance instruction for all students. A specialist in gifted and talented education provides an additional visual arts class for 30+ select students and the visual arts specialist now uses an art cart to collaborate with the social studies teacher on integration. A new string instrument program has been created for grades four through six after school and has resulted in three new classes during the school day for grades seven and eight.

Student Assessment. Student assessment in the arts is not area of focus in the district arts plan currently.

Professional Development. Teacher training in the arts is now paid for by Rosemead District, just as with every other subject area. Teachers at both the elementary and middle school levels have received training in using the new music and visual arts curricula materials and software. This is scheduled to continue in 2008-2009.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. With just five schools in the district, hiring an arts coordinator has not been perceived as a financially viable option. The assistant principal at the middle school, who led the CAT team during the planning stage, has continued to function as the arts point person for the past five years. Strategic directions are identified in annual planning meetings and implementation tasks are handled by committee.

Personnel. There has not been an increase in arts staffing, although the physical education teacher at the middle school level has added dance instruction into the syllabus. There are no plans to hire arts specialists at the elementary level.

Facilities and Equipment. A new visual arts room and music room were paid for out of a local school bond initiative. All four elementary schools have performance stages. The legislative funding was used to buy string instruments to start a parent-driven elective string instruments program for grades 4-8. Other arts supplies, equipment and instruments (recorders) were purchased for elementary schools and for the middle school dance units.

Partnerships and Collaborations. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Council has been an active collaborator from the beginning. It has participated in the planning process, provided funds for art materials in all elementary schools, and in 2007-2008, donated \$500 for a grade-level field trip to an art museum. Artist residencies have not been a priority during the first phase of implementation, although potential arts providers have been identified for the future as funding allows. In general, the schools are being more judicious about how they spend their budget allotment and instructional time in arts education. They are more selective about community arts program offerings and first check to see how they fit in with the overall arts education plan before participating.

Sustainability

Policy. The school board passed a district arts education policy in 2004. The middle school has since been identified as a Performance Improvement site by the CDE, but teachers fought to keep the arts classes in place despite the increased academic pressure. A school administrator acknowledged this would have been unlikely to occur in the past. However, it is also unlikely that the middle school theatre program will expand under these circumstances.

Funding. The arts education budget in Rosemead comes from a combination of sources: district general funds, school improvement funds, state legislative block grants, the PTA, and funds from Case Management, Outreach, Referral and Education (CORE), Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) and Accelerated College Enrollment (ACE) programs. The CAT team has not yet taken advantage of grants from offered through the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund because of a lack of fit with their current implementation focus or simply a lack of time to pursue the offerings. The district does not currently have funding for teaching artists other than what the PTA can provide through direct instruction programs at the elementary level. An education foundation has been established to provide supplemental funds for special programs, including the arts, but it has not made significant contributions to date.

“Having the state money available just as the planning stage was completed brought the implementation stage to life. The [impact] has exceeded our expectations.”

Evaluation. The district has conducted two needs assessment surveys over the past five years to document available resources and find out what schools need to advance their arts education plans. The data have strongly influenced the CAT team’s planning and spending decisions.

Communication and Advocacy. Since Rosemead is a small district, communication primarily happens through word of mouth or through an on-line “staff lounge” blog. In terms of parent advocacy, student artwork is now being exhibited as evidence of academic progress during Open House night.

District Leadership. The program is strongly supported by the superintendent and school board members as exemplified by their role on the CAT team and their willingness to spend district money on arts facilities, personnel, supplies, and professional development over the past five years. In addition, without a full time arts coordinator, the work of implementation is divided and accomplished by several district administrators, the assistant middle school principal and arts specialists.

CHANGES IN EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

The main areas of improved student access to learning experiences in the arts were increased instructional hours and new equipment (including instruments and supplies) at both the elementary and middle school levels. Prior to the *Arts for All* initiative, all elementary students participated in arts experiences, but they were not thought to be standards-based or sequential. Now all four elementary and the middle school have textbook curricula and related materials in the visual arts and music, and elementary teachers are receiving professional development to provide the instruction. All K-6 students received musical recorders, and a new string instrument program is offered after school for interested fourth, fifth and sixth graders.

At the middle school level, three new elective classes in string instruments are offered, filling the sequential gap between elementary and high school. In addition, the middle school used categorical funds to hire an arts specialist for a GATE visual arts class, and the physical education specialist teaches a new unit of ballroom dancing. The CAT team reported that approximately 80 percent of the student population take at least one elective class in art and in music during seventh and eighth grade, and now enjoy access to new arts-designated classrooms.

Parents have also responded positively to the district changes linked to the arts plan and have encouraged their students to become involved in the arts, so student participation rates have reportedly climbed, though are not currently documented. This was, however, reflected in a higher level of attendance in the district talent show that was revived after a three-year hiatus. It is anticipated that the amount and quality of arts instruction will continue to rise as classroom teachers engage in more training and practice.

While the district has made commendable improvements in its visual arts and music programs, dance education and theatre still need to be adopted in a significant way, which will require more funding. In addition, the extent to which teachers are able to apply what they learn in professional development workshops in the visual arts and music has yet to be adequately documented.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The CAT team identified five possible areas for further technical assistance through *Arts for All*:

- CAT team coaching at various phases of implementation
- Professional development coaching
- Grants for teaching artist residencies
- Advocacy letters to the school board and district administrators, reminding them to keep the arts on their front burner.
- An external program evaluator, to help them reflect on their progress