

Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District

2007-2008 student enrollment: 11,688

3 high schools (grades 6-12, 9-12)

2 middle schools (grades 6-8)

10 elementary schools (grades K-5)

2 alternative schools¹⁸

DISTRICT CONTEXT

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District had a well-established music education program in its secondary schools prior to joining *Arts for All*. The district enjoyed strong parental support for arts instruction in general and had several community arts partnerships in place, including with the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation. The district also had a written arts education policy in place. The document did not, however, reflect a commitment to providing a sequential, standards-based education in the arts, nor other essential elements of a quality arts education program. Significant gaps existed in arts offerings from kindergarten to Grade 12. There was also an imbalance in funding earmarked for arts education with 60 percent allotted to music programs, 30 percent to visual arts, 8 percent to theatre and 2 percent to dance. The district had a full-time fine arts coordinator and 36 arts specialists district-wide, primarily teaching at the secondary level. When the *Arts for All* initiative was announced, the district recognized and embraced the opportunity to create a comprehensive strategic plan to strengthen instruction in all four art disciplines, to receive guidance in revising the existing arts education policy and to receive funding and technical assistance in developing a more equitable and sequential approach to arts education.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The development of a strategic arts plan began in late 2003, with the formation of the district's *Arts for All* Committee (a.k.a. CAT team). There were 14 initial members including administrators, secondary arts specialists, community artists, parents, an *Arts for All* planning coach and representatives from the district's education foundation. The CAT team constructed a plan with a nine-year timeline with the eventual goal to offer sequential, standards-based arts instruction in the four major art disciplines—dance, music, theatre and visual arts—to all students.

The finished plan was entitled *Blueprint for Arts Education in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, 2004-2013*. It

“We didn’t even know we had a policy for arts education or that it was outdated. This process helped us to discover that and make a change.”

¹⁸ Alternative schools are addressed in the LACOE case study.

included known elements of a quality arts program: standards-based curriculum, instruction and methodology, student assessment, professional development for staff, program administration and personnel, partnerships and collaborations, funding, resources and facilities, and program evaluation. Elements not mentioned in the plan were communication and advocacy, although they were later recognized to be necessary components of effective implementation. The biggest drawback reported about the planning process was the creation of a comprehensive plan that the district did not have the means to pay for. Nonetheless, the CAT team chose to avoid dwelling on the overall price tag during the planning process, believing a cost analysis might have negatively impacted the chances of getting their strategic arts plan approved.

During the development of the plan, the CAT team conducted a needs assessment of all schools and revised the outdated board policy, adding clauses on standards-based instruction in all four major art disciplines during the school day, equitable access to arts instruction, and support for ongoing, community-based learning opportunities for both students and teachers. The revised arts education policy and the nine-year plan were approved by the school board in December 2004 and January 2005, respectively. A matching grant from the *Arts for All* Pooled Fund was used to extend the arts coordinator's job from a 10-month to a year-round position and to pay costs associated with the CAT team's monthly planning meetings.

IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS PLAN

Once the plan was finished, the CAT team worked together with Santa Monica-Malibu music and visual arts specialists, curriculum specialists and consultants from the dance and theater departments at the University of California at Los Angeles to create standards-based

curricula for all four art disciplines, Pre-K through Grade 12. The curricula contained grade level breakdowns of the California Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards, lesson strategies, recommended materials and assessment options. The curricula were completed in the spring of 2006 and have since been offered as models for other school districts to consider.

“A couple people have complimented me and the Arts for All team saying, ‘...you really did write the curriculum. You didn’t just talk about it and have meetings and debate about it. You actually put it down and you did it.’”

During 2005-2006, the CAT team also created a Pre-K through Grade 12 instructional framework, researched professional development needs across the district, investigated models for training, reviewed assessments, and worked to solidify existing community partnerships and other sources of support funding. It was decided that as far as possible, arts specialists would

provide arts instruction and classroom teachers would use integration methods to include the study of the arts in the general curriculum. At the elementary level, this meant that music and visual arts would be taught as discrete subjects by arts specialists, dance would be taught as part of the physical education curriculum and classroom teachers would learn to integrate theatre arts into their language arts lessons with the assistance of textbook lessons, visiting actors and existing teacher expertise. Visual arts courses were already taught by credentialed specialists at the secondary level.

In the fall of 2006, the CAT team began the multi-year effort of improving student access to quality arts instruction one art discipline at a time, starting with music. Although music was already the most highly developed program of the four major art disciplines, the CAT team wanted to solidify the instructional sequence and truly make music part of the curriculum for *all* students. Due to a new instructional schedule, it was possible for specialists to provide more consistent music instruction for elementary students in less time per week, which would allow time for the other art disciplines and for professional development. In order to make this change, the new ongoing arts education funding from the state legislature was used to hire four music specialists to join the existing six. Thereafter music was offered to an entire grade level at an elementary school by a team of credentialed instructors twice a week, rather than the “pullout program” that existed before the expansion. As a result, the elementary music program expanded to include a 40-minute weekly general music lesson for grade three by a music specialist as well as 40-minute band, orchestra and choir classes twice weekly for every fourth and fifth grader district-wide.

PTA donations continue to be earmarked to fund K-2 music education, using non-credentialed teachers. Professional development opportunities in all four art disciplines and arts integration were also provided for classroom teachers through a four-year U.S. Department of Education Arts Education Demonstration Grant through the SmART Schools program which had previously demonstrated success on the east coast. Santa Monica-Malibu is the first district on the west coast to have the SmART Schools program.

The CAT team also implemented changes beyond the elementary music program. At the middle school level, three theatre classes and one dance class were offered for the first time, in addition to music and visual arts electives. At Lincoln Middle School, the drama class was cut, but an afterschool theatre program was created for plays and musicals. The arts coordinator is working to restore the drama class that was dropped due to budget cuts. At the high school level, there is new Regional Occupation Program (ROP) dance teacher who teaches three dances classes. In addition, two new dual enrollment dance electives were created, with credits transferable to Santa Monica College. Funded by the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation, two other dance classes were also initiated at Malibu and Olympic high schools (one dance class at each school).

To support arts instruction, the legislative block grants were distributed to all school sites by art discipline. The funds were to be spent on supplies, equipment and materials district-wide. Larger amounts were given to dance, theatre and visual arts programs because music programs had been so well supported by past budgets and/or booster clubs. The community also voted for a \$268 million schools facilities bond, part of which was

earmarked for new or improved visual and performing arts facilities for all school sites over time.

In 2008-2009 the CAT team's next major goal is to implement a district-wide professional development program in visual arts, pending available funding. In addition, arts specialists will be offered workshops to explore and develop student assessment models. The team also plans to advocate for adding theatre specialists at both middle schools as well as credentialed visual arts teachers at the elementary level. Two aspects that have not been fully implemented as intended is the development of Pre-K through Grade 12 assessments in all four art disciplines and to formally evaluate the progress and impact of the district arts plan at the school level. As of yet, neither adequate staff nor funding have been available to initiate these projects, with the exception of an annual district-wide assessment of fifth graders on general music knowledge—an on-line effort that began in 2005-2006.

Recognizing the difficulty of keeping Santa Monica-Malibu teachers informed of arts activities and opportunities, the arts coordinator has also begun to identify communication liaisons at each school to act as conduits for visual and performing arts news. A liaison is typically the school librarian, the community liaison, an arts specialist or a classroom teacher.

MECHANISMS AND CHALLENGES

More than any other Vanguard District, Santa Monica-Malibu places a strong value on hiring arts specialists to teach the four art disciplines as discrete subjects. The success with which the district will be able to actualize that vision is dependent on the availability of funding—not only in the district budget but also through community support. Other mechanisms that have supported the implementation of the district arts plan or have created obstacles are listed below.

Mechanisms of Change

- *Superintendent, school board and parent support.* Both Santa Monica-Malibu administrators and parents were strongly in favor of improving arts education when the initiative began.
- *Experienced arts coordinator.* The arts coordinator worked at the district for several years and was willing and able to take on the bulk of responsibility for implementing the plan.
- *Experienced curriculum staff on the planning team.* District arts advocates and leaders were instrumental in writing the board policy, the district arts plan, and the sequential curricula. Their leadership clout helped win approval of all documents from the school board.
- *Pre-existing music program.* The district had a successful K-12 music program on which to build.

- *Availability of state funding.* A portion of the state funding paid for the purchase of musical instruments, equipment for the elementary music program and arts supplies, which helped jumpstart the implementation process.
- *Strong community partnerships.* The district had a supportive education foundation and committed community partners that have readily helped meet the objectives of the arts plan.
- *Having a written plan.* The document has been used to attract funding, both from the district budget and external sources.

Challenges to Change

- *Declining enrollment.* Loss of district funding due to declining enrollment has prevented the hiring of elementary visual arts teachers, thus effectively disrupting the rollout of the district arts plan.
- *Communication.* Disseminating information on the progress of the CAT team, school art events and other related opportunities has reportedly been a challenge, despite the existence of a visual and performing arts website.
- *Low CAT team membership.* Membership on the CAT team has declined over five years from 13 to six active participants. The team has had difficulty attracting teachers to attend monthly meetings after school. In addition, bringing newcomers up to speed on the work of the CAT team has been perceived as a challenge. That being said, the team is planning a recruitment campaign for 2008-2009 that will target a broad range of stakeholders.
- *“The Three Barriers” to Arts Education: time, space and money.* The ability to move forward with implementation plans at the school level correlates strongly with these three factors.
- *Persistent perception that the arts are not core subjects.* Despite the adoption of Pre-K through Grade 12 curricula, the arts are not treated as core subjects because of the federally imposed emphasis on math and literacy.
- *Lack of funding or expertise in program evaluation.* The CAT team has lacked the internal resources to develop and implement an evaluation plan for arts programming today, however it intends to make this area a priority in 2008-2009.

OUTCOMES

In the early stages of the nine-year plan, the Santa Monica-Malibu CAT team has made notable strides in implementation of its district arts plan by focusing on strengthening the infrastructure of the overall arts program and designing Pre-K through Grade 12 curricula for all four major art disciplines. The following paragraphs provide an account of the kinds of changes that have occurred as a result of planning and implementation effort, relative to the elements of their plan.

Content

Standards-based Curriculum. CAT team members collaborated with district arts specialists and UCLA performing arts staff and wrote standards-based Pre-K through Grade 12 curricula in dance, music, theatre and visual arts during the first year of implementation. The curricula were designed to better prepare students to transition from one school level to the next, improving retention in arts programs and ensuring students have the preparatory skills they need to excel with each advancement. In addition, the curricula list the materials, supplies and resources needed to deliver standards-based instruction and list the types of assessment that can be used to determine whether or not students are meeting the standards. The curriculum framework is now being considered as a model for other subject areas and has been shared with other districts.

Pedagogy. As a general rule, Santa Monica-Malibu pursues the best teaching talent available, believing instructional quality is key to student participation. As of 2007-2008, all four art disciplines are offered as electives at the high school level and taught by credentialed specialists; one of the two middle schools lacks dance and theatre offering. At the elementary level, all students in grades three through five receive weekly music lessons from credentialed specialists. All K-2 students also receive weekly music instruction from non-credentialed community artists through PTA funding.

In six of eleven elementary schools, the PTA also funds visual arts instruction in collaboration with community arts providers, such as P.S. Arts. Some classroom teachers with a background in the arts also provide periodic instruction, although the extent of this activity is not yet documented. The arts coordinator reported that due to teacher training and use of the district's new arts curricula, instruction is presumed to be more standards-based than before the *Arts for All* initiative.

Student Assessment. Based on the state music standards and the new music curriculum, an on-line music test was developed and piloted as an elementary school exit exam. Henceforth, it will be administered to all fifth graders on an annual basis. The purpose is to measure each student's musical knowledge as they prepare to transition to middle school music programs. It also provides a way to measure the effectiveness of the elementary curriculum and instruction. Other district-level arts assessments are currently being developed.

Professional Development. Teachers have been offered professional development opportunities in the arts each year, including The California Arts Project (TCAP) workshops, arts coordinator-led workshops, and grant-funded workshops taught through community arts providers such as the Santa Monica Art Museum and SmART Schools Institutes for Title I schools. Workshops are designed based on teacher interest and attendance is voluntary. The professional development sessions typically cover lesson planning, instructional practices and/or assessments in an art discipline.

Infrastructure

Program Administration. An arts coordinator and administrative assistant were already on staff when Santa Monica-Malibu joined *Arts for All*. Both have since increased their working schedule during the summer months. The coordinator also teaches a dual enrollment high school jazz class after school at Santa Monica high School. Communication liaisons are now being identified at each school to improve communication about arts education and to encourage more school representation on the CAT team.

Personnel. Since *Arts for All* began, the district has hired four additional elementary music specialists from the ongoing arts education block grant. While the district eventually plans to hire visual arts specialists to provide instruction for all fourth and fifth grade students, declining enrollment and the 2008 state budget crisis has prevented this to date. A dance teacher and music specialist were hired at the middle school level to fill instructional gaps. At the Santa Monica High School, one band director was promoted to a full time position and one full time orchestra teacher was added. In addition, three guitar classes were added through dual enrollment. At Malibu High, a part time orchestra/guitar teacher was added.

Facilities and Equipment. The passing of a 2006 school bond measure provided funding for new visual and performing arts facilities, primarily at the secondary school level. Details were not available at the writing of this report. Musical instruments, second and third grade music textbooks, art supplies and theater equipment were purchased from the legislative block grant funds and foundation grants.

Partnerships and Collaborations. Santa Monica-Malibu is situated in a community that contains tremendous potential for arts education partnerships—both instructional and fiscal—because it is home to numerous entertainment industry corporations, museums, galleries and arts organizations. In fact, there were at least seven partnerships in place providing either funding or programming for students prior to the district joining the *Arts for All* initiative. Since implementation of the district arts plan began, an even greater emphasis has been placed on actively seeking external funding support, particularly with the aid of the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation. Current partnerships include a multi-year U.S. Department of Education Model Arts Demonstration grant, SmART Schools, P.S. Arts and Grammy Signature Schools, among others.

Sustainability

Policy. The school board approved a revised arts education policy in 2005. The new policy contains specific language about the districts' commitment to offering standards-based, sequential instruction by highly qualified and credentialed arts instructors. It also states that visual and performing arts instruction should be offered during the regular school day. The arts coordinator has, at times, referenced the tenets of the policy and district's commitment as an *Arts for All* district as a tool for persuading school principals to spend funds that were earmarked for arts education accordingly.

Funding. The district arts plan was used to attract funding that would not have been available for the arts in the past, including money from the district, the facilities bond measure and from external grant sources. The district has been particularly successful at raising external funding through grant writing and fundraising activities, producing 22 percent of the total arts budget. The school board increased arts education spending in 2007-2008 by half a percent to 3.88 percent and currently pays for more than 40 arts specialists, the arts coordinator, and an administrative assistant. It also provided supplemental funds to repair musical instruments and in other ways supports the advancement of arts education at each school. The one-time state legislative funding was also passed onto schools to spend primarily for equipment and supplies.

The Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation has played an important role in the development of the plan and the pursuit of sustaining resources beyond state funding.

“What’s exciting is that while enrollment is dropping, the number of music students...is not mirroring the big drop.”

Before the district joined *Arts for All*, the Foundation created an endowment called *For the Arts* to raise money for arts education. To help ensure the arts would never again be eliminated from the school curriculum, the endowment aims to provide annual funding for arts education programs. To date, the Foundation has helped pay for musical instruments, arts delivery programs and arts specialist salaries. It has also provided leadership on the CAT team over the past five years and continues to seek new avenues for generating sustained financial support. In addition to the funding contributions made by the endowment, the foundation has also been instrumental in sponsoring events that advocate for arts programs in the Santa Monica-Malibu district. These events include the annual “Celebration For The Arts” on the Santa Monica Pier and the annual Jackson Browne benefit concert.

Evaluation. The arts coordinator has taken preliminary steps to establish evaluation procedures, including talking over possibilities with RAND corporation and creating a template for tracking the completion of annual objectives in the arts plan. The coordinator holds regular meetings with district arts specialists to discuss program issues. This provides informal opportunities for reflection and adjustments to both program administration and classroom instruction. The CAT team is also considering tracking student enrollment levels in arts classes to find out whether any increase in attendance is taking place.

Communication and Advocacy. During 2008-2009, each school will identify an arts leader to act as a communication liaison for the arts coordinator. The administrative assistant for arts education also maintains a visual and performing arts website that is used to showcase events and advocate for the district arts program. The CAT team reported that their strongest form of advocacy is student performances, especially in music.

District Leadership. The Santa Monica-Malibu superintendent and school board members have provided strong support in terms of approving the district arts plan, the

revised arts education policy and paying the lion's share of salaries for the arts specialists and arts administrators. This is notable in that the superintendent and senior cabinet members have changed at least three times since the inception of *Arts for All*. Nonetheless, they have allowed the arts coordinator considerable support in implementing phases of the arts plan, when funding is available through external sources. In the context of declining enrollment, plans to hire visual arts specialists have been tabled and, at this point, it is increasingly unlikely that district expenditures for arts education will continue to expand in the near future. It should be noted that the majority of school board members are parents with students who participate in the district's music program.

CHANGES IN EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

The district has made the most progress in increasing student access to quality arts instruction in its Pre-K through Grade 12 music program. With the hiring of four additional elementary music specialists and with increased funding from school PTAs, all students in the district now have access—either mandatory or as an elective—to music education. Also at the elementary level, the CAT team reported increased hours of instruction due to music staffing, more community artist residency programs (in dance, theatre and visual arts) and varied professional development for classroom teachers. The one-time legislative block grant allotment afforded the purchase of musical instruments and instructional supplies, including Apple i-pods for studying musical compositions.

At the middle school level, dance and theatre classes were added at one site, a music teacher was hired at another, and new supplies, equipment and musical instruments were provided for all arts specialists. Both middle schools purchased orchestra risers and an orchestra shell. An increased number of musical performances were reported at this level as well.

At the high school level, dance classes were added with the hiring of a dance teacher at one school. The University of California's *Arts Bridge* artist residency program brought increased dance opportunities to another. Regional Occupation Program (ROP) classes in digital design, theatre and music production/engineering were expanded at two high schools. New dual enrollment classes with Santa Monica College included choir, dance, drawing and jazz band. An additional band and a string instruments teacher were hired at Santa Monica High School and a part-time string/guitar teacher was hired at Malibu High. Arts specialists have been given laptops and digital cameras as well, to help with documentation, assessment and other instructional purposes.

The only recent upgrade in facilities was the installment of an air conditioning system in the music and choir rooms at Santa Monica High. However, all arts specialists received supplies and equipment from the state block grants. While student enrollment across the district has declined recently, the arts coordinator reported that music course enrollment has not, indicating that the percentage of secondary students taking elective music classes is increasing slightly. More students reportedly participated in festivals and music contests this year as well.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The CAT team mentioned six areas where technical assistance would be valuable at this time:

- Professional development planning
- Student assessment in the arts
- Program evaluation
- Gaining an increased financial commitment from the district and school board
- Locating funding for elementary arts specialist salaries
- Matching funds grants to provide incentives for increased district funding