

Enhancing Pathways For Collaboration Between Teaching Artists and Philadelphia Public Schools

A Policy Brief from Public Citizens for Children and Youth

Introduction

On any summer or winter day there are painters, actors, dancers, and musicians working with Philadelphia public school staff to enrich students' arts experiences. For decades Philadelphia's rich cultural infrastructure and fabric of teaching artists has enriched the school lives of children and youth in the city. But the mix of outsiders and insiders, big systems and individual artists or small community-based arts organizations presents challenges. If not addressed and resolved, differing organizational cultures, bureaucratic procedures, and institutional safeguards inhibit the ability of schools and teaching artists to work effectively to serve students.

Within the scope of its advocacy work for arts education, Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) documented a number of challenges regarding teaching artists and collaboration with schools.



These observations were gathered through conversations and forums with teachers and principals, artists and arts organizations, non-profit partners with schools, arts administrators and education advocates.

Issues raised range beyond the scope of this brief paper – from improving funding, compensation for artists and arts facilities at schools to increasing co-planning and curriculum coordination with school-based teachers, to strengthening the teaching artist community. This brief concentrates on several focus issues within this broad palette, and proposes several ways that the arts and education communities in Philadelphia can galvanize their resources to resolve them.

Background

With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its focus on standardized test scores, many schools throughout the country diverted their resources from the arts to state-tested subjects such as math and English. The tests and NCLB were the latest in a series of events leading to a decline in the presence of the arts and creative experiences in the school lives of children.

The School District of Philadelphia's long tradition of nurturing engagement in the arts was not enough to protect it against the national decline of arts support during the

last several decades as school budgets became tighter, the urgency of school safety loomed larger, and increasing numbers of students needed health and social services in order to succeed in the classroom.

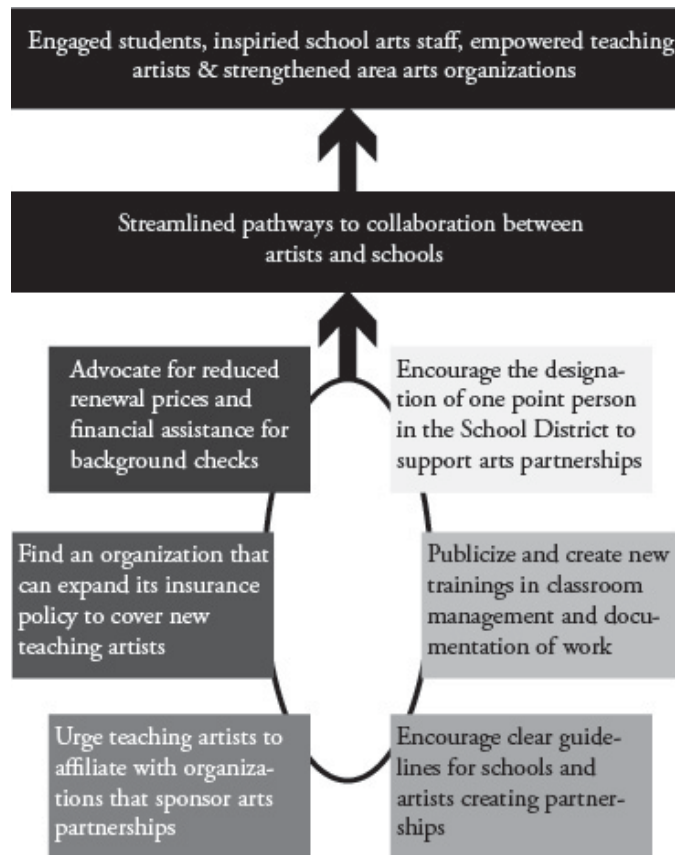
Fortunately, the decline in school arts funding is now being reversed in some cities such as Philadelphia, as educators and advocates have reasserted that the arts have important educational value and can play significant roles in improving school climate and engaging students in school. Communities across the country are waking up to the contribution the arts make towards improving the learning environment, stimulating interest in core subjects, and involving students, families and communities in school activities. The impact of the arts in supporting and strengthening learning, particularly for struggling students, is finally being acknowledged again.

Within the School District of Philadelphia, the arts have begun to be re-energized with

the creation of 180 new art and music teaching positions in the past two years alone. Today there are 234 art teachers and 275 music teachers serving its 160,000 students, as well as additional staff teaching dance, drama, and digital and creative arts subjects.

At the same time, partnerships between Philadelphia public schools and area teaching artists and arts organizations are increasing student opportunities to engage in the arts. These partnerships have augmented classroom instruction, brought performances into schools, exposed students to the area's cultural riches, and added quality arts experiences to students' lives.

As Philadelphia public schools employ more teachers in the arts and seek to engage in an ever-richer series of collaborations with teaching artists from the community, new pathways are needed to facilitate partnerships, particularly for emerging artists and small arts organizations with limited financial resources and educational capacity.





Challenges to Collaboration

Background checks: In order to protect children and youth, all individuals who work in schools must have background checks to assure that children are safe with them.

Federal, State and District policies require all teaching artists who wish to work in the schools to undergo a child abuse clearance (\$10), an FBI clearance (\$36), and a criminal history check (\$10) every year. Anyone working in schools is required to pay the full \$56 to renew their background checks every year.

Larger arts partnership organizations handle the background checks, but the requirement can be confusing and expensive for several groups: new and veteran individual teaching artists who are “unaffiliated” or not part of a larger arts organization; small, emerging arts organizations; and working artists who only occasionally work in schools.

A representative from a small arts organization reported that taking on the cost of these background checks on an annual basis for the individual artists whom she employs was prohibitive. Similarly, a performing artist working only once a year on a small contract (for example, a \$300 assembly performance) felt \$56 was a high price to pay.

Liability insurance: The District requires teaching artists to carry professional liability insurance. Again, this requirement can pres-

ent a barrier to the unaffiliated teaching artist or working artist who is only occasionally engaged in schools.

One emerging teaching artist negotiated a \$1,200 fee for a music teaching project at a Philadelphia high school. He encountered a roadblock when he discovered that he needed liability insurance for his contract to be approved. Insurance providers were willing to sell him the required liability insurance, but it would cost him \$500/year. Under the District’s “TULIP” insurance policy, available for purchase by individuals, the insurance would have been even more expensive at \$950. Neither of these options was financially viable for this teaching artist.

Timely Payment For Services: Another common challenge involves timely payment from the District for the services of teaching artists. Teaching artists’ confusion and lack of guidance about the contract process often leads to delays and frustration.

During the 2009-2010 school year, two teaching artists were involved in a video production project at a local high school. Although the project began in February, the artists did not receive any payment until July. Payment was delayed because the artists were not familiar with the complex contracting process, and did not have enough assistance in completing their contracts correctly. Other teaching artists were not aware they could invoice the District for payment on a monthly basis during a six-month contract, and instead, waited until the end of their contract, causing lengthy payment delays.

Documentation of work: Many teaching artists want to demonstrate the positive effects of their work but do not know how to make their case. Teaching artists often have trouble articulating to school teachers, administrators and outside funders the positive impact their arts education work has on students, schools, and communities.

One organization suggested that it would like to better articulate the positive effect of arts partnerships – not just through the lens of how the arts can address social or academic ills, but rather, what arts bring to students' lives that is unique, valuable and sustainable.

Classroom Management: Many teaching artists, especially those with little experience in the classroom, are in need of training in classroom management. While Pennsylvania law states that teaching artists cannot be left alone with students at any time without the supervision of a District teacher, some classroom management training would enrich students' experiences and help teaching artists maximize their effectiveness.

One teacher's school contracted with a teaching artist who turned out to have poor classroom management skills and was unable to work effectively with students. As a result, the principal stopped hiring from outside organizations, cutting off all possibilities for future collaboration at the school.



Lack of Partnership Experience: Many schools are hesitant to partner with outside organizations because they do not know how to begin the process or they are unaware of partnership opportunities. Teachers at one local school said they wanted to start more partnerships with organizations in the community, but the teaching staff lived in different parts of the city and was unfamiliar with what the neighborhood or the community surrounding the school could offer.

Enhancing Pathways for Collaboration

The challenges facing artists who wish to collaborate with schools are widely varied and go beyond the procedural issues discussed in this paper. Luckily, both the regional arts community and the School District of Philadelphia already have a rich infrastructure from which to draw.

Many individual arts organizations are addressing these challenges for the teaching artists corps they engage. Several programs, including the Philadelphia Arts Education Partnership and the Teaching Artist Programs of the Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation, offer training and resources for the whole community of teaching artists and should be encouraged to increase and grow the impact of their efforts.

In addition, bridges between the professional development efforts for teaching artists and Out-of-School Time professionals can be built to benefit both communities.

To begin to solve the challenges described in this paper, we recommend that:

- unaffiliated teaching artists partner with like-minded arts organizations to gain liability coverage and simplify the contractual process of working with schools as well as gain valuable professional development and community-building elements that experienced arts organizations offer;
- one organization offer general buy-in to its group liability insurance plan, especially for unaffiliated and emerging teaching artists or full-time performing artists who want to do an occasional partnership with a school;
- an existing organization offer contract administration services on a fee-for-service basis to interested unaffiliated teaching artists or small arts organizations with minimal infrastructure;

- a “hardship fund” be established to pay for background checks for emerging artists;
- procedural requirements for establishing partnerships, a directory of teaching artists, and professional development opportunities be easily accessible for both teaching artists and school teachers on District and arts organization websites;
- one individual at the District be designated as point person for all arts partnership questions and concerns teaching artists and schools may have;
- advocacy be conducted at the State and Federal levels for a reduced renewal price for background checks;
- forums for teaching artists to exchange best practices and provide peer support to each other and with collaborating school teachers be supported and increased;
- connections be formalized with local universities’ departments of journalism, arts, arts education and digital media to create a roster of graduate students available to assist teaching artists in documenting their successes in schools.

We encourage the rich array of organizations and initiatives already active in supporting teaching artists in the Philadelphia region to widen their missions to make their services accessible to emerging teaching artists and small arts organizations, and create pathways for new teaching artists to engage with District students.

Conclusion

Whether the needs mentioned above are addressed in a “one stop shopping” effort or through the combined efforts of existing arts partnerships and the School District, one thing is clear: the needs of students for rich and varied arts experiences throughout their school experience challenge all of us – teachers and administrators, teaching artists, arts partnerships and arts advocates – to work together.

Failing to do so will leave our children with diminished opportunities both now and in adulthood. Succeeding in this effort will create the next generation of creative thinkers, artists and arts audience members in an arts-rich city which increasingly relies on the creative economy.



*We can do this.
We can make the difference.*

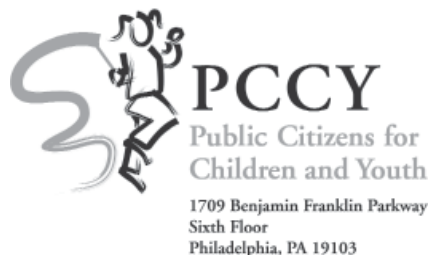
This brief was produced by PCCY as a member of ArtsRising, a collaborative arts for youth initiative of the Philadelphia Education Fund, Fleisher Art Memorial and Public Citizens for Children and Youth.

ArtsRising is supported nationally by the Wallace Foundation, with local funding from the William Penn Foundation, the Lenfest Foundation, PECO, Samuel S. Fels Fund, ACE Charitable Foundation, Lincoln Financial Foundation, Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Lumpkin Family Foundation, Sovereign Bank Foundation and individual donors.

For more information, go to www.myartsrising.org.



About PCCY: Founded in 1980, Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the region's leading child advocacy organization and works to improve the lives and life chances of its children. Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY seeks to watch out and speak out for children and families.



PCCY undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice and child welfare.

Project Staff: Shelly D. Yanoff, Executive Director; Gretchen Elise Walked, Picasso Project Coordinator, Deb Weiner, Education Specialist; Sid Holmes, Communications Director; Steven E. Fynes, Design and Layout. Interns: Haley Phillips and Roseann Chamberlain