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UNLOCKING TITLE I FUNDS FOR ARTS EDUCATION TO ACHIEVE TITLE I GOALS

BY ELLEN HIRZY

Federal funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has supported multidisciplinary arts-based learning strategies for student success at Quincy Jones Elementary School since it opened in South Central Los Angeles in 2010. Second-grade teachers partner with a teaching artist from the Los Angeles County Music Center to teach writing skills through the visual arts. Students who participate in the rigorous drum circle program have fewer disciplinary problems that land them in the principal's office. Student performances are a way to improve parent involvement because they draw parents into the building where they can meet teachers and staff. Eighty-seven percent of students at Quincy Jones are eligible for free or reduced-price meals—nearly twice the national average. With its arts-infused culture and curriculum, the school has been called a model of student achievement for other schools in low-socioeconomic areas.

Integrated arts programs like these are a highly effective way to help schools meet Title I goals, which include improving student learning, student engagement, attendance and motivation, school culture and climate, and parent involvement. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has said “the arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively.” As a result, “arts education remains critical to leveling the playing field of opportunity.” But Title I schools are often reluctant to try. **Steve Venz**, former principal of Quincy Jones and now visual and performing arts coordinator for the Orange County Department of Education, says his was the only one of more than 400 Title I-eligible schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District authorized to use its funding for arts-integrated learning. (continued on page 9)

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UNLOCKING TITLE I FUNDS FOR ARTS EDUCATION TO ACHIEVE TITLE I GOALS

This has been the prevailing attitude around Title I and arts education, according to **Joe Landon**, executive director of the California Alliance for Arts Education, a statewide advocacy organization. School districts receive Title I money through state education agencies and have discretion in determining how it will be used. Some districts define their own priorities that schools must follow. Confusion often arises over appropriate uses, as it did in California. “Educators either believe that using Title I for arts education isn’t permissible under the guidelines, or that if you do it, it’s best to keep it below the radar to avoid scrutiny by state or federal administrators who might revoke your funding.” In fact, Monique M. Chism, who directs the U.S. Department of Education office that administers Title I, has clarified that it is permissible as long as arts-related activities “are part of an instructional strategy that is designed to improve the academic achievement of at-risk students so they can meet the state’s academic standards.” Title I funds typically are spent on math and language arts, the subjects that standardized tests evaluate.

Since 2012 the Alliance has been working to change perceptions and clarify misunderstandings about arts education and Title I at the local, state, and federal levels. From on-the-ground conversations with principals and state public school officials to relationship building with federal administrators, the Alliance’s Title I Arts Initiative has sought a shared understanding of what is permitted when integrating arts education in a Title I school. A policy paper, *Embracing Arts Education to Achieve Title I Goals*, explains a “policy pathway” toward that understanding. Launched this year, an online resource center (<http://www.title1arts.org>) provides a seven-step process aligned with California and federal Title I regulations that is a useful guide for practitioners everywhere.

The Alliance’s work points to opportunities in every state for community arts education organizations to explore arts-integrated learning partnerships with Title I schools. An essential starting point, Landon says, is to shift the focus from more arts education in schools to the role of the arts in providing a complete education. “It’s not about using Title I to support arts education, but about how arts education can support Title I goals.”

The Evidence

Reluctance to consider arts-based learning strategies only widens the educational equity gap that Title I is designed to

reduce. “Research tells us that the students who benefit the most from arts education are the ones who are getting it the least,” says **Laura Smyth**, lead consultant for the Title I Arts Initiative. A 2011 study by the Los Angeles advocacy group Arts for All found that “students who attend high-poverty, Title I designated schools [in Los Angeles County] have fewer options in accessing a high-quality education in the arts than other students.”

Title I guidelines require hard evidence of the efficacy of a learning strategy. “You can’t just say, ‘I have a good feeling about drums and math,’” Landon says. “You have to be able to prove it. And in fact, we can.” The online clearinghouse ArtsEdSearch (<http://www.artsedsearch.org>), created in 2012 by the Arts Education Partnership, transformed access to high-quality research studies on arts learning. More than a research compendium, the site also analyzes implications and identifies research needs. Through ArtsEdSearch it is possible to document specific arts education impacts on students, including those from low socioeconomic backgrounds who benefit the most. Multiple studies do show that music supports mathematics learning—by making a connection between musical notation and fractions, for example. Other studies demonstrate that underserved students show the most relative improvement in overall academic achievement when they attend schools with strong arts offerings.

The Role of Community Arts Education Organizations

The use of arts-based learning strategies in Title I schools is still sporadic, Landon says. But a project in San Diego, now in the planning stage, is creating a network of community arts education partners and promises to be a model for district-wide implementation. In 2015 the San Diego Unified School District committed \$3 million in Title I money over two years to a stand-alone initiative supporting arts integration in 21 Title I schools. **Merryl Goldberg**, professor of visual and performing arts at California State University San Marcos and executive director of Center ARTES, serves on the project team. She explains that Young Audiences of San Diego is the SDUSD’s primary community partner, supervising teacher professional development and brokering relationships that match schools with numerous local arts education providers. “These arts organizations may serve several roles, from coaching classroom teachers on how to integrate the arts into the curriculum to presenting assemblies and field trips.” Professional development for teachers, arts specialists, principals, and teaching artists

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Chicago High School for the Arts (ChiArts), Chicago, IL



Longy School of Music, Cambridge, MA



Flint School of Performing Arts, Flint, MI



Say Sí, San Antonio, TX

will be provided, along with a three-day arts integration boot camp.

Partnerships are central to the curriculum at Quincy Jones Elementary School. In addition to the Los Angeles County Music Center, nonprofit arts and education partners have included the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Harmony Project (a National Guild member), the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, California State University, Northridge, and the University of California, Los Angeles. (Fox Entertainment Group and Remo Drum Corporation are among the corporate sponsors.) In California, some community arts education organizations are approaching Title I schools individually by initiating one-on-one conversations with principals about the possibility of working together.

Smyth, Landon, and Venz offer these suggestions for organizations interested in partnerships that merge high-quality arts education with Title I programs.

1. Address misperceptions about arts education. Arts education practitioners and advocates face a perennial, overriding cultural perception that also affects conversations about the arts and Title I: that the arts are a feel-good frill, not a legitimate, essential ingredient of every child's education. In schools with high numbers of low-performing, disadvantaged students, basic needs may demand so much attention that this attitude is even more prevalent. Know and use the powerful research findings—accessible through ArtsEdSearch and soon through the Alliance's Title1Arts.org—that point to the benefits of arts-based strategies for addressing these students' needs.

2. Have prior experience with school partnerships. "It's the responsibility of arts providers to raise their game," Landon says. When seeking opportunities to partner with Title I schools, "you have to be ready at a level that meets the criteria of school districts" and prepared to take on the rigor and complexity of the Title I process. These partnerships are not for novices; they are more successful when an organization is an experienced school partner with collaboration skills, inside knowledge of the school or school district, and experienced in working in tandem with classroom teachers.

3. Know the system. "Understand how the system works," Smyth says, "specifically for Title I but also in general." Decisions about arts-integrated curriculum happen at the school level, though depending on the school district they may be driven by district-wide priorities. A community arts education provider should begin with the principal of a Title I school because support for arts instruction will most likely come from Title I funds in the school's discretionary budget. From a principal's perspective, Venz says it is essential "not to get lost in the language." Do not begin a meeting by saying, "we're here to talk about the arts." Be clear about the specific evidence-based strategies you are proposing and how they relate to Title I goals, remembering that most school administrators do not have arts backgrounds. Understand the annual planning and budgeting cycle, which in many school districts happens in March and April. Be aware of the specific funding pressures in the school or district.

4. Be sensitive to educators' needs. As in any school partnership, it is important to understand public school culture and the multiple demands on teachers in today's education environment. Classroom teachers generally do not have arts training or experience, and Title I schools may not have arts specialists. "It takes time to find an arts specialist or provider and then figure out how to add that arts time to what is a pretty prescribed school day," Smyth says. When you reach out to partner schools, know that you are competing with off-the-shelf curriculums and lesson plans that are easier for teachers to use. Be prepared to show the added value that teaching artists from community arts education organizations bring to a classroom.

Looking Ahead

Response to the Alliance's efforts has been heartening, Landon says. In California, the Alliance is working on an updated policy paper to document best practices in schools using arts education to support Title I goals. At the state and federal levels, there has been a shift in recognition that arts education strategies support Title I goals. Arts education has an ally in Chism at the Department of Education. As a graduate of a performing arts high school, she speaks eloquently of the value of the arts in her own education. A partnership with Americans for the Arts is in the works that would enable other states to join the effort. "This issue is just beginning to take on a national presence," Landon says.

Title1Arts.org is a promising way for the Alliance to guide Title I schools nationwide through the step-by-step process of integrating arts learning strategies and a useful guide for community arts education organizations as well. As the site continues to develop, it will feature selected research studies, distilled from ArtsEdSearch, that relate directly to Title I goals and narrow the gap between researcher and practitioner. Video with testimony from every level of the process—district supervisors, teachers, art specialists, and community arts providers—will also be added.

The message in the Alliance's work is that Title I and the arts are a perfect fit. In conversations about educational equity, arts education "is not an outlier," Landon says. Throughout a Title I school—from student academic achievement, to school culture, to parent involvement, "the arts may very well bring the best bang for the buck."

Resources

California Alliance for Arts Education, arts411.org
Title I Arts, www.title1arts.org

A Policy Pathway: Embracing Arts Education to Achieve Title I Goals, <http://bit.ly/1BRq1qY>

ArtsEdSearch, www.artsedsearch.org

Arts for All School Survey: Measuring Quality, Access, and Equity in Arts Education (2011), <http://bit.ly/1ADQ9hZ>.

Arts for LA, *Title I and Arts Education* (fact sheet), <http://bit.ly/1BRpLs4>

National Title I Association, <https://www.titlei.org/>