



FOR RELEASE MAY 16, 2001

Contact:
Linda Chiavaroli, United Arts
323-256-7828
performingarts@uarts.com

FIRST COUNTYWIDE STUDY REVEALS STATUS OF ARTS EDUCATION IN LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

Spurs establishment of Los Angeles County Arts Education Hub

“This is a district that knows what the arts can do. Years ago we had wonderful award-winning arts programs and gifted teachers. Children did better academically. Now the focus has shifted to 3R’s and meeting standards. Art has fallen by the wayside.”

School District Superintendent, Fall 2000

Los Angeles — *Arts in Focus*, the largest and most detailed study of arts education in Los Angeles County, reveals the lack of a systemic approach to teaching the arts and wide variations in the degree to which arts are included in the educational experience. Commissioned to provide much-needed baseline information, the *Arts in Focus* study addresses arts education resources, curriculum, activities, the value of parental support, policy, partnerships, and existing successful programs.

Because Los Angeles is the largest and most populous county in the nation with 1745 schools, and 1.7 million students in 82 schools districts, the *Arts in Focus* study can be seen as a significant national indicator. The students in the districts surveyed represent 27% of all students enrolled in public schools in K-12 in California, and 3.4% of all students enrolled in public schools K-12 in the nation. Information was obtained through in-depth, in-person interviews conducted with officials from 80 of the 82 school districts in L.A. County.

A snapshot of reality, the survey indicates contradictions between beliefs and action, desires and planning. It also establishes a departure point from which to seek improvement. Indeed, the study has already spurred the establishment of an Arts Education Hub by the Los

Angeles County Office of Education and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission to provide information and resources to LA schools and teachers.

Donald W. Ingwerson, Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, commented, "I am confident that *Arts in Focus* will serve the educational community in Los Angeles County both as a clarion call to action and a consensus builder for the action that needs to be taken. This is a vital first step in creating a strategic plan to advance arts education countywide--and, ultimately, to affect arts education policies and programs on a broader scale."

The survey was commissioned by the Arts Education Task Force of Arts for L.A., a coalition of senior arts leaders in Los Angeles that has been meeting regularly since 1993 to advocate for strong public support of the arts, increased visibility, recognition, and arts participation. The Task Force focuses on advancing quality arts education curriculum and programming in K-12 public schools. The survey signatories are: Donald W. Ingwerson, Superintendent, L.A. County Office of Education; Kendis Marcotte and Hope Tschopik Schneider, Co-Chairs of the Arts Education Task Force Steering Committee; and Laura Zucker, Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

Highlights of the study include the following:

- While school leaders profess a unanimous and encouraging belief about the value of arts education to learning, there is a disappointing lack of systematic approaches to teaching art forms such as music, visual arts, dance, and theater. Among the districts surveyed, 37% reported *no* defined sequential arts education in any discipline, at any school level.
- There is a shortage of qualified arts teachers—the current countywide ratio is only one arts specialist for every 1200 students.
- According to the survey, Los Angeles district leaders have a strong desire to improve arts education, but are given no real incentives to develop comprehensive, sequential systems to teach the arts.
- Nearly 50% of officials surveyed cited “lack of instructional time in students’ schedules as the most significant challenge.” Many districts said “what gets tested gets taught,” and because the arts are not included in mandatory standardized tests, other subjects take priority.
- A surprising assertion among those interviewed was that lack of state and federal arts funding was less of a problem than the shortage of time or personnel to pursue existing sources.
- Parental participation is a key factor in arts education. Without the support of parents, district leaders stated, many districts would not have arts programs.

- While 80% of the school districts say they seek partnerships for financial input and stability, the non-profit arts education partners outside the educational system they strongly rely upon for arts expertise are often more resource-strapped than the public schools.

Despite the many challenges — the absence of universal sequential curriculum, shortage of trained personnel and equipment, inadequate time in the school day and lack of incentives to teach arts — the study finds plans, partnerships, and success stories that include outstanding model programs. These demonstrate that the obstacles can be overcome.

There is good news about arts education:

- The survey shows that five of the most populous school districts in the county, representing 55% of the student population, have both an arts education policy and notable future plans.
- The State of California has established a Framework and Standards for arts education; and the University of California and California State University systems have an arts requirement for entrance to their schools.
- In 2000, the California Arts Council received an additional \$10 million for state arts education. The California Department of Education has also increased funding for the arts.

Information from *Arts in Focus* will help define the blueprint for future arts education plans. Already, as part of the establishment of the Arts Education Hub, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission is hiring a full-time Arts Education Program Manager. This person will work in tandem with a counterpart who is being hired by the Los Angeles County Office of Education. These two managers will use the study's information to create a strategic plan to advance arts education; foster partnerships among schools, arts organizations, funders and resource providers; and help plan and implement programs and policies on a statewide level.

The *Arts in Focus* study was funded by A.S.K. Theater Projects, California Arts Council, the J. Paul Getty Trust, and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. It was commissioned by the Arts Education Task Force of Arts for LA and conducted by Museums Without Walls, a communications consultancy.

The full report can be downloaded at www.lacountyarts.org. For further information about *Arts in Focus* contact Los Angeles County Arts Commission, 374 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, 213-974-1343.

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EDITORS/REPORTERS PLEASE NOTE: A copy of the summary of *Arts in Focus* is enclosed with this release.