



OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN IN THE ARTS IN MAINE

FOR THE MAINE ALLIANCE FOR ARTS EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2009





FUNDERS

This project was made possible by the generous support of:

- **The Betterment Fund**
- **The John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts**
- **The Maine Arts Commission**



THE DESIGN TEAM

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The design team collaborated on designing, piloting research tool and working to engage teachers throughout the state. We would also especially like to thank the teachers who took the time to complete the survey and the organizations that urged their members to respond: the Maine Art Education Association, Maine Music Educators Association, Dance Education in Maine Schools, and Maine Drama Council. These efforts will help build the case for arts education in Maine.

Front cover photo credits:

Ballet dancer: Bay Chamber Concerts

Saxophonist: Maine Alliance for Arts Education

Dancers: Maine Alliance for Arts Education

Script reader: Maine Alliance for Arts Education

Pianist: Bay Chamber Concerts



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FOUNDATIONS, CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS: THE MAINE CENSUS OF ARTS EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Often thought of as the home to fishing, lumber and farming, and cabins and one-room schoolhouses, Maine is re-inventing its traditional economies and forms of education by:

- Updating traditional resources like forests, water, wind, and fisheries by investing in innovative forms of industry and green technology and by preparing young people to take charge of those investments;
- Developing strategies that support pre-schoolers through seniors in life-long learning that can benefit families, communities, and the state as a whole
- Ensuring that learning has a strong and sustained emphasis on creativity and innovation; and
- Harnessing both formal and informal learning.

A STRONG FOUNDATION

At the center of this effort is building a public education system that will allow young people throughout the state to become part of a creative workforce and active contributors to quality of life in their communities. In fact, throughout the last decade, Maine has invested in policies designed to help young people acquire the skills and values of thinkers and innovators. These include:

- The original Maine Learning Results that stress interdisciplinary competencies
- The visual and performing arts standards
- The updated Parameters for Essential Instruction, and
- Maine’s membership in the national partnership for 21st Century Skills: a consortium of states that all are seeking to educate a contemporary workforce.

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ARTS EDUCATION

Arts education can galvanize this effort. Long invested in young people’s creativity, arts educators can take a lead role in:



- Articulating the role of creativity in learning
- Demonstrating how to build partnerships designed to maximize students' access to creative learning; across schools, cultural organizations, and community organizations
- Taking stock of and celebrating the opportunities that currently exist in Maine schools and communities, and
- Building a case for what more needs to happen.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

To begin this work, the Maine Arts Commission, the State Department of Education, and the Maine Alliance for Arts Education jointly sponsored a statewide census of arts learning opportunities and conditions, with funding provided by The Betterment Fund, the John F. Kennedy Center, and the Maine Arts Commission. Over a third of the arts teachers in Maine, at 44% of the schools, responded to a survey about their programs and their working lives as educators. According to the teachers at participating schools¹, Maine has much to be proud of:

- The arts are taught by certified arts teachers (80% at elementary, approximately 75% at secondary).
- Most schools have dedicated arts facilities along with curriculum guides that are aligned to state standards.
- Nearly all elementary students are enrolled in visual arts classes (98%), with over three quarters of students participating in music classes (76%).
- Even in secondary schools, where the arts become electives, over one-third (37%) of students enroll in visual arts and one fifth (20%) take music classes.
- Teachers put their “heart and soul” into programs: teaching approximately 300 elementary pupils and as many as 600 secondary students in 19 to 23 periods a week, while also counseling individual students, fund-raising, and supporting after-school activities.

¹ The current version of the Census was voluntary and collected data from individual arts teachers. As a result all data refer only to those teachers and schools who participated. Further, it did not capture information about other forms of arts learning such as English teachers who also teach theater; PE teachers who include dance in their curricula, etc.



The data also yielded powerful maps of where young people have the greatest access to arts learning opportunities. These maps show that:

- Larger towns and cities frequently make a serious investment in arts programs.
- There are a number of small and rural communities where the arts offerings are extensive. Often these communities also host colleges and universities, arts schools, or festivals, suggesting the powerful synergies between community values and schools.
- Still other programs appear to be the result of dedicated teachers and community advocates who have demonstrated what it takes to build and sustain arts learning with modest funding and fewer community partners.

THE CHALLENGES

However, the survey also documents some sobering facts about Maine students' access to arts learning:

- **Inequitable distribution:** The maps show that schools able to support the most arts education opportunities are largely clustered in southern and coastal regions of the state. These extensive arts programs are highly correlated with community wealth and resources. This means that students' opportunities to engage in the creative activities characteristic of the arts are tied to where they happen to live – not to their interests, gifts, or efforts.
- **Sharply falling engagement:** Enrollment in the arts drops off sharply at middle school and again at high school, as the arts become electives. Low enrollments translate to fewer positions for arts teachers and a narrower range of courses that can be offered.
- **Lack of support for arts teachers:** As mentioned, arts teachers work hard in their schools and regions. Yet they lack time to plan with arts colleagues in or across schools to build their programs. Similarly, they have little time to collaborate with academic teachers in order to build the enriched interdisciplinary curriculum necessary for 21st century learners. Many teachers lack student materials aligned to the state's visual and performing arts standards. One in five teachers reports contributing to support their programs out of their own pockets. This means that what arts teachers can effect is sharply limited by the conditions under which they teach.



- **Broken paths for arts learning:** Many Maine communities struggle to ensure consistent pathways for arts learning. A developed program at elementary may not feed into an equally developed set of opportunities at middle or high school. A well-developed high school program may not have strong feeder programs in middle and elementary schools. Without sequential learning opportunities it is hard for arts programs to make their full contribution to a next generation of imaginative and thoughtful citizens.
- **Limited access to all arts disciplines:** While visual arts and music programs are provided by a number of Maine schools, dance and drama/theatre offerings are rarely offered. This further limits opportunities for students to participate in creative activities.
- **A serious need for partnerships:** If Maine students are going to be inventing the state’s future, they need intensive and sustained opportunities to learn the skills and strategies that fuel creation and innovation. Strong and equitable arts education is one powerful motor – but it requires partners.
 - What is the role for high-quality arts integration and rigorous cross-disciplinary courses that feature the arts in partnership with other subjects? How can student learning in the arts be complemented by course work in areas like science, social science, or technology that emphasize creative problem-finding and solutions? Without these kinds of partnerships Maine’s young people may be receiving thin preparation in the innovation skills critical to individual and community success in the 21st century.
 - How could community resources be used to expand what schools alone are able to offer? (For instance, imagine that a school had a rotating “zero-th” period, before the official day began, when student could come to work on their art projects, practice their singing, instruments, scenes, or dances.)

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

Building on these findings, a team of Maine arts educators has developed a set of bold recommendations for moving this work forward. In the next year these actions include:

- **Sharing the results of the census widely:** In the next month the team will be sharing the major results of the census with policy makers, funders, and leaders in the field. On October 9th the findings will be shared with arts teachers in a session at the statewide arts education conference. The full report will be available on the Maine Alliance’s website.



- **Identifying and publicizing “imagination-intensive” communities:** Using data from the census, combined with a self-nomination process, Maine educators will identify a range of communities where combined school- and community-based programs support young people’s access to arts, imagination, and innovation across the arts and other disciplines (e.g., science, technology, career education, etc.). The Kennedy Center has pledged a grant of over \$18,000 to fund this effort. The Maine Alliance for Arts Education, along with its partners, is seeking local matching funds. The result will be profiles of imaginative-intensive communities and a set of tools that would allow other communities to take stock of the opportunities that they offer and could build.
- **Joining forces with similar initiatives:** Given the current interest in developing the creative economy and in 21st century education in Maine, a number of groups and individuals around the state are beginning to explore how to join forces to discuss what a statewide initiative in creative learning could look like. For instance, the Maine Commission hosted an initial conversation on September 17 in Augusta.

THE LONGER TERM

In a 2006 report, *Charting Maine’s Future*, researchers from the Brookings Institution wrote:

As the search for quality places grows in importance, Maine possesses a globally known ‘brand’ built on the image of livable communities, stunning scenery, and great recreational opportunities.

Building on this foundation, Maine’s brand could also expand to include workshops, studios, theaters, and laboratories. But realizing this new quality of place will require concerted effort across sectors. It will also require both public and private support for longer-term actions including:

- **Measuring the fulfillment of Maine statutes on arts education and other forms of innovative learning:** Using a short list of indicators developed through the census, it is vital that the Maine Department of Education regularly measure the extent to which young people throughout the state have the creative learning opportunities that are already in statute (e.g., the creative learning opportunities outlined in the Learning Results and the arts education opportunities established in the standards).
- **Building robust regional paths for creative learning in multiple disciplines:** Few Maine communities can afford K – 12, not to mention K – 16, pathways in all four arts disciplines (visual arts, music, dance, and theatre) as well as access to learning the fundamentals of innovation in other disciplines. But by identifying



regional networks of opportunities across schools, colleges, universities, and nonprofits, it would be possible to map, publicize, and create scholarship support for young people who want to pursue their talents in and beyond school, through local courses, internships, after-school opportunities, during the school year, and throughout the summer months.

- **Mounting a statewide initiative for 21st century learning:** Maine could easily become a leader in equitable and excellent opportunities to learn the skills that yield innovation and creation. It especially could provide a model for other states seeking to re-energize rural and traditional economies that currently narrow young peoples' opportunities to contribute. This initiative could be distinctive for the bold way in which it harnesses in- and out-of-school time, as well as formal and informal learning.

There is little question – the coming years could be a critical moment for arts education in Maine. Teachers and advocates across the state could become clear voices for ensuring that the arts are a cornerstone in this significant statewide effort to build a new creative economy, fueled by young people who have had the sustained opportunity to think and act creatively.