

## Summary of Evaluation Findings for the LINC Arts Program

### **What is the LINC Arts Program?**

LINC (Learning In Community)—Arts, is a mentorship program which matches Hancock County high-school students who are very talented in any of the arts with experienced local artists for specific arts training, assistance with career planning, and information about living as an artist in the community.

### **In brief, what have we learned about the effectiveness of the LINC Arts Program?**

- Students, mentors, recommending teachers, parents and others tell us the LINC program achieved its overall desired outcome of providing uniquely supportive, concentrated, effective mentoring in the arts to talented area students.
- In a very practical and meaningful way, the program met the students' artistic needs and goals.
- The learning environment the mentoring relationship creates is individualized, energized and high impact.
- The recommending teacher and school often benefited from newly formed relationships with community artists, and the students often brought their new knowledge and skills to their peers and the classroom teacher.
- The program was well administered.
- The LINC program is highly recommended by students, mentors, teachers and parents. They are willing to and have been advocates for the program, hoping for its continuation and expansion.

“Maine does have the arts community to support this. The artists are there and the schools and student need is there. It is about aligning the needs and resources.”

*“I hoped my student would gain a better understanding of what it takes to cover the arts for a newspaper. I also hoped she would develop contacts so she would be better equipped to network in the world of journalism. I believe my student grew as a writer because this experience exposed her to a style of prose that she was completely unaccustomed to. Also, through her participation, not only in reporting, but in the newsroom in general, she learned the necessity of teamwork among writers, graphic designers, and photographers to create a successful package.”*

### **More specifically, what have we learned?**

The majority of participating students of the arts say the mentor provided through the LINC program:

- Understood their needs as an artist and helped them set personal artistic goals;
- Was uniquely knowledgeable and skilled to mentor them; and,
- Was friendly, respectful, encouraging, and supportive.

And, through the mentoring experience, the students say they know more about:

- What skills to develop as an artist;
- The process of setting goals and improving skills in their art form;
- What it means to be an artist;
- Other artist/art groups or resources in the community; and, to a lesser but still notable extent;
- Training and career opportunities available after high school.

In fact, the students feel strongly that as a result of working with the mentor, they have:

- Improved certain artistic skills;

- Set personal goals to continue skill improvement;
- Feel more satisfied with themselves as an artist; and, to a lesser but still notable extent;
- Formed new and meaningful relationships with other artists; and,
- Plan on looking into career opportunities available after high school.

*“He is definitely an artist who has ‘made it’ so I guess it gave me a different perspective than I had. I was under the impression that it was difficult to make a living as an artist. So I was looking at different professions that had to do with art but were not strictly art and I’ve been able to talk with him about this.”*

The vast majority of LINC mentors, affiliated teachers, and parents concur with what the mentees say about how they benefited from the program. They also think the mentored youths feel more confident as artists.

*“I’m just grateful that children have the opportunity to do this. To get him to have something like this is a big deal. It’s a great thing beyond the natural school setting. For my child to have done it says a lot. He typically doesn’t go beyond what he is used to. If you knew him you would never picture him doing this. We live on a seasonal income. It’s great to show them that you can do different things besides making money. I think he’ll stay involved as long as he has opportunity/resources around him.”*

LINC Mentors and affiliated teachers also say the student they worked with:

- Had a high level of interest and skill in their art form they worked with;
- Were enthusiastic and clear about their interest and need; and,
- Worked seriously on goals and tasks to achieve mutually agreed upon learning goals.

As for themselves, all LINC mentors say that as a result of working with the program they are

somewhat better connected with area school(s)/teacher(s), have improved their own skills as an arts mentor/instructor, and feel more appreciated as an artist in the area.

*“A renewed enthusiasm/connection to be an artist in my community. This experience has led me to consider teaching at the college level, as well as high school (some issues are better suited to more mature students). Being a mentor improved my organizational skills, as well as my artwork.”*

Most teachers indicate they are more aware of community artists/resources, feel their school has found new ways to use local artists, and have formed new working relationships with local artists. There is also no doubt that the learning goals and environment of the LINC mentorships are in many ways well aligned with the *Maine Learning Results*.

*“His playing improved tremendously and he is excited. He also takes a peer leadership role and shares what he has learned with others. He spreads enthusiasm. It makes a big difference in my classroom. The sound of the band is better too! It is worth the investment in one student.”*

### **What are the strengths of the LINC Arts Program?**

In addition to advancing the knowledge and skills of the young artists, the program:

- Uniquely meets a real need in the education and arts community.
- Produces high impact learning results for the money – depth of learning and variety of impact.
- Provides individualized attention for students with advanced interest/talent in the arts, expanding on what classroom learning offers. *“It provides the advanced thinking/training for the gifted student that is not available in the classroom – on a one-to-one basis. It educates beyond the classroom in a studio/workplace setting. These are things I cannot provide usually.”*

*Also, I learn and make artist contacts to be used at a later date.”*

- Students are afforded an opportunity to see art as a profession versus just a study or hobby.
- In several cases, the student will continue the newly formed and valued working relationship.

*“He still has some things he’ll come by and do. But other than that it is open. If he wants to come by and work for me in exchange for wedging clay he could. I don’t know past school what exactly will happen, but I bet when he goes off to school he’ll try to keep pottery in his life.”*

- Creates new relationships between the arts community/artists and schools.
- Enhances the classroom learning environment because the young artists often bring back what they learned to their peers and teacher. *“Mentees return to the class and share – it is the ripple effect!”*
- Community artists are fiscally rewarded for their talent and mentoring (\$500 for 20 hours), a fact valued by all involved in the program because they believe it is important to honor the gifts and profession of the mentor as well as their contribution of a significant amount of time.
- Gives community artists personal and professional satisfaction from sharing and nurturing talent.
- Provides opportunity for arts study that some talented students may not otherwise be able to afford due to economic limitations of the family.
- Helps to demonstrate that the communities/County recognizes that the arts and arts education is important.

Further, the design of the program is perceived to be strong.

- Matches are personalized and carefully planned.
- The initial meeting of student, mentor, teacher, coordinator, and parent is viewed as an effective, critical aspect of the design. It

allows good opportunity to assess whether or not the mentor and student are a good fit. And, it is a positive way to start the mentoring relationship because it facilitates communication and commitment between the student/family and the program/mentor.

▪ And, the closing celebration provides an intense demonstration of the accomplishments of the mentoring relationship and allows students and others to learn of each other’s work. This is in and of itself a unique community arts opportunity.

▪ By all accounts, the LINC Arts program has a strong beginning, middle, and end.

### **What challenges do we experience?**

- The mentoring relationship is often dependent on the student having good transportation.
- Squeezing the 20 hours of mentoring in the program timeframe, a challenged deepened by the fact of busy student/family schedules.
- A lot of energy goes into finding and making the mentoring match. This end of the program is very labor intensive and sometime the matters of finding a good fit and coordinating the initial meeting is a challenge. Some wonder what steps can be taken to streamline/facilitate this process and encourage the program administrators to reflect on this fact. It is important to note that the program coordinator is viewed as outstanding; this latter observation is simply acknowledging the importance and challenge of bringing the right mentor and mentee together.
- Sustaining funding for the program remains a challenge. A few specific suggestions were made such as approaching some know Maine-based funding sources, asking participating schools to make a small annual budget allocation, raise the current fee for participating schools contribute, publicity for donations, and when possible having the family of participating students pay a fee. There was also some interest in

exploring the possibility of expanding the partnership/ownership for the program.

- There is interest in expanding the program in the area as well as considering its replicability elsewhere. Again, a few suggestions were made.

“I got into Emerson for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Perhaps without this mentorship I wouldn’t be there. It shows not only the craft, but also the life. If a program like this can help kids see their dream then I can’t think of anything better to invest in.”

### ***What suggestions for improvement were offered?***

- There were few suggestions for improving the program.
- When a suggestion was made it typically had to do with simply desiring more than 20 hours to the extent possible – though there is basic satisfaction with 20 hours to form a strong working relationship and accomplish some key goals.
- Also, a few mentioned interest in starting the mentoring relationship earlier in the year to make it more reasonable to reach the 20 hours at a proper pace.
- A few also expressed interest exploring the idea of having some sort of follow-up activity/exchange between the mentor and student.
- In response to the challenge of scheduling around busy student/family lives, a few mentioned interest in exploring the possibility of conducting some of the mentoring hours during school time.
- A couple mentioned requiring a minimum level of student output.
- Raising school and community awareness of the program was a common theme throughout the key informant interviews and somewhat present in the

survey results. A few strategies for raising awareness were suggested.

### ***What evaluation activities were conducted?***

- A self-administered mail survey for students, mentors, the recommending teacher, and parents. The survey asked for feedback on satisfaction with and the accomplishments of the mentoring relationship. It also provided an opportunity to make suggestions for program improvement.
- In-depth phone interview with “key informants,” individuals with perspective on the programs accomplishments, strengths, and challenges. The purpose of these interviews was to document the latter, hear recommendations for improving the program, and generating insight on program replicability and sustainability.
- Two “case studies” where a student, mentor, parent and teacher were asked to reflect on the student as artist before and after the mentoring relationship – what they went into it with and what they came out with.
- The data gathered from these sources is presented in attached appendices.
- Evaluation activities were conducted in May/June of 2003.
- **Evaluation activities were conducted by Program & Organizational Assessment**, an independent research and consulting firm located in Brewer, Maine (207-989-1367).
- **For more information on the LINC Arts program or its evaluation results**, please call Carol Trimble at the Maine Alliance for Arts Education, 207-667-7707, or email [artseveryday@adelphia.net](mailto:artseveryday@adelphia.net).