

ADVOCACY-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS

PRINCIPLE 8: ADVOCACY-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS

Provide advocacy-oriented administration and leadership that institute system-wide mechanisms to focus all stakeholders on the diverse visual and performing arts needs and assets of each specific group of students. These administrative and leadership systems structure, organize, coordinate, and integrate visual and performing arts programs and services to respond systemically to the needs and strengths of each group of students.

DESCRIPTION

In many districts and schools, study of the arts is considered the responsibility of the arts teachers, or the visual and performing arts program. To create districts and schools that embrace and support the arts well, the entire school community has to feel and enact ownership of an arts education for every child, in every school, every day, and proactively work towards eliminating the arts deficit that occurs in most districts today. Rather than being served in “pull-out” programs or in 30-minute “add-ons,” the arts are taught as discrete disciplines related to each other and when appropriate to other subject areas in the curriculum. In the elementary grades, arts are taught in an integrated fashion as an important aspect of other core curriculum disciplines. This requires strong advocacy-oriented leadership from district superintendents to site-based principals that makes it clear that arts learning is important for all students and that all students are guaranteed access to a rich, comprehensive, and meaningful standards-based arts curriculum.

District and site administrators, counselors and other support staff, visual and performing arts coordinators and teacher, parent, and student leaders work together as a district-wide arts team to develop a policy for arts education. This advocacy team additionally builds broad-based support through in-depth strategic planning that yields results in professional development, standards-based curriculum, quality instruction and methodology, partnerships and collaborations, sustained arts funding, resources and facilities, program evaluation and student assessment. School and district administrative systems need to effectively address issues of data, communication, accountability, and equity relative to their arts programs, as well as leverage and maximize existing arts resources to create sustainable arts programs.

In addition, site administrators need to ensure that the arts are included as core curriculum for all students by making appropriate accommodations for students’ diverse learning styles and abilities. Arts instruction should be culturally and linguistically responsive to the needs and talents of the students being served, and should be structured and delivered in ways that encourage the successful participation for English Learners, poor students, students of color, and special needs students, all of whom have the capacity to excel in the visual and performing arts.

Advocacy-oriented leadership realizes that to achieve the emerging statewide vision of arts learning for every student, every day, in every school, requires the ongoing expansion of our community of arts education supporters. A common unity must be developed among arts education colleagues, friends, and allies. This involves providing arts leadership that models, inspires, and facilitates relationship building, trust, and mutual support—qualities required for long-term social change. Finally, advocacy-oriented leadership requires celebrating successes and struggles. It is important to engage in public ceremonies that acknowledge who the students are, what they contribute, and what they have the potential to become relative to the arts. Through the celebratory process, new arts visions and possibilities are created that move schools from a deficit, behavioristic way of thinking, doing and being, to a more asset-based and culturally and linguistically responsive approach, which is what students and families need, want, and deserve.

Vignette

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The Sunset Elementary School District school board has for several years had a policy in support of an articulated visual and performing arts instructional program for its grade K-6 students. Three years ago, they hired a district Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator, Mrs. Nguyen, whose responsibility is to provide support to the district's four schools as they implement and monitor their local arts programs. One of her first responsibilities was to bring together district and site administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and organizations to develop a district arts plan and individual school arts plans aligned to the district plan.

This plan, which articulates a powerful vision of comprehensive arts education for all students, also outlines how this comprehensive curriculum will be phased in starting with the visual arts, then adding theatre arts, music education, and dance over a seven year period. The plan includes goals and objectives related to student achievement in the arts, teacher professional development, funding, internal and external communication, parent and family involvement, use of local arts providers and organizations, and arts advocacy locally and at the state level.

Several partnerships have been established to support arts education for the district's students. The local PTAs work in concert with the district to take a leadership role in community arts advocacy efforts. An alliance of local arts-related businesses has been established to provide internships and support for teachers who will

be integrating arts teaching into their daily work. These same businesses offer their employees to work in the classroom as partners with teachers to bring real-world relevance to the arts teaching and learning. The local symphony has agreed to provide a free symphony experience for every student annually. The superintendent and school board have met with a private foundation interested in funding a multi-year evaluation of the district's efforts in arts education.

Mrs. Nguyen, the district visual and performing arts coordinator, works with teachers with arts expertise, to support them in serving as mentors to other teachers at their sites. She has provided arts leadership support to both site administrators and central office staff, so that they are able to see where the arts fit into the bigger instructional picture. She regularly collaborates with the district and school accountability staff so that the arts are seen as a viable school reform vehicle and to ensure that administrators, teachers, and parents are able to access the data regarding student, school, and district arts progress and achievement. She communicates with the district public information officer so that arts achievements are communicated and celebrated internally and in the community. She also meets with the secondary school district into which Sunset's students feed to ensure that Sunset students are placed appropriately in the middle and high school arts programs, and Sunset's student information system tracks the progress of its students through high school in order to strengthen its own arts program.

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