

Unlocking the Creative Power of Youth
through Arts Education:
2014-2015 Arts Corps Program Evaluation

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September, 2015



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Executive Summary

Based in Seattle, Arts Corps brings hands-on art classes to youth with little or no other access to arts learning opportunities, predominately children in low income families or communities of color. Starting in 2000 with just a few classes at six sites, Arts Corps is now a leading nonprofit arts education organization dedicated to creating the conditions for powerful learning, so that all youth can reach their full potential.

Arts Corps offers during and after school arts education opportunities at schools, community centers and other locations serving youth and young adults. Programs cover a wide spectrum of arts disciplines such as breakdance and capoeira, music, visual art, spoken word, theater and ceramics. Art classes are offered during out of school time as well as integrated into classrooms during the school day. Arts Corps also offers professional development opportunities for teachers, artists and other youth workers.

This report seeks to answer the following evaluation questions:

- Does Arts Corps improve access to arts education by serving students in low-income communities of color?
- Does Arts Corps provide high quality programs?
- What do students learn in Arts Corps classes?
- What is the impact of Arts Corps' community partnerships?

Key findings are listed below, followed by a full report that details analysis and findings by program.

This document summarizes the report's key findings.

Programs Delivered

In 2014-2015, Arts Corps delivered 169 arts classes at 35 sites in four program areas.

- **Elementary Program** – operating in the Highline and Seattle School Districts, Elementary Programs served 1,110 students through in-school residencies and out-of-school classes.
- **Teen Program** – consisting of out-of-school classes, in-school residencies, Youth Speaks Seattle, the Spokes leadership group and Teen Artist Events, Teen Programs served 360 students.
- **Creative Schools Initiative** – partnering teaching artists with classroom teachers in two middle schools to promote academic engagement and performance while fostering creative capacities, the Creative Schools Initiative (CSI) served 271 students.
- **Residential Program**– reaching low-income and at-risk youth by providing classes in residential settings, this program served 419 youth, most of whom attend one or two classes during a two-week stay at a secure crisis center.

Students Served

In 2014-2015, Arts Corps served 2,068 unique students and delivered 23,028 contact hours of programming.

- This year, Arts Corps served 8% more students than in the previous year, although the overall student contact hours dropped by 18%.

Arts Corps continues to successfully reach underserved populations. By most measures, Arts Corps successfully delivers arts education to underserved demographic groups. This is a program success. Strategies used to successfully reach these students should be maintained and strengthened.

- 84% of youth served by Arts Corps partners are youth of color, and 72% are eligible for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of family poverty.

Executive Summary

- 78% of students served by Arts Corps through in-school residencies are students of color, with the greatest percentage (43%) identified as African or African American. 37% of students surveyed in teen out-of-school classes report speaking a language other than English at home.
- Two-thirds of **elementary**, out of school partners agreed that Arts Corps met the goal of serving students who typically have the least access to arts education at their site. Two of the four out-of-school partners in the **teen** program agreed that Arts Corps met this goal. All four **residential** partners agree that this goal was met at their site.

Program Satisfaction and Quality

Consistent program delivery correlates with consistently high stakeholder satisfaction. The program model as currently delivered results in high rates of stakeholder satisfaction. As Arts Corps undergoes strategic planning and restructures programs to better achieve its mission, it should consider how to mitigate the potential dissatisfaction that changes may bring to longstanding partners that reported high satisfaction with the current programming.

- All (100%) **elementary** partners rated the partnership as *good* or *excellent* and agreed that they were satisfied with the various aspects of the partnership.
- All (100%) **teen** program partners agreed that the classes offered at their site were high quality, reporting that classes were *good* or *excellent* or that they were *extremely satisfied* with the partnership.
- All (100%) **residential** partners surveyed rate the overall quality of Arts Corps classes as *good* or *excellent*.
- Four years of structured program observations provided evidence that Arts Corps has improved the quality of its **elementary** classes and consistently offered high quality out-of-school classes.
- 100% of **teens** surveyed rated their teaching artist as *good* or *excellent*. This is higher than last year's rate of 95%.
- 98% of **teens** rated their class experience as *good* or *excellent*, compared to 93% last year.
- All **Spokes** participants rated the experience and facilitator quality as excellent and reported elements of program quality *often* or *almost always*

The only program with a decrease in partner satisfaction was **CSI**, a program that was restructured and "downsized" this year due to partner requests stemming from budget constraints. Despite the decrease in contact hours, CSI maintained high levels of student satisfaction with the arts integration program. However, teacher feedback suggests that the less robust model does not have the same impact on academic engagement and performance as the program did in its first years. Also, teacher satisfaction decreased overall. Teachers universally miss the more robust CSI program model. They cited the limits of the short program delivery cycle and decreased opportunities for planning and communication as influential factors. Some requested more intentional lesson planning based on standards. When planning new programs, Arts Corps should determine the minimum amount of investment and time required to deliver a satisfactory program, and avoid delivering programs that exist below this line.

- 79% of **CSI** students agreed *somewhat* or *strongly* that they enjoyed the days the teaching artist was in class. These ratings are slightly more positive than those reported in year 2 (75%), when the program was more robust.
- Four of five **CSI** partner teachers report being *moderately* to *extremely* satisfied with the partnership. Their satisfaction with the teaching artist and support from Arts Corps staff in particular decreased this year.

Executive Summary

Artistic Competencies

While most students (75-80%, depending on the program) reported that Arts Corps increased their artistic skills, 20-25% of program participants do not report this program impact. Given Arts Corps' focus on arts education, it is worth reflecting on these rates to determine if they indicate an opportunity for program improvement. On the one hand, these rates may underrepresent skill-building; they are students' self-report of perceived skill-building, and do not reflect actual assessment of skills. On the other hand, these rates may be good indicators that a large number of students do not gain new art skills or that students are not reflecting on their growth in artistic skill building. This evaluation relies heavily on self-report because it is considered a reasonable method of assessing the outcomes of interest and is feasible given available resources.

- 87% of teaching artists report that fostering self-expression through art is a primary focus in their classes.
- 55% of **elementary** partners reported that *many* or *most* students developed artistic skills as a result of the in-school residency program.
- 3 out of 4 **teens** report learning of artistic skill and techniques in out-of-school classes.
- All **CSI** classroom teachers reported that *some* or *many* students increased or improved their artistic skills as a result of the partnership.
- 80% **CSI** students reported learning new art skills and techniques as a result of Arts Corps.

Creative Capacities

Changes in growth mindset rise to the top among the creative capacities measured. Students report that growth mindset is the creative capacity most impacted during Arts Corps participation. Interestingly, 70% of the **teens** in the out-of-school program (who reported room for growth) reported this change, while 39% in **CSI** did. This is consistent with other evaluation findings, where out of school programming generally leads to more positive results than in-school programming.

- 96% of teaching artists reported a primary focus on fostering courage and risk-taking in their classes. 87% of teaching artists reported a primary focus on growth mindset and 83% focus on imagining possibilities and teamwork and collaboration.
- Seven out of ten students in the **teen** program (who reported room for growth at the pre-program stage) reported increased development of growth mindset, while six out of ten reported increases in future orientation and courage and risk-taking.
- 39% of students in **CSI** (who reported room for growth at the pre-program stage) reported growth in the areas of teamwork and collaboration as well as growth mindsets.

Impact on School Performance

Increased student engagement and motivation is a commonly reported outcome associated with school performance. Arts Corps continued to seek evidence of the impact its school-based programs have on school performance. Due to a lack of a valid comparison group and myriad limitations associated with data provided by the school district, this evaluation has not been able to measure an impact on school attendance, discipline, grades, or test scores. However, multiple data sources suggested a positive impact on student engagement and motivation in the classroom, particularly for in-school residencies. Residency partners (**elementary** and **teen**), **Spokes** participants, and **CSI** students all reported that Arts Corps teaching artists supported increased student interest in school and academic engagement.

- Residency partners (**elementary** and **teen**) reported that the partnership was most likely to impact students' classroom participation and interest in school – 82% reported this impact for *some*, *many* or *most* students.

Executive Summary

- Residency partners (**elementary** and **teen**) also reported an impact on academic performance and completion of assignments, although for a smaller portion of their students – 62% reported increased completion of assignments and 41% reported increased academic performance for *some, many or most* students.
- Almost all **Spokes** participants (90%) agreed that things they learn in Spokes help them to do better in school and/or make them more interested in school.
- **CSI** student self-report revealed increased academic engagement for 43% of students and increased class participation for one-third¹. This is similar to Year 2, when 40% reported increased academic engagement after CSI and 35% of students reported increased classroom participation.

Partnerships, Professional Development and Consulting

This was the first year that the evaluation included an assessment of professional development offered by Arts Corps. Participants were generally satisfied, with many reporting that they were exposed to new ideas or concepts through the workshops and trainings.

- Anecdotally, the majority of program partners reported that their goals for the partnership were met.
- **CSI** teachers reported that are more likely to integrate arts into their lesson delivery in the future – three of five said they are *a great deal* more likely.
- Arts Corps partnered with three schools or community organizations to provide eight opportunities for professional development. Participants rated their experience as *good or excellent*, with many praising the high quality facilitators.

Next Steps

Arts Corps began the process of strategic planning during the 2014-2015 year, with a focus on revisiting its program model and associated evaluation plan. This evaluation underscores the reasons this planning process is timely, and also raises important questions and considerations for that planning process.

How do program goals vary by program type?

Currently, Arts Corps has articulated general program goals associated with increasing access to arts education, building artistic skills and fostering creative capacities. Annual evaluations have revealed that program outcomes vary between in-school and out-of-school programs in all of these areas. Also, evidence suggests outcomes vary based on student age and the intensity of the program. A comprehensive program model would articulate how organizational goals vary by program type.

What is “good enough”?

As currently articulated, program goals do not define specific, measureable targets. Consequently, annual evaluations typically fall short of determining which goals were reached and where programming fell short. To strengthen the usefulness of evaluation efforts and provide staff clearer direction, future evaluation plans should include general goal areas as well as specific, measureable objectives associated with each.

Should new programming or goals areas be formally added to the program model and evaluation plan?

Over the years, Arts Corps has gradually increased its advocacy efforts and begun offering professional development workshops, while the evaluation plan has not substantially shifted or increased to measure success in this area. As the new program model is developed, the evaluation should be balanced across all priority areas.

¹ Students with no room for growth (i.e. those who self-reported at the highest level on pre surveys) were removed from analysis.

Executive Summary

Family engagement is an outcome area that has occasionally been articulated as a goal of a particular program; most recently, the **CSI** program aimed to increase parent engagement. Family engagement may be an appropriate program goal for a subset of programs, such as those delivered at the Low Income Housing Institute.

How much is too much, given organizational capacity?

As Arts Corps considers adding new programs, it should also consider what is reasonable given organizational capacity. Annual evaluations have underscored the push and pull between breadth and depth, and quality and quantity of programming. Arts Corps should remain cognizant of its own limits and design programming that it can deliver while letting go of programming that is beyond its organizational capacity.

How can the evaluation plan be revised to better foster organizational learning?

For a number of years, the annual evaluation has produced similar results and consistent lessons learned. There is value in changing the evaluation plan in order to maximize organizational learning. Future evaluation planning should strive to answer the following questions:

- What is best way to measure program impact on creative capacities, given real world constraints?
- How can Arts Corps better measure the impact of the elementary program?
- How can data collection, analysis and reporting be restructured to provide the most useful information in a timely fashion to program managers?
- How can teaching artists gain value from the evaluation process?
- What efficiencies can be found to allow the annual evaluation to continually provide new information but exist within the budget realities of a nonprofit organization?

Full 53 page report including program-level detail available upon request.

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