

# The Arts Are An "R" Too

*Integrating the Arts and Improving Student Literacy (and More)  
in the Mississippi Arts Commission's Whole Schools Initiative*



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Historically there have been several arguments for the need to include **the arts** in public schools:

- enhance** cultural awareness and appreciation,
- stimulate** creativity, **teach** specific arts-related skills that translate directly into learning content-related skills,
- tap into **students'** multiple intelligences,
- reinforce** content and skills taught in the "major" subjects,
- and **promote** artistic development - to name several.

Participants in the Whole Schools Initiative report that they have seen their students **realize** a host of these **benefits**.

*\*The principal evaluators acknowledge the substantial help provided by two field researchers - Charlotte Tabereaux and Adrenne Dedeaux.*

# Mississippi

*schools can help their students improve literacy skills in line with (or slightly better than) state expectations AND provide them with arts-infused activities that reinforce those skills. The current press for accountability in education need not cause schools to narrow their instructional programs to a single-minded, “no frills” focus on basic skills.*

*Instead Mississippi schools can celebrate the state’s cultural richness, accommodate the diverse ways in which its students learn, and provide a quality education. Indeed, it is entirely possible that connecting cultural experiences to diverse instruction is a significantly viable means of improving the quality of education students receive. The following pages of this report share evidence that supports the conclusion that, when implemented seriously and systematically, arts infusion is an integral contributor to stimulating and enriching student learning. What this conclusion means for schools is that educators can view arts integration as an integral ally (perhaps even as a fourth “R”) in improving student learning; what the conclusion means for the Whole Schools Initiative is that keen attention must be paid to supporting schools in ways that improve the likelihood that all participating sites will succeed in seriously and systematically infusing the arts into curriculum and instruction.*

The Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC) has funded schools since 1991 to embed the arts into regular classroom instruction. For the last five of these years, the effort became known as the Whole Schools Initiative (WSI), a label which underlined the intention that the arts would become more than a set of add-on activities. In fact, WSI had five ambitious goals: improving student achievement through infusion of the arts into the core curriculum, enriching students’ lives by increasing their skills and knowledge in the arts disciplines, assisting the growth of educators through arts-based professional development, using the arts to increase parent and community involvement, and building a sustainable system for arts infusion. WSI, therefore, was a systemic approach that hoped to alter the organizational, cultural, instructional, and learning patterns in the participating schools.

To track the progress of this reform, MAC contracted with an external, third-party evaluation team. Five researchers spent four years documenting progress in the schools, while collecting information from all the stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, parents, artists, and community partners. The evaluation examined three intersecting themes: the need to identify the impacts on children, adults, and the participating schools; the importance of documenting the variety of paths that schools took in their change journeys; and, finally, the tracking of the infrastructure of support available to all the participants. Data pertinent to these themes came from (1) the evaluators’ site visits to the schools to interview the various stakeholders and tour the schools and classrooms to see examples of instruction as well as student work; (2) surveys that were administered to students, teachers, and parents both early and late in the implementation process; (3) “change journey maps” that required that participants create, revisit, and reflect regularly about their progress; and (4) state-collected student performance data (the Mississippi Curriculum Test - MCT) that allowed comparisons among WSI sites, state averages, and a set of matched comparison schools.

When discussing the various effects of arts-infused curricula on students, staff, and schools, participating educators fervently argued that one common indicator - test scores - was woefully inadequate at capturing the full range of impacts they saw on students. But, with the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), Mississippi schools did not have the luxury of ignoring the state's expectations for growth in student proficiency across basic literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, the evaluation had to attend to such measures and chose to focus on literacy because learning to read was the foremost concern in all the participating schools. The analysis revealed that students in the participating WSI schools achieved proficiency in literacy as well as - if not slightly better than - both the state average for all Mississippi schools and a set of matched comparison schools. However, closer inspection showed that 75 percent of the higher implementation WSI schools (based on survey results triangulated with field visit data) met the state standard for growth in student literacy proficiency whereas less than half of the lower implementation WSI sites did so. The higher implementation sites also outperformed their matched comparison peers. This analysis suggested that enriching rather than narrowing the curriculum might be the wiser move in improving students' literacy.

In addition, participants - adults and children - identified a host of academic, social, and personal benefits other than test score improvement that students enjoyed as a consequence of arts integration. The arts, therefore, not only appeared to help schools meet formal accountability requirements but also added considerable value to students' education generally. Academically, educators argued that integrating the arts into math, language arts, science, and social studies heightened students' comprehension and retention of content and sharpened their ability to think critically and creatively about the material. Socially, the collaboration involved in arts activities gave students' increased opportunities to communicate with one another on school-related matters and, teachers said, paid off in the respect students began to afford one another. Personally, students became more confident in school because those that had heretofore been unsuccessful academically often found that they stood above their classmates in the arts. The association of the arts with academics enabled this confidence to transfer frequently to school work. Most importantly, adults and students reported increased enjoyment and motivation.

Variation in implementation was characteristic of WSI (as well as all educational reforms). In fact, schools varied in seven important ways. First, the schools differed with respect to their endorsement of WSI. For some, the idea was sold to the entire faculty while others tried to win staff over one at a time. Second, WSI schools had differential success in making opportunities available for teachers to become skilled at infusing the arts. A range of strategies were used, including MAC-sponsored professional development, local school-based professional development, visitations among participating schools, and finding ways for teachers to reflect on and redesign their work. Third, schools took advantage of informal coaches to assist with arts-infused instruction in a variety of ways. The project directors in each school, as well as the MAC-assigned field advisors, varied in the degree to which they were able to help teachers. Fourth, schools were variously successful in maintaining a continuity of focus on arts integration in the intervals between formal WSI training events and in the face of external demands for change on other fronts (e.g., the NCLB legislation). Fifth, serious infusion of the arts into the mainstream of instruction across core subjects was a time-consuming and demanding task. Schools varied markedly in how well arts integration remained a priority in the resource allocation process. Sixth, arts-infused instruction took an abundance of support. Support manifested itself in a variety of ways: time, materials, and human assistance being the three most prominent. The schools experienced widely varied levels of such support. Finally, the schools displayed a marked range of capacity to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organizational and instructional changes promoted by WSI involvement. The ability to maintain focus, keep staff motivated, find time for faculty to collaborate, and continue the refinement of curricula were all critical to sustainability. An analysis of survey results comparing the highest and lowest implementing schools confirmed these qualitative findings.

The unambiguous finding from this evaluation was that the accomplishments of the WSI schools differed in large part because of this variation in the degree and quality of implementation. While local circumstances will (and should) force schools to modify any educational reform, substantive choices during implementation mattered tremendously in WSI and students benefited the most in those schools that seriously and systematically integrated the arts into the core curriculum. The evaluation concluded that there were several steps MAC could take that would both honor local context and improve the quality of implementation across the participating sites. These included: insisting on

informed consent to participate from all educators; taking seriously the existing level of staff expertise and predisposition to integrate the arts in judging grant applications; requiring that participating sites have a plan to develop, adapt, implement, and evaluate arts infusion that fits with their districts' overall strategic plans; strengthening the schools' use of field advisors; promoting regular teacher collaboration; demonstrating concrete ways of adapting arts integration in the upper grades; creating an ongoing documentation process to track implementation progress annually; making implementation issues one of the training strands at the Whole Schools Summer Institute and retreats; rethinking the process for judging annual grant renewals; and revising the patterns of communication with the schools.

This report is organized around elaborating the substance of the previous six paragraphs. It begins with an overview of the Whole Schools Initiative. Next, a detailed description of the evaluation activities is offered. Third, an analysis of NCLB impacts looks at the relationship between arts integration and test scores and then the fourth section details a large number of other value-added benefits. Fifth, the importance of implementation variability is explored in depth. Finally, the concluding section ends with a set of recommendations for the Mississippi Arts Commission and other like-minded organizations interested in promoting reforms that seek to move the arts to center stage in a school's instructional program.

### **The Whole Schools Initiative**

Arts education across the nation, including the state of Mississippi, suffers from the simple fact that the arts are not part of the three "Rs." They are not "core" subjects. Arts instructors are not "regular" teachers. Most state accountability systems include the arts in their mandated course of study but not in their testing programs. No matter how valuable people perceive dance, drama, visual art, and music to be, they remain add-on programs.

Consequently, arts advocates frequently find themselves having to justify the presence of the arts in a school's curriculum. There are at least six arguments for the arts, which proponents combine in various ways (see *Gaining the Arts Advantage*, 1999; *Champions of Change*, 2000; and *Critical Links*, 2002). These include:

- The arts are disciplines worthy of attention for their own sake - at least partially because they culturally enrich those who participate in and appreciate creative endeavors.
- The arts are themselves ways of knowing in which all people should become literate.
- The arts can be an instructional tool that more effectively allows students to acquire and process content in "core" subjects. A more concrete variation of this rationale boasts of the arts' capability of raising achievement test score in more or more of these subjects.
- The arts are a vehicle for tapping into the multiple intelligences prevalent among students, thereby giving children the opportunity to learn in the style that best suits them.
- The arts increase students' interest in school, particularly those who have previously been unengaged, and this increased interest yields a concomitant benefit in motivation to learn.
- The arts enable students to develop "workplace" skills and understandings, such as critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, and communication, that instruction in major subjects habitually neglect.

A recent review of research on the arts' contribution to learning has rekindled the debate about the best argument for giving the arts an indelible spot in the curriculum (Winner & Hetland, 2000). Researchers found little evidence that learning the arts contributes to reading and math achievement, at least as such achievement is measured currently (Winner & Cooper, 2000). Reluctant to fall back totally on the "arts for arts sake" justification, Winner and Hetland instead challenged arts advocates to identify the unique contributions that arts education makes to an individual's intellectual, social, and emotional growth.

It was precisely for that reason that MAC provided grant funds, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities to elementary and middle schools to develop and implement an arts-based, interdisciplinary curriculum for every child in participating schools. This emphasis on increasing and integrating the arts throughout a building led the Commission to label this initiative The Whole Schools Initiative. This Initiative had five goals which the participating schools reaffirmed in a strategic planning session in the summer of 2001.

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The five goals were:

- To improve student achievement through the infusion of the arts into the basic curriculum (see Figure 1),
- To enrich the lives of students by increasing their skills and knowledge in all arts disciplines,
- To assist the professional and personal growth of teachers and administrators through arts experiences,
- To use the arts to increase parents and community involvement in schools, and,
- To assist schools in building a sustainable system for supporting arts infusion.



**Figure 1:**  
**WSI Goal**  
**with Students**  
**in Action**

In the Initiative's early years (prior to the current phase that began in 1998), the goals of increased arts instruction and integration of the arts into academic subjects were adopted by one pilot school a year. Schools were invited to submit proposals describing their intentions in this regard, and then those chosen began a three-year implementation process. Over time, six elementary schools piloted the ideas, including two that remained a part of the present WSI.

The current phase, started in the fall of 1998, built on this initial work. The Arts Commission found that comprehensive and sequential professional development was needed to promote widespread arts integration. Thus, it created a week-long Summer Institute in 1999 that brought together staff from 14 schools and the two continuing ones from the first phase. Four more were added for the 2000 Summer Institute, six more came on board in 2001, and three more joined in 2002. During the

course of implementation two schools dropped from the program. In addition to the summer training each year, participating schools received up to \$15,000 a year in grant support, two retreat opportunities during each school year, technical support from MAC on an as needed basis, plus a field advisor to offer assistance, support, advice, training, and troubleshooting.

In return, the Whole Schools Initiative expected schools to increase and integrate the arts thoughtfully into existing school programs and reform initiatives. This was not to be done as an add-on to those other efforts but as an integrated way to enhance and enrich students' opportunities to acquire, process, and demonstrate new knowledge and skills in their core academic subjects. Schools began the Whole Schools process by creating a five-year comprehensive strategic plan to address critical learning needs through increasing and integrating the arts. The schools updated their plans on an annual basis in consultation with MAC and their field advisors. While schools necessarily established goals and devised an implementation process that suited their particular circumstances, all participating sites shared a commitment to the idea that student learning would benefit from greater opportunities to be exposed to and participate in the arts in their regular classrooms. The Initiative also expected schools to make corresponding changes in their organizational arrangements (e.g., common planning time for teachers) that would maintain - and sustain - increased and integrated arts experiences.

The Whole Schools Initiative, therefore, was an example of comprehensive school reform, using the arts as a vehicle for promoting high quality instruction and learning for all students. Indeed, WSI advocated that each participating school develop the characteristics that the U.S. State Department of Education established as essential in its Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant program. Schools wanting to receive these federal funds had to adopt an approved CSR model or show that their home-grown effort had the same characteristics as the models, of which there were 11:

- Effective and replicated research-based methods and strategies
- Comprehensive design for effective school functioning
- High quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development
- Measurable goals and benchmarks for student performance
- Within-school support for reform by faculty, administration and staff
- Support for teachers and principals
- Parent and community involvement

- High quality, external, technical support and assistance
- Annual evaluation of implementation and results
- Coordination of resources to support and sustain reform
- Strategies that improve academic achievement.

WSI's comprehensive intentions, therefore, represented a distinct departure from most arts-based educational programs that tended to be add-ons to existing school programs.

### **The Evaluation**

Because of the Initiative's encompassing scope, the accompanying evaluation process had to be both extensive and intensive - and include all stakeholders in the participating sites. This suggested the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative strategies for collecting information to elicit students', teachers', administrators', parents', business partners', and artists' perspectives on the problems and prospects of infusing arts instruction throughout schools. The evaluation of that process extended over a four-year period during which time evaluators made repeated visits to the schools, attended all the Summer Institutes, maintained ongoing communication with MAC, and regularly provided feedback to MAC and the schools.

The WSI sought to alter the organizational, cultural, and instructional/learning patterns in participating schools by infusing them with the arts. This was done with the intent of creating diverse, rich, and meaningful educational experiences for all students, particularly those who had not thrived in school previously. From the perspective of the evaluation team, to inform and assess the progress of the WSI, the evaluation approach simultaneously had to pay attention to three intersecting themes. First, the evaluation had to identify the impacts on children, adults, and the schools that participated in the Initiative. There would likely be knowledge, skill, and attitudinal changes in teachers; organizational and cultural changes in schools, as well as how successfully they sustained the effort; and academic and personal growth in students.

Second, the evaluation had to document accurately and concretely the paths that schools took in their change journeys. Any effective reform has to accommodate the various contexts (social, political, cultural, economic, and technical, to name several) in which schools operate. Schools invariably implement their commitment to reform goals in different ways - which often render meaningless attempts to compare one reform to another in terms of certain commonly desired outcomes. However, because of the variety of settings in which schools function, such diversity is not only to be expected but also probably to be desired - given this country's historical commitment to local control of education. Nevertheless, the nature and influence of such contextual conditions had to be accounted for in the evaluation.

Third, the evaluation had to track the evolution of the infrastructure of support available to participants. The schools were not expected to change on their own - just because they had received some funding to do so. Rather, there was a set of resources available to the schools, their districts, and the informal network of WSI participants that helped to unite these disparate entities in a common effort, including the field advisors and training opportunities. The what and how of these supportive elements were vital subjects for developing and portraying a complete picture of WSI.

Finally, in addition to highlighting impacts, assessing variability of implementation, and tracking key supports, the evaluation had to capture the nuances of change, detect unintended consequences, and provide specific guidance to participants. To do so the evaluation used a range of strategies that touched all the participating schools and stakeholders (not just a sample) and was carried out by a team of five evaluators. Five key strategies were employed over the course of the evaluation: interviews, observations, surveys, change journey maps, and extant data analysis.

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## **Interviews**

For the first three years of the evaluation, two separate site visits were made to all the participating schools. In one visit interviews were conducted with leaders in each building (usually the principal and project director), as well in the district and the community. Face-to-face contact was also often made with the field advisors at that time, and, if not, telephone interviews were arranged for a later date. The focus of these conversations was to explore the purpose of arts infusion in each building, the goals each school had set and their relationship with other district and school reform priorities, the activities they had undertaken (including professional development), evidence that the efforts were working, and reflections on the facilitators and barriers to implementation.

A separate visit explored with students (anywhere from four to eight per building) and teachers (usually six to eight per building) the specifics of what was happening in classrooms and assessments of its effects. Teachers shared which art forms they were using, how and how often they were using them, how they evaluated student progress, descriptions of their best lessons, descriptions of their professional development experiences and opportunities to share learnings with colleagues, and what helped and hindered arts infusion in their buildings. Students described the type, frequency, and nature of arts-related activities in their classrooms, what their favorite instructional activities were, and how those activities helped them learn. Over the course of the first three years close to 1,500 interviews were conducted across the participating buildings, with somewhere between 15 and 25 interviews per building each year. Attempts were made to remain in contact with staff in schools that for whatever reasons decided to not continue in the WSI.

In the last year of the evaluation (2003-2004), a single half-day visit was made to all the buildings that had been a part of WSI. During these visits, principals and project directors shared updates about what they were doing to sustain arts-infused activities, their plans to continue these actions in the future, and the progress they were making with students, especially the linkages they saw between arts integration and student achievement. This latter topic was elevated to the highest priority with the advent of the new accountability requirements associated with the NCLB legislation.

## **Observations from School and Classroom Tours**

Each visit to a school included a tour, usually led by a student, the principal, or the project director. These tours allowed evaluators to observe public displays of the ways in which schools communicated to the community that the school incorporated the arts as a central part of its mission. One school, in fact, changed its formal name to reflect its arts focus and designed a tile mural portraying that name over the doorway entrance to the school. It was also common to observe student work in the hallways that used the arts to convey students' understanding of important content in mathematics, science, social studies, or language arts. Finally, there were informal walk-throughs of classrooms. It was not uncommon for teachers to invite evaluators into their rooms and highlight examples of ways in which the arts had become a routine part of their instructional repertoire.

For example, one teacher was excited about using a Mandala, which is an artistic representation of wisdom that is captured in a two-dimensional circle made from paper, textiles, or colored sand, to help students develop a deeper understanding of a book they were reading. The book was the Native American story "The Rough Faced Girl" and the students were using mathematics (radial symmetry) to design their individual Mandala, the visual arts to make the Mandala, and language arts to write about the feelings of the characters in the book or their own feelings in developing the Mandala. The teacher explained that in subsequent lessons students would present their individual interpretations of the story to the class and that all of the students' work for the unit would be assessed using a rubric that had been taught to the students at the outset of the series of lessons.

Such opportunities were a natural, but informal, outgrowth of spending evaluation time in the schools. The evaluation did not use, however, an observation protocol because early in the four-year period, it was deemed potentially disruptive to have outsiders observe teachers' initial attempts to incorporate the arts into their lessons. Over time, as suggested above, classrooms became more "public" places as student performances and displays became the object of pride in the buildings. But, the norm of informality with respect to entering classrooms remained in place.

## Surveys

All participating schools took student, teacher, and parent surveys in their first year of participation in WSI. In that first round (which took place over the first three years because new schools joined each year), 637 teachers, 10,656 students, and 6,812 parents participated in the surveys. In the last year of the evaluation (2003-2004), teachers again were surveyed as well as students enrolled in the highest grade in each school and their parents. This sampling of students and parents eased the data collection burdens on the schools and ensured that information was available from people who potentially had the maximum exposure to arts-infused activities over the course of the WSI. This follow-up round of surveys yielded responses from 485 teachers, 2,247 students, and 1,174 parents. Nineteen of the twenty-three 2003-2004 participating schools responded (83 percent of the schools), and an average of 84 percent of the teachers in each building returned useable data. The reader should keep in mind that this response rate refers to the entire universe of schools involved in the reform, not just to a subsample of participating schools.

The teachers reported on the importance of a range of student and teacher goals, how much impact the WSI had on those goals, the frequency with which they engaged in a range of arts-related instructional practices, as well as their degree of agreement about the value of arts-related activities. The students offered assessments of the frequency and value of arts and arts-integration activities. Parents provided their insights on the availability of arts-related activities for their children, in addition to their own level of involvement in the school and the efforts of the school to reach out to them.

## Change Journey Maps

Each school created or modified an existing “change journey map” at the end of each school year. These “maps” were designed as a tool for school staff to identify key events, milestones, and influences that characterized their approach to implementing the Whole Schools Initiative. The maps not only provided a visual representation of past history but also acted as a stimulant for reflection about future direction (see Figure 2).

The schools designed their own strategies for creating a map, but they typically went through a five-step process. First, a representative group of the school faculty (typically four to eight members) framed a question for the journey, such as: What have been the key Whole Schools-related events or activities during the year? Second, the group structured a brainstorming session where participants could think back over these events/activities to identify what they had accomplished with respect to curriculum, instruction, assessment, organizational arrangements (e.g. scheduling), leadership, and politics. Participants highlighted both supports and obstacles that shaped how these aspects of the school were or were not affected. Each issue was represented on a sticky note. Third, these sticky notes were sequenced in some order on newsprint to capture the flow of the school’s “story.” Fourth, participants began to make some meaning from the activity. Questions that typically guided this reflection included: (a) How much progress had the school made to date? (b) What had the school learned from this? (c) Where was the school going in the future? Finally, the group collectively decided how to present what they have learned to the other school staff. These were often some artistic representation that could be prominently displayed in a public space in the school.

## Extant Data

The Mississippi State Department of Education, as part of its own accountability system and in response to the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, reported annual student achievement data from the criterion-based Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) for subgroups of students at each grade in each school in the state. This data set provided one source of information about student achievement. During visits to the school buildings, principals’ descriptions of the types of data sources they used to monitor student progress made it clear that there were scant other data commonly collected across even a majority of the WSI schools (other than the survey data referred to above). The possibility of expanding the range of data available diminished quickly as NCLB put even more pressure on local schools to focus on certain results to the exclusion of any others. As a consequence, the evaluation directed its student achievement efforts exclusively toward an analysis of MCT results that were reported to meet the NCLB guidelines.



**Figure 2:**  
**Sample**  
**Change Journey**  
**Map from**  
**WSI School**

This analysis involved the WSI participating schools, state averages, and a sample of closely matched (across several demographic characteristics) comparison schools, which are the topics of the next section of this report.

### **The Whole Schools Initiative and No Child Left Behind Results**

Historically there have been several arguments for the need to include the arts in public schools: enhance cultural awareness and appreciation, stimulate creativity, tap into students' multiple intelligences, teach specific arts-related skills that translate directly into learning content-related skills, reinforce content and skills taught in the "major" subjects, and promote artistic development - to name several. Participants in the Whole Schools Initiative reported that they had seen their students realize a host of these benefits. These benefits, educators said, stemmed from students' participation in a variety of WSI-advocated and supported activities, such as:

- Core subject lessons that provided a variety of ways for students to acquire, process, and demonstrate knowledge and skills
- Grade-level and schoolwide thematic, interdisciplinary units
- Interactions with visiting artists - through both direct contact and attending performances
- Student performances
- Field trips to a variety of cultural institutions
- Arts lessons that connected to core subject content and skills
- Other special events

In other words, Mississippi educators in WSI buildings believed that the presence of the arts had added considerable value to their students' education.

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Schools today (not only those in Mississippi), however, do not have the luxury of losing sight of how proficient their students are with basic literacy (and math) skills. A decade's long, keen national interest — some would call it an obsession — in using standardized tests as the primary means of assessing students' academic progress has culminated in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. In exchange for funding to assist schools with low performing students, the states must adhere to a stricter code of accountability whereby all students will be proficient in language arts and mathematics by the year 2014. Each state is responsible for setting annual benchmark goals for the percentage of students in each school expected to demonstrate proficiency in literacy (reading) and numeracy (mathematics). Mississippi identified a series of graduated targets for the percentage of third grade students who were proficient in reading, leading to the eventual goal of having 100 percent proficiency by 2014. A special feature of this recent legislation is that schools are held accountable for all student achievement, including students of different ethnic backgrounds, limited-English proficient students, and students with disabilities. Schools can no longer receive passing marks simply by having their top students pull up the average for the entire student population.

Based on Mississippi's state curriculum test, schools serving students in grades three and above receive an achievement level score (from one to five, with higher being better) based on the percentage of students that were proficient or above and a rating for its growth status (not met, met, or exceeded) which compares a school's year-over-year improvement in achievement to the expected growth rate for all schools in the state. These two ratings are then combined to classify a school according to its performance level. There are five classifications:

#### **1. Low-performing 2. Under-performing 3. Successful 4. Exemplary 5. Superior**

In addition, schools also must demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for a host of student subgroups. If a school fails to demonstrate acceptable progress, a series of increasingly severe sanctions come into play, from having to notify parents that they have the option to transfer their children to nearby, higher performing schools if the building fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years to having to completely reorganize if this failure to show progress in student growth continues for up to six years ([www.mde.k12.ms.us/ACAD/sag/school\\_improvement.doc](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ACAD/sag/school_improvement.doc)).

While few of the WSI participants would have denied the importance of the value-added benefits of arts integration, their schools first had to make absolutely sure that they demonstrated that the percentage of students proficient in the basic skills was increasing at the rate the state deemed necessary in order to meet the requirements of NCLB and that all student subgroups were progressing at a rate commensurate with majority students. Thus, it was neces-

sary for the evaluation to look closely at WSI participating schools' NCLB performance in literacy, which was reported for the first time in the fall of 2003, because this measure became the de facto priority for schools regardless of whatever their local strategic plans might have said. Literacy was chosen as the analytic focus because most of the examined schools were elementary buildings and learning to read was the foremost concern at that level.

There are two parts to this analysis. The first examines the NCLB performance of 25 schools that were participating in the WSI in the spring of 2003 and compares their results to the state average and to a matched set of comparison schools. The second then examines a subset of 18 WSI sites that 1) completed a teacher survey concerning the implementation and impact of WSI and 2) had grade levels that were included in the reporting requirements of NCLB.

To foreshadow the following discussing, the two-part analysis suggested that two conclusions were warranted. First, schools attempting to create an arts-rich environment for their students performed as well as - if not better than - both the state average for all Mississippi schools and a comparison group of schools demographically and geographically similar to them. Second, schools within WSI whose teachers reported higher implementation of WSI objectives far surpassed lower implementation WSI schools in enabling their students to meet the all-important growth benchmarks (using the not met, met, exceeded categories the state set under NCLB).

### WSI Schools Compared to State Averages and a Matched Comparison Group

Table 1 contains much of the information about school performance that will be used throughout the following pages. The left-hand side of the table contains data for the WSI schools and the right half contains information for a matched set of comparison schools. Table 1 shows that all but three of the 25 WSI sites that participated in 2003 received a 3 or above on their composite School Performance Classification (Column 4). Eight had 3s; eight had 4s; and six had 5s. Thus, according to the state's accountability system, 22 (88 percent) of the Whole Schools sites were "successful" or better. Of these 22, 45 percent (10) achieved their classification without having met their growth targets; 55 percent (12) of the successful schools met or exceeded their targets.

**Table 1**  
Whole Schools and  
Comparison Schools  
Performance Ratings and  
Demographic Characteristics

WSI Site ID's	Achieve Level '03	Growth Status '02-'03	Perform Classification	Percent Free Lunch	Percent Minority	Implementation Mean	Comparison Site ID's	Achieve Level '03	Growth Status '02-'03	Perform Classification	Percent Free Lunch	Percent Minority
01	3	Not	3	51%	49%	16.00	26	3	Not	3	48%	54%
02	2	Exceed	3	54%	29%	N/A	27	5	Exceed	5	51%	33%
03	5	Exceed	5	66%	36%	10.25	28	4	Not	4	74%	35%
04	3	Not	3	67%	24%	11.25	29	5	Exceed	5	81%	34%
05	4	Not	4	22%	20%	13.00	30	4	Not	4	22%	19%
06	3	Not	3	85%	96%	N/A	31	2	Not	2	85%	100%
07	3	Not	3	85%	69%	N/A	32	3	Not	3	67%	58%
08	2	Not	2	85%	98%	11.25	33	3	Exceed	4	85%	99%
09	3	Not	3	85%	98%	4.00	34	3	Not	3	85%	100%
10	4	Met	4	85%	99%	N/A	35	3	Not	3	85%	100%
11	2	Not	2	93%	97%	N/A	36	2	Not	2	88%	100%
12	4	Met	4	74%	66%	7.13	37	3	Met	3	74%	77%
13	3	Exceed	4	43%	32%	10.50	38	3	Not	3	42%	45%
14	4	Not	4	28%	15%	7.50	39	4	Met	4	28%	13%
15	5	Exceed	5	28%	15%	N/A	40	5	Exceed	5	28%	10%
16	5	Exceed	5	84%	82%	4.00	41	3	Not	3	84%	75%
17	3	Exceed	4	91%	94%	6.50	42	1	Not	1	93%	98%
18	5	Met	5	26%	19%	17.50	43	5	Exceed	5	26%	28%
19	5	Exceed	5	26%	21%	2.00	44	5	Exceed	5	26%	12%
20	2	Not	2	73%	78%	15.00	45	3	Exceed	4	57%	60%
21	4	Exceed	4	27%	15%	16.25	46	5	Not	5	27%	14%
22	4	Not	4	27%	33%	16.50	47	3	Not	3	27%	36%
23	5	Met	5	40%	55%	2.75	48	3	Met	3	40%	38%
24	3	Not	3	75%	83%	15.13	49	4	Met	4	66%	73%
25	3	Not	3	56%	64%	N/A	50	3	Met	3	56%	69%
				Av=59	Av=55						Av=58	Av=55

Because all of the schools except one met their AYP in reading and all but two did so in math for subgroups within the schools (which reflected the low diversity of the student population in most of the schools), this information is not included in Table 1. Moreover, the subgroup AYP results reported as a part of NCLB have been extremely controversial, particularly with respect to which students are placed in certain of the subgroups (e.g., those receiving free and reduced lunches). Several districts successfully appealed their AYP status and reported receiving letters from the Mississippi State Department of Education to this effect. Consequently, the AYP results apparently changed after the state first made the NCLB results public. These issues surrounding AYP reinforced the decision to concentrate on the overall growth in proficient readers as the primary measure of student achievement progress in this report using the not met, met, and exceeded designations.

To gain a perspective on these results, a sample of matched comparison schools was created. A school was found for each of the 25 WSI buildings that resembled it geographically and demographically. Geographically, schools in the participant's county were sought. If a match could not be found, one from a neighboring county was selected. Demographically, schools were matched on size, grade configuration, Title I designation, percent of male students, percent of minority students, and percent of students receiving free lunch. An attempt was also made to make sure that special status schools, such as magnets, were paired with similar status schools. During site visits, all but two principals agreed that the school matches were appropriate; in these two cases, the demographic factors for the chosen schools were indeed similar but the principals pointed out other subtleties that did not show up in the databases used to draw the comparison schools, such as differences in housing patterns, that made a different school a more suitable choice.

*It was a constructive sign for arts integration that the WSI schools compared favorably to a group of schools likely using a wide variety of reforms, some of which undoubtedly targeted reading and math more directly.*

Table 1 shows the percentages for minority students and free lunch only; all of the schools received Title I funds, the percent of male students varied only slightly around 50 percent, and size varied by more than 200 students in about a third of the matches but finding schools with closer enrollment figures led to more distant communities. These sites were put in the comparison sample prior to examining their performance on the state accountability system. Ideally, the schools also would have been matched on prior test score performance but the NCLB ratings were being used for the first time and it was unclear how well other measures would have served as proxies. Overall, the comparison sites were very similar demographically to the WSI sites as the averages at the bottom of Columns 5 and 6 and at the bottom of Columns 12 and 13 show.

The performance of the comparison schools nearly mirrored that of the WSI sites. All but three received a 3 or above; 11 had 3s; five had 4s; and six had 5s. Thus, 22 (88 percent) were "successful" or better. Of these 22 "successful" schools, 55 percent (12) achieved their ratings without having met their growth targets and 45 percent (10) met or exceeded their targets. Four schools did not meet their AYP in reading and five did not do so in math.

By comparison, more WSI sites with classifications of three or higher attained their growth targets than did their matched comparison schools (55 percent to 45 percent) and fewer failed to achieve AYP in reading (one WSI site versus four comparison schools) and math (two WSI sites versus five comparison schools). The comparison schools, as mentioned, tended to be from the same locales as the WSI schools and, although they were not in the Whole Schools Initiative, they were very likely to be involved with other school-based and county-based improvement efforts. In fact, nearly every school in the state - or the United States for that matter - was under pressure to adopt, adapt, or create a comprehensive strategy for improving learning for all students. Thus, it was a constructive sign for arts integration that the WSI schools compared favorably to a group of schools likely using a wide variety of reforms, some of which undoubtedly targeted reading and math more directly.

Whole Schools buildings performed slightly better than the state average with respect to the School Performance Classification (see Table 2). The WSI group had fewer non-successful schools and slightly more successful schools. It was likewise the case that the comparison schools exceeded the state average.

These modest numbers are important in understanding the Whole Schools Initiative. The Summer Institute, school-year retreats, input from field advisors, and school-based professional development helped teachers think about how to use the arts to enhance their subjects. However, WSI was NOT a reading program. The schools implemented WSI in addition to whatever literacy programs they had in place. WSI represented, therefore, additional work for participating educators, and the above comparisons suggest that this additional work did not detract from their students' performance in literacy. This meant that WSI students experienced the added value of an arts-infused environment AND performed similarly to peers in nearby schools and throughout the state. This was not an inconsequential achievement in the face of the narrowed instructional programs that many decried as the inevitable consequence of imposing high-stakes tests on schools.

This finding in and of itself would have been an important outcome of an evaluation of arts integration: the arts and the acquisition of basic skills in a high-stakes environment did not necessarily conflict with one another. However, the next section looks more closely at the WSI schools and unveils an intriguing connection between the extent of schools' implementation of WSI and their NCLB growth performance.

### WSI Implementation and NCLB Performance

As is the case with any reform effort, WSI sites did not all go about implementing the Initiative in the same ways. For example, some opted to fill the school year with artists' visits and to introduce students to Mississippi's vast cultural richness; others concentrated their efforts more on equipping regular classroom teachers with strategies to embed the arts in their lesson plans; and still others attempted combinations of these approaches. Reports from the outside evaluation of the Initiative have documented these differences over the past three years.

In the fall of 2003, teachers in the WSI sites were asked to complete a survey that elicited their assessments of WSI implementation and impact. The survey items related to implementation were organized into four categories that reflected 1) the extent of arts integration in the buildings, 2) the degree to which teachers' used a variety of instructional strategies, 3) the quantity and quality of opportunities teachers had to participate in arts-related professional development, and 4) the extent of "coordinated" effort in the buildings, such as engaging in collaborative planning and aligning the school's curriculum and instruction internally and with state standards. A composite implementation rank was created for each school based on teachers' responses to the items in the four categories. The composite rank was simply the average of a school's ranking in arts integration, varied instruction, professional development, and coordinated effort. All four areas were repeated emphases of the Initiative and reflected the overall goal of WSI to affect directly both instruction and organization in the buildings.

Eighteen of the 25 sites became the focus of this further analysis because these schools: 1) had teachers complete the survey, 2) were of sufficient size to receive an individual School Performance Classification, and 3) served grade levels that were included in the classification system. The seven schools that did not meet all three of the above criteria had more minority and free lunch students than did the overall WSI group of buildings, with 67 percent minority (compared to 56 percent overall) and 69 percent free lunch (compared to 59 percent overall). The analyses that follow, however, bolster an argument that wealth and minority status were not determining factors affecting the relationship between WSI implementation

**Table 2**  
Schools Performance Classification Levels of Schools across Mississippi, Whole Schools, and Comparison Schools

School Performance Classification Level	State Percentages	WSI Schools Percentages	Comparison Schools Percentages
Level 1	4%	0%	4%
Level 2	13%	12%	8%
Level 3	38%	32%	44%
Level 4	27%	32%	20%
Level 5	19%	24%	24%

and meeting the state’s growth target; but because issues of wealth and ethnicity pervade all standardized testing related issues, the evaluation carefully attended to demographics as an important consideration in understanding WSI reform.

As an initial analytical step, the nine top schools based on the composite implementation average rank were labeled as “higher” implementation sites and schools ranked 10-18 were treated as “lower” implementation sites. The site visits that the evaluators made to each school each year, including one conducted after the final survey results were available, were used as an additional check on whether the survey rankings appeared to reflect what was actually going on in the buildings. Of particular importance was to determine whether the observations in the schools contradicted the survey results. None did so sufficiently to alter the relative rank order of schools.

Because all but two of the schools achieved School Performance Classifications of three or above, it was not statistically viable to compare the classifications for the higher and lower implementation schools. More importantly, for NCLB, schools had to demonstrate progress each year in increasing the percent of proficient readers in their buildings, so that by the year 2014 all students will have achieved that standard. Thus, again, the growth status of the schools was used in this analysis. It must be kept in mind that although most of the schools were already labeled “successful” (receiving a 3 or higher) on the basis of their School Performance Classification, they could still trigger sanctions associated with NCLB by failing to meet predicted growth over time.

In this group of 18 WSI buildings, nine had met or exceeded their growth targets and nine had not (see Table 3). Seven of the nine that had met or exceeded their target were higher implementation schools; seven of the nine that had not met the target were lower implementation schools. In other words, 78 percent of the higher WSI implementation schools met or exceeded their growth target while only 22 percent of the lower implementation schools did so.

Statewide, 44 percent of schools met or exceeded their growth targets. It was also the case that 44 percent (four) of the nine comparison schools matched to these higher WSI implementation sites met or exceeded their growth target. Thus, higher implementation WSI schools almost doubled the success rate of Mississippi schools overall and the matched comparison schools.

**Table 3**  
Cross Tabulation of  
Achievement Growth by  
Level of Arts-Infused  
Implementation

	<b>Lower Implementation</b>	<b>Higher Implementation</b>
Not Met Achievement Growth	7	2
Met Achievement Growth	2	7

Chi square p value = .028

Additionally, it should be pointed out that the two lower implementation schools that also met or exceeded their growth targets were two of the five wealthiest WSI schools, based on the percent free lunch data from Table 1 (Column 5). Even with these exceptions and the small sample of 18 schools, these results were statistically significant (chi square p value=.028), meaning that this apparent relationship between WSI implementation and meeting expected growth in the percentage of proficient readers was not by chance.

Being mindful of the historical relationship between wealth and test performance, it should be noted that the nine higher implementation schools had 60 percent free lunch students and 56 percent minority students. These numbers resembled almost exactly those of the overall WSI group of 25 (59 percent and 55 percent respectively - Columns 5 & 6 in Table 1).

While the evaluation’s site visit observations indicated that the relative ranking of the 18 schools based on the survey results were accurate, it was

advisable to examine whether there was a more “natural” break in the survey data to use in separating higher implementation schools from lower ones. If one looks closely at Column 7 in Table 1, it will be seen that there is a larger gap between the seventh highest school (School #14 - 7.50 combined rank) and the eighth (School #3 -

10.25 combined rank) than there is between the ninth (School #13 - 10.50 combined rank) and the tenth (Schools #4 & #8 - 11.25 combined rank). This grouping arrangement suggested that it would be worthwhile to look at the results using seven “high” implementation sites and 11 “low” implementation sites. The two schools that were shifted out of the higher implementation category were making diligent efforts to incorporate the arts, based on site visit data, and probably should have been in a mid-range implementation category, but the numbers of schools involved in the analysis were too small to create more categories for statistical analysis.

The remaining seven higher implementation sites were less mirror images of the overall group of 25 schools (Columns 5 & 6 in Table 1) than was the previous collection of nine higher implementation sites, with the seven having slightly more minority students (62 percent to 56 percent overall) and a greater percentage of poor students (61 percent to 59 percent overall).

Table 4 presents the revised analysis. It was still the case that the high implementation schools far exceeded both the statewide percentage of schools meeting or exceeding the growth targets (71 percent to 44 percent) and the percentage of lower WSI implementation schools (71 percent to 36 percent) — and still surpassed the performance of their seven matched comparison peers (71 percent to 57 percent). Demographically, in the group of five schools that implemented WSI thoroughly and that met or exceeded growth targets were two schools that were almost completely poor and minority, a school with two-thirds minority and three-fourths free lunch students, a school that was about 50 percent minority and free lunch, and only one school that had predominantly wealthy, majority students.

Making this adjustment in the number of higher implementation sites weakened the statistical significance of the relationship between implementation and meeting the growth target because with low numbers of schools involved in calculations, small changes in cell numbers can greatly affect whether statistical significance is achieved. The relationship between implementation and meeting the growth target is still clearly in the same positive direction as the previous analysis however.

The four lower implementation schools that met their growth expectations were wealthier and less diverse than the majority of WSI participating sites, which again possibly reflected the added benefit to student test results of community wealth. Among these four were a school with less than 50 percent of its students on free lunch, a selective magnet school, and two schools with only about a quarter of their students receiving free lunch.

This analysis reinforced the possibility that not only were WSI schools able to infuse the arts and compare favorably to state averages and to peers but also that those schools that embraced WSI the most were likely to have enabled more students to be proficient in their literacy skills than either schools across the state or in the matched comparison group. One, thus, has to look at these data as interestingly, indeed highly, suggestive that there was something going on in the schools with higher levels of WSI implementation that not only benefited students in the various ways discussed at the beginning of this section but also academically in terms of literacy achievement.

In the complex real world of public education, positing a statistical relationship between a reform strategy and student performance should be done cautiously because many uncontrollable and immeasurable factors can and do influence school life. Educators had no such qualms.

Drawing on their hands-on experiences with the arts and students, they not only believed that arts integration had made an academic difference but also pointed to concrete explanations as to why. During the final site visits, educators were asked how they viewed the relationship between arts infusion and students’ academic performance. In other words, they were asked: What is the path through which students’ involvement with the arts affects academic performance?

**Table 4**  
Cross Tabulation of Achievement Growth by Level of Arts-Infused Implementation

	Lower Implementation	Higher Implementation
Not Met Achievement Growth	7	2
Met Achievement Growth	4	5

Chi square p value = .028

In three of the lower implementation sites visited, school leaders acknowledged that the arts had value but that it was either up to individual teachers to decide how much integration they would do (in the case of two of the schools) or that the pressure to meet growth targets did not allow the school the luxury of taking time away from direct literacy instruction to do the arts (in the case of the other). As one person explained in the latter instance: *“The test scores are so low. It is hard to justify missing a day of pure instruction. I wish we had more time to do [the arts] but we just don’t. You know and I know that it helps. I can’t afford it right now. We have to do too much straight instruction to fit it in.”*

In several of the higher implementation sites, three proposed connections between arts infusion and student test performance (and more broadly - learning) emerged in interviews. One was that the arts reinforced content and skills students needed to learn. In fact, the motto in one school was “Teach it once, and then teach it another way.” Thus, within regular classrooms, the arts helped teachers devise a variety of ways to teach and reinforce critical material; and in the arts classrooms, teachers aligned their activities with regular classroom content. As a teacher said: *“The arts offer multiple opportunities for students to grasp concepts. They can learn by hearing, seeing, and doing. This allows for light bulbs to go off at different times in different ways and in different places. It gives kids permission to learn in different ways.”*

The second purported connection between the arts and academic achievement was that arts-related activities increased the breadth and depth of students’ life experiences and therefore gave them more concrete hooks on which to hang the concepts, content, and skills they were being taught in school. The arts, in other words, grounded what students were taught in ways that helped make what they were learning tangible and visible - and therefore understandable. Two teachers explained: The arts allow students to make connections to all subjects and to real life. *“Kids need a background of experience in order to learn. The arts provide that. Learning is authentic. Our little children come to us starved for experience.”*

Thirdly, educators proposed that the enthusiasm students had for arts-integrated lessons infused all of their learning. This in turn paid positive dividends in the classroom which then also had some payoff at test-taking time. *“For some students, the arts are the only success they feel in a day. Success in the arts leads to a willingness to try academic subjects. Learning becomes defined as fun, interesting, and exciting.”*

Whatever the connection between arts integration and academic achievement, the arts appeared to play a significant role in helping schools serve larger numbers of students well.

### **The Added Value of Arts Integration**

Although the preceding discussion posits a connection between students who encountered the arts regularly in classroom lessons and literacy achievement, it has to be reiterated that the Whole Schools Initiative was not a literacy program. Certainly all participants were keenly hopeful that infusing the arts into regular classroom lessons and integrating language arts, math, science, and social studies into whatever arts courses the schools offered would pay off academically. But the arts were used in conjunction with each school’s adopted literacy program, not as the program itself. This meant that WSI was not in competition with, for example, the Barksdale approach that several schools were implementing; WSI was trying to equip teachers and schools with the means to enhance students’ performance in such programs.

However, in the process of using the arts in this way, both teachers and students noted a host of benefits that accrued to students beyond those measured by test scores. Indeed, if the evidence contained in the previous section simply showed that arts-infused schools could hold their own in test score comparisons AND expose their students to a varying array of arts experiences, then many WSI participants would have argued that the effort and time would have been wisely spent. On-site interviews yielded a litany of claims for students having benefited from being in a WSI school. The value that arts integration added to students ranged from the academic to the social and to the personal.

Academically, teachers noted three broad consequences of using arts-related activities in conjunction with teaching the core subjects: comprehension, retention, and thinking. They referred to the three using a variety of phrases. For example, comprehension was highlighted with such words as “the subject now makes sense to them,” “they can tell

others what they did," "they all did it and they all got it," and "it made things real for them." Teachers also remarked that students tended to "retain" what they were learning when the content was reinforced with the arts. They said that "it showed up on the (teacher-made) tests" and that students seemed to be "remembering" better. Comments about thinking had two interrelated strands: creativity and critical thinking. The former was frequently noted as teachers marveled at the myriad ways that students interpreted and carried out the arts portion of a lesson. As a middle school student explained, "I like the creative part of just thinking of what you can do." Or as a classmate said in identifying a favorite arts-related English lesson: *"I liked doing a poem about why we like Fall - what is so special about it - because we got to express ourselves with no limits. We could be whatever we wanted to be."*

Higher-order thinking skills like synthesis, analysis, and evaluation were less prevalently mentioned directly in the interviews but were nevertheless hinted at in comments like one teacher made about how students were beginning to learn how to "critique and compliment" one another constructively. Still, in the teacher surveys, educators ranked student problem-solving near the top of a list of important student goals (a mean of 4.82 with 5 being most important) and claimed that "helping students think creatively" was the student goal most affected by their WSI efforts (a mean of 4.11 with 5 representing the highest impact). Teachers saw direct connections among teaching the arts, teaching the academics, and teaching social skills (that will be described next). An arts specialist stated: *"The arts are important; they are a non-threatening way to teach [state] benchmarks and respect of themselves and peers."*

Socially, many of the activities students engaged in required them to work together, whether it was making an individual contribution to a mural, helping to construct a replica of the Mayflower in the middle of the classroom, building a cardboard house, or just talking with one another as they wrote poems or drew. The result was that teachers said that their observations of students' actions and the tone of their interactions suggested that students were learning to collaborate or at least communicate better with one another - and showing respectfulness for others. In their survey responses, students rated "learning about having respect for others" as one of the most frequently emphasized lessons in their classrooms (with a frequency mean of 3.46 with 4 being "often"). For their part, early in the reform, teachers viewed working with others as being among the most important student goals (a mean of 4.75) and they subsequently indicated that it was near the top of the list of goals that had been positively influenced by WSI (a mean of 3.99).

Personally, teachers said that they could see students developing confidence and self-esteem, particularly among those students whose strengths had not been evident in the more traditional classroom activities. *"One little boy was failing in all his subjects, but he is an excellent artist. He started showing classmates how to draw, and he has started to regain his confidence."*

Using a somewhat ironic twist of words, another teacher said: *"Some of the kids who do the best on a project are my lowest academic students - gifted kids are not as talented."*

A side effect of the pride that students took in their newfound capabilities was that parents tended to hear more about what was going on in school. A teacher believed that "Parents are more aware because kids brag at home and they take projects home." Supporting that assertion, the parent survey showed that 78 percent of the parents agreed that their children had opportunities to express themselves creatively through the arts and 75 percent of the students noted that there were plenty of artistic things to do at school. The idea of enhancing students' personal growth was extremely important to teachers at the outset of WSI (a mean of 4.82) and their later survey responses indicated that it too had been strongly influenced (a mean of 3.97).

Most notable in the interviews were references to students' "enjoying" learning. Enthusiasm for learning had been the fifth most important goal to address teachers said on the initial survey (a mean of 4.8) and this area was the third most affected by WSI (a mean of 4.05). Teachers described students as being motivated to participate in class and "wanting to do it again." Eighty-five percent of the students surveyed said they liked the arts activities they did in school and 80 percent enjoyed having the arts as a part of their core subjects. One teacher's list of personal benefits included the following: *(Whole Schools) Helps their confidence, they see more purpose for what they do, they see a reason to be here, and they value themselves more.*



Some of the older students among those whose schools participated in WSI indicated that arts integration was not just for the young. These four teenagers said the following in response to a question about what value they saw in the arts activities they had described: *"It helps me to do the right thing - good grades and attitude. I can concentrate on arts rather than argue."* *"It helps me to learn better by doing it."* *"I learn more."* *"It's better than the same old way; it pulls you into it."*

Teachers and students described the kinds of lessons that were responsible for promoting these types of academic, social, and personal benefits. For example, when asked about a favorite arts-related lesson, a student said, *"When we made house plans and used the building as parts of speech."* In this classroom, students actually constructed a house in the classroom as part of an overall thematic unit on community. However, as the building took shape, the teacher had labeled pieces with parts of speech and parts of a sentence (such as subject and predicate) so that students could learn about how to construct good sentences at the same time that they were putting the miniature together. In a separate interview, the teacher also identified this activity as a favorite example of arts integration.

A math teacher in one school was concerned because students were not doing very well identifying polygons, particularly because this topic was a primary unit in the curriculum and well-represented on the state test. The teacher described the problem with the art teacher and so the latter used students' art time to create low reliefs of their names and each name was formed in the shape of one of the many types of polygons students needed to know. Associating their names with shapes, the math teacher felt, helped tremendously.



**Figure 3: Using Drama to Learn Historic Literature**



Arts-related activities did not have to be as elaborate as these however. For example, teacher after teacher and student after student provided descriptions of having students move while reciting class content (such as having number lines on the floor so that students could actually walk to the numbers to solve problems); of singing/rapping the parts of speech, the planets, math rules, or explorers; of dancing/moving to create a volcano, to simulate the movement of atoms and butterflies and earthquakes, and to represent geometric shapes; of acting out stories and scenes from history (see Figure 3); and drawing people, places - real and imagined, and innumerable things. The descriptions were nearly endless and regularly part of the core curriculum as 70 percent of the students indicated on the survey that they had arts activities in their core subjects. A sixth-grade student launched into a torrent of such examples:

*"In math, I like when the teacher introduces a new skill, she sometimes lets us dance and play music. In science, she let us get in a circle and push the lightest person around the circle holding the person up to keep him or her from falling. That teaches us friction and how to trust. In reading, we make up scripts to go with our reading lesson. In social studies, we make maps to go with the parts of the world and we draw pictures of the culture we are studying. We talk about our light and happy experiences, and we talk about our dark and bad experiences. In language arts, we draw flow maps that go onto the event we are studying. I really like doing art in my classes. It is really fun."* At times, the arts were the object of lessons - even in regular classrooms - and then teachers had students to use their language arts skills to reflect on what they had seen and experienced, as one second-grade student described a favorite use of the arts: *"When we used music in reading to describe what we felt when we played different kinds of music. Like we had to tell what Beethoven's music made us feel like."*

In another such lesson, an elementary teacher followed up a class visit to a local art museum featuring Mississippi artists by bringing reproductions of some of the paintings students saw to class. Students discussed which were their favorites and explained why. One student commented: *"I like the way you can see what kind of day it is by looking at the cloud reflections in the mud puddles."* The teacher then shifted into a language arts lesson on nouns and adjectives and asked the students to identify objects they saw in their favorite painting and to use vivid words to explain to someone else what the objects looked like. Thus, serious and thoughtful consideration of an art form served as the springboard for a classroom lesson related to course content.

It is important to emphasize here that many of the lessons did not require the teacher to be adept in a particular arts discipline. All the teacher had to do was create a situation in which academic content was taught and/or reinforced in and through the arts. In fact, one teacher reported that a student described the teacher's role in this way: A student said to me, *"You don't have to teach us; you just have to inspire us."*

What had these lessons added to the classroom that made it possible for students to understand, remember, think, work together, become confident, and to be motivated? Teachers' explanations were amazingly consistent with one another. Arts integration enabled students to be active, to experience things directly, and to express themselves in ways that best suited the students. In the process, of course, students had fun and enjoyed themselves and were enthusiastic which then made them eager for the next time they could engage in active, hands-on, and varied lessons.

The above lessons were not ones that visitors would necessarily see when visiting the schools. They happened almost seamlessly in the course of the daily routine and thus even people in the buildings did not regard them as remarkable unless prompted to dredge up examples in interviews. Visitors would see the major arts events: elaborate hallway displays tied to an interdisciplinary unit an entire grade would be working on; a multi-class performance; a mural created under the guidance of a Mississippi artist (see Figure 4). Students - and parents - were thus inundated with the arts in and outside the classroom. Indeed, 80 percent of the students said that they had participated in such activities during the year and two-thirds of the parents had attended a school-sponsored arts event.

Teachers were asked in interviews how they could be sure that all the effort was in fact paying off. After all, the cycle of instruction-results-reflection-revised instruction was an extremely long one if they latched onto state test scores as the indicators of success. By the time the schools knew how students had done, the students were often no longer with the same teachers and occasionally no longer in the same buildings. Schools are places of immediacy and this extended cycle of testing is extremely frustrating for people accustomed to adjusting to student needs on an hourly and daily basis. If teachers had had to wait months before finding out the results of arts-related activities that took a great deal of time to plan, often put them at the edge of their comfort, and held open the promise of things getting out of control, then they likely would have not engaged in them quite so much. They needed to know whether the investment was worth the effort as the effort was being made. Fortunately, teachers had quite an array of data sources that were accessible to them daily and weekly. These included students' "participation," "enthusiasm," "teacher-made test" performance, "working together," "expressions," work quality (or "products"), "conversation," "application of what they had learned," and as one teacher said, "No groans!" Teachers indicated that these bits of evidence triangulated, or more appropriately - "multi"-angulated, one another in supporting the conclusion that arts integration had added considerable value to students' school lives.

**Figure 4:**  
**Students Work**  
**with a**  
**Visiting Artist**  
**to Develop**  
**Hallway Murals**



Not surprisingly then teachers' reactions to their schools' participation in WSI were nearly unanimous. All but 39 of the 467 teachers surveyed in the last year of the evaluation agreed that their schools should continue in WSI. The interviews were met with a similar level of endorsement. Typical were the responses of all seven teachers interviewed in one middle school:

*"Great importance... without it we would lose some of our kids."*

*"No grants needed... should be a part of curriculum period... it's that important."*

*"Gives kids a chance to express themselves... more to learning than just taking a test... we see learning."*

*"I love it... it's excellent... Every teacher should use it... Noisy, but that's OK."*

*"Art is very valuable, especially for kids with disabilities."*

*"Very useful, need more training... keeps me interested. Has a lot to do with building children up... more creative... willingness to participate and be in things."*

And from all eight elementary teachers interviewed in another school:

*"Very valuable... provides kids with an opportunity to learn different ways."*

*"Adds excitement to our school."*

*"Greatest impact is on students who never have opportunities; it allows a teacher to see a gift in a child and a new way to reach them."*

*"Helps kids' performance level in language arts & math. If I didn't have the arts I would not have the success I have now."*

*"If we weren't doing it, some of the children would never be exposed to it. It brings fun into your life, something you will never lose."*

*"A very important way for teachers to learn - a way to reach more students and add to the repertoire of teaching ideas."*

*"Been great. Attending retreats inspires us and gives us ideas."*

*"Very important. During Teddy Bear Week, all the kids bring in one and the bear spends the night at school. They trash the room and the kids write about bears going crazy."*

Not all students in every WSI building had access to these classroom activities that engendered so many positive comments. Additionally, students access to arts classes varied as 80 percent said they had art and music weekly, just under half had dance/movement, and only 25 percent were exposed to drama. As described earlier, not all of the schools implemented WSI in the same way. Were the only difference among the buildings a difference in how schools went about integrating the arts then the issue of varied implementation might not have been an important issue. After all, each school had special contextual circumstances that influenced their particular change journeys. However, schools differed in whether all or some regular classroom teachers drew upon the arts, whether all or some teachers talked to one another about arts integration, whether all or some teachers actually combined the arts with content instruction or instead used the arts as a "fun" activity, and whether all or some teachers had access to leaders, organizational arrangements, and professional development that enhanced their use of the arts. The next section of the report looks closely therefore at the implementation process.

### **WSI Implementation**

The earlier section on WSI and NCLB makes a simple point: Implementation mattered. Schools where teachers integrated the arts into the core subjects, varied their instruction, engaged in meaningful arts-related training, and coordinated their efforts with colleagues and the curriculum tended to meet the state's achievement and growth levels and performed better than WSI participating sites that did not accomplish as much in these terms.

Integrating the arts, however, was not a simple task; if it were, then this part of the report would be unnecessary. Just as a well-constructed building starts with a detailed analysis of the site and plan, requires good quality materials fashioned by skilled workers who are supervised by knowledgeable managers and exhibits a coordination of style, function and economy, effective school reform requires comparable elements. This section of the report describes seven elements of the reform process that appeared to be integrally linked to the breadth and depth of implementation that occurred in the participating school sites. That is, how a school (and the Initiative itself in some instances) dealt with each of the elements seemed to have significant repercussions for how widespread and rich arts infusion became in the building. As has been seen in studies of numerous reforms, making the assumption that all schools undergoing the same change initiative turnout similarly leads to faulty, misleading, and potentially harmful judgments about the value of the proposed reform.

Our analyses of the site visit data suggest that (1) the nature of a school staff's endorsement of their participation in Whole Schools, (2) the opportunities staff have to become skilled arts infusion teachers, (3) the presence of skilled coaches to help teachers translate training into actual practice, (4) the means by which reform and school leaders provide continuity during the interim between formal reform-related events, (5) the extent to which staff and leaders seek to implement serious arts infusion, (6) the presence of substantial support for the changes staff hope to make, and (7) the arrangements that schools put in place to insure the sustainability of the organizational and instructional changes they make all combine to influence greatly the eventual breadth and depth of implementation. The first four of these elements are best thought of as "front-end" developments. In other words, they are particularly meaningful as schools begin and go through the initial year or two of putting arts infusion in place. The last three elements are more "big picture" in nature. They represent the ultimate characteristics that schools should hope to achieve in their journeys to be arts-infused schools, namely buildings noted for well-supported, serious, and sustainable use of the arts in daily classroom instruction.

The remainder of this section addresses each of the elements in turn and attempts to clarify the critical role that each plays in influencing the direction that implementation takes. Following this section, we address the differences and challenges that distinguish high implementation and low implementation schools.

### **Endorsement**

School reforms succeed or fail based on whether faculty and administrators endorse and adopt the process. This implies that educators must agree that the reform has merit, addresses the needs of the school's clientele, fits with the climate of the school and the makeup of its staff, and is worth the considerable effort and cost—not just monetary—that is required. There were many approaches to the matter of endorsement tried among the Whole Schools sites, some showing greater efficacy than others. Among those that appeared to have been helpful:

*Sell the idea to the entire faculty.* In a few instances, a local teacher or administrator arranged for a visiting arts educator or team to come and "wow" the faculty with an in-service demonstration. These sessions appeared to work best when (a) the demonstration included one or more state framework objectives, so that a common objection—that arts infusion might compete with, rather than facilitate learning of the framework objectives—could be overcome; (b) the activities were not too demanding of arts skill so that teachers came away believing they could duplicate them; and (c) there were examples of activities that would apply to teachers in disciplines that were traditionally "tough sells," such as mathematics.

*Win souls one at a time.* A more common strategy was to focus on individual teachers, giving them the opportunity to see that arts infusion could be implemented in their own classroom successfully. Specific tactics that participants mentioned as useful in this approach were: (a) having arts specialists team teach in the classroom with the classroom teacher; (b) pairing the target teacher with a more experienced mentor, whether just for planning and debriefing purposes or for team teaching as well; (c) giving the teacher public affirmation, reinforcement, and recognition for their efforts, such as in faculty meetings or similar venues - which implied that the administrator, coordinator, or both were keeping close tabs on the progress of individual teachers, rather than letting implementation attempts go unnoticed or unmonitored; and (d) making available the time or opportunity for fledgling implementers to get together with one another, their mentors, or both. In one school, the arts specialist took it upon herself to go literally knocking on each teacher's door, offering her services and making appointments to plan arts-infused lessons tailored to the teacher's needs.

*Target new personnel.* One approach mentioned by many principals and coordinators was that applicants for faculty positions were asked to bring evidence of lessons they had developed that showed arts integration as a part of their application and interview process. During the interview the principal made it clear that the applicant would be expected to adopt the arts-infusion approach. Many of the coordinators interviewed suggested that recent teacher education graduates had more exposure to

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hands-on, infusion approaches, and therefore had a greater degree of comfort initially with the idea of embarking on the WSI path than some of their more experienced counterparts. Several principals and coordinators expressed the perspective that this approach, coupled with attrition of the more reluctant or recalcitrant teachers, would eventually result in a faculty composed completely of arts integration advocates.

**Retreat.** A few sites took the sales pitch for initial endorsement and planning to venues away from school. Virtually all teachers, principals and coordinators agreed that, if faculty could all be taken to the Summer Institute, nearly all would come back as converts. Unfortunately, some of the schools struggled to get teams of teachers not already converted to go, for various reasons. Having a local retreat during professional development days could offer some of the same advantages without the monetary costs associated with travel and stipends. Also, the teachers would have the opportunity to see demonstrations from their peers (or visiting specialists), and to share in some of the enthusiasm that those who had “gone to the (WS) meetings” brought back with them.

Just as these approaches seemed to have worked to help gain endorsement, there were a few schemes that, based on the experience of some of the sites, had a much lower likelihood of success. It is important that these be acknowledged as well:

**Bypass the faculty.** Several of the sites began their foray into the Whole Schools Initiative by dint of someone outside of the school (e.g., central office staff) hearing of and preparing the initial grant application. Then, when notice of the award was made, the administrator(s) and faculty were confronted with something else to do, not necessarily of their making, regardless of their preference. A similar effect occurred when a principal decided that the Whole Schools’ approach sounded good or that the school could use a few extra dollars, and perhaps only a few persons even heard of or saw the grant application. In some cases, the entrance into the Whole Schools Initiative coincided with the beginning or existence of other, competing program(s) in the school. In others, the reform started in schools having district initiatives that either discouraged or made arts infusion a real challenge to implement successfully. Had teachers been polled beforehand, many could have easily pointed out such conflicts or concerns.

**Take a laissez-faire approach.** In a few instances, building administrators introduced the ideas of arts integration as just representing an additional tool or method in the repertoire of teachers from which they could freely choose. The motivation for this approach, not wanting teachers to feel as if arts infusion was being forced upon them, was quite understandable. However, allowing faculty with a hint of doubt to skip the attempt altogether would dramatically increase the length of time it took for the reform to become thoroughly embedded. Most teachers had seen reform initiatives come and go repeatedly in their careers, and some may have been more than willing to “wait this one out.” The other concern with this approach was that, if there were not a consistent message that arts infusion was important and valued, then many of the faculty concluded that it was not and acted accordingly.

Faculty and administrators needed to have a clear notion of what they proposed to undertake when becoming part of the Whole Schools Initiative. At the front end, teachers and administrators needed to be apprised of what work would likely come their way in order to convert the curriculum to an arts-infused one (for many, this may have started with curriculum mapping), as opposed to thinking that altering a couple of lesson plans during the school year would accomplish the goal. If administrators did not value (and consistently communicate the value of) the approach, if teachers thought arts infusion required arts skills beyond their ken, if subject area teachers or upper grade teachers thought that infusion would not work in their areas, if teachers saw insufficient support and resources in place to help them come up to speed, then the reform would never take hold in the school past the few who probably were predisposed to the approach in the first place. Just like modern research stresses the importance of informed consent, modern reform efforts need informed endorsement of the players.

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## Skilled Faculty

An enduring message from research on nearly every school reform is the importance of providing teachers with quality professional development that enables the entire school staff to become knowledgeable about new skills and techniques as well as comfortable in using them. Past evaluation reports from the Whole Schools Initiative noted that while teachers were enthusiastic about the place for arts infusion and its potential impact on students, it was also clear that teachers acknowledged the critical need for adequate training to build their awareness and comfort in using those skills.

The schools used multiple ways to enhance skills and confidence with arts infusion. The most prominent and highly praised ways included:

*Teachers attended Summer Institutes and Fall/Winter Retreats organized by MAC.* These experiences allowed the building administrator, the project director, and/or several teachers (usually four to six) to spend several days away from the daily routines of the school building listening to ideas from outside experts, as well as their colleagues from other schools. More than two-thirds of the staff (134 of 196) interviewed during the 2002-2003 school year had taken part in one or multiple Institutes/retreats. The survey results supported this figure as responses to a question about Institute and retreat participation yielded a 62 percent number for the nearly 500 teachers that responded to the second teacher survey.

*Teachers visited other schools to see and hear firsthand how their peers were implementing the arts into the regular routine of the school.* This allowed teachers, who typically viewed their work as being isolated and isolating, to feel part of a larger effort and to learn from those whose work they respected the most - their peers in similar classroom settings. However, this tactic could fail when schools with upper grades (e.g., 7-12) had staff visit other elementary schools; the complaint was that arts integration “wouldn’t work for us.”

*Teachers worked with visiting artists and arts infusion specialists who made the rounds of individual schools to model their skills and techniques with students and teachers.* The schools became quite savvy about the available human resources (primarily through word of mouth and exposure during Institutes and retreats) and learned important lessons about how to maximize the value of their investment in them. The most frequently mentioned strategy was making sure that visiting artists built ample time to not only instruct teachers (as well as students) but to also follow that up with classroom visitations to help teachers try out what they were learning.

*Teachers tapped the resources being offered by the school’s field advisor to help with arts infusion activities.* These resources ranged from providing supplies or links to curricular resources to offering hands-on help to being a cheerleader for reluctant participants.

*Teachers reflected with their colleagues about what they had been doing with arts infusion and how this might have affected the performance of their students.* This reflection took place during days set aside for the ongoing documentation of each school’s change journey map, regular team or grade-level planning time, and/or special planning time set aside during early dismissal days, staff meetings, or all-day professional development days.

*Schools pooled their “learning time” through collaboration with another local agency* (e.g., a local arts council) to hire a specialist trainer who coordinated workshop offerings and development and delivery of demonstration arts infusion lessons across multiple schools.

The important message was not so much what they did during these professional growth opportunities since these varied from school to school, but rather how they made sure that these activities reached everyone and that the entire staff saw the activities as an integral part of their teaching responsibility. A common refrain from our interviews was the feeling that a subset of staff could be exposed to new skills but that the subset often fell short of a critical mass that could change the behavior of the whole school. The most frequent tool used by schools to move the knowledge from a few to many was to have those who had the experience report back to his or her peers at a school-wide staff meeting or grade-level meeting. This almost universally fell short as a useful strategy for moving teachers from traditional instructional practices to a more arts infusion-friendly set of practices. Thus, what happened in most school efforts was that “pockets” of knowledge and enthusiasm emerged - led by those who had first-hand experience with training and had an affinity for implementing innovative practices.



### **Skilled Coaching**

All Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models incorporate the role of a coach into the process. The intensity of the coach's involvement with a school varies from model to model, but the underlying principle is that having someone physically present in a building greatly enhances teachers' ability to translate reform expectations into practice in ways that take into account the particular contextual circumstances of that school. Early research on one of these models, Talent Development, suggested that coaches can be invaluable in this regard (Wilson & Corbett, 2002). Coaches are able to answer teacher questions and concerns immediately, demonstrate lessons with teachers' students, observe and critique teachers' attempts to implement new practices, and conduct on-site, targeted training that reinforces and extends off-site professional development.

Whole Schools does not currently operate with someone formally designated to be a coach. Over time, however, some field advisors and project directors began to act in this capacity. For example, a field advisor reported that after teachers in one school returned from the Institute or a retreat, they would contact the field advisor to clarify what they had learned and ask the person to drop by their classrooms to see if they were "doing it right." The field advisor acknowledged that being primarily an artist was not necessarily the best preparation for serving in this capacity but that the request could not go unfulfilled because the teachers were so willing to make an effort to implement new things and "just needed a little help." Several other field advisors said that they too had been invited into classrooms, but for the most part their interactions with teachers were not of the frequency and depth that seemed to be developing in the above example.

More frequent were instances in which project directors took on coach-like responsibilities. This appeared to occur mostly when the project director had an arts background and the person would either do some team-teaching of a lesson with a regular classroom teacher or brainstorm ideas for the regular teacher to use, or both. However, project directors varied tremendously in terms of their working arrangements, with some having nearly full-time teaching responsibilities and others having much more time to interact with others about arts infusion. There also were several occasions where grade-level teachers inducted new colleagues into arts integration, particularly in situations where the grade-level team maintained and revised lessons and interdisciplinary thematic units regularly.

Thus, there were informal coaches available to teachers in some of the buildings and where this occurred, teachers valued highly the contact. Equally as important, analysis of the data from all sites indicated that the presence of someone who acted as a coach was associated with wider-spread implementation. However, coaching was a serendipitous phenomenon. It appeared where individuals had the capability and inclination to deepen their involvement and expand their range of contacts with other staff.

### **Continuity of Learning**

An issue that overlapped with the concern about ensuring that all teachers received the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate the arts into the regular classroom routines was the related worry that once everyone received the valued information how did the school ensure that the positive enthusiasm for using arts infusion activities continually remained at the forefront? This was a particular challenge because of the on-again, off-again rhythm of what happened with many Whole Schools activities. That is, teachers attended the Summer Institute and went home excited about what they learned. But a month intervened before school started. A further delay occurred when all the excitement of the first few weeks of school often pushed arts integration to a back burner. More time elapsed until affected teachers either visited another school, attended a retreat during the school year, or rubbed shoulders with an artist or an arts integration expert during a visit to the school. These fairly consistent patterns of fits-and-starts or ups-and-downs of arts infusion made it a real challenge for teachers to maintain their momentum.

Teachers easily recited a list of key factors that seemed to get in the way of a more consistent, continual stream of arts infusion learning. Foremost among those were the following:

*State Accountability.* The state moved from holding districts accountable for student performance to reporting the progress of individual buildings. So, the primary driving force about what happened in a classroom, in the view of many teachers, was often dictated by the more limited focus of improving standardized test scores in reading and mathematics rather than the broader goal of enhanced learning to be a critical thinker or problem solver. For many teachers arts infusion took them away from this narrow task. In some schools, virtually any other activity other than

preparing for the “state tests” was curtailed after February. It was not uncommon for field trips to be forbidden during March and April.

**Other Reforms.** In nearly every school, staff shared details about plans and activities for other instructional improvements, as well. These ranged from the Barksdale Reading Program to the Saxon Program (in both reading and math) to 21st Century grants. These were often competitive grant programs with prescribed sets of activities. But there were also district-wide initiatives in which local boards expected all schools to participate (e.g. implementing a Comprehensive Management System that required extensive planning by teachers). The interpretations that teachers offered about how well these fit with arts infusion activities varied markedly, but whether they were a close or loose fit, the common message was that they often took time and energy away from using the arts more comprehensively in the classroom.

**Scheduling Complications.** Almost to a person, teachers reported that an effective tool for learning was engagement in on-going conversations with their peers about how the learning could be infused into their regular classroom routines. This was true both for those who personally had been exposed to new ideas, as well as those who were learning secondhand from others. But many teachers talked about the practical constraints of making that happen. The most intractable scheduling problem seemed to be finding time for arts teachers to work with grade-level teachers, since the prep times for grade-level teachers were defined by the availability of arts teachers to cover their classes. But schools also often struggled even with finding adequate time for grade-level teachers to work together or making effective use of what time was available in the school schedule.

**Staff Turnover.** An unfortunate, but inevitable reality of the teaching profession is that teaching staff either change professions or move to different locales. Thus, the continuity in a school gained by having a cohesive group who learned together about helpful arts integration strategies was disrupted. One of the most frustrating aspects of turnover was losing staff at a school during the summer and replacement staff not being identified in time for them to be part of Summer Institute training.

**Lack of Resources.** The disconnect between knowing what to do and having the resources to make it happen sometimes proved an insurmountable challenge for teachers. Teachers complained about how their enthusiasm for trying new ideas was dampened by not having readily available supplies or materials to implement arts activities. They returned from training experiences only to find that the musical instruments, art prints, CDs, or sheet music were either too expensive or took too much time to order. The latter concern was that with limited windows of time to do anything new or different in the classroom, resources needed to be available with minimal delay so that teachers could use them spontaneously and in conjunction with an aspect of the regular curriculum that was time bound. Having to wait reduced the likelihood it could be integrated within the context of the regular curriculum.

### **Serious Arts Infusion**

The Whole Schools Initiative sought to embed the arts in everyday instruction. In the process, students would acquire knowledge about, an appreciation of, and - in some cases - a talent for cultural aspects of being a citizen in their communities, state, and country, but art appreciation and developing artistic skill was not what drove the reform. Plain and simple, the arts increased a teacher’s instructional repertoire, enabling him or her to tap students’ varied strengths and to give them multiple ways to acquire, process, and demonstrate what they had learned.

Thus, Whole Schools expected “serious” arts integration in which the arts became a part of daily instruction, integral to learning any skill, concept, or fact. This was in distinct contrast to the arts serving as an “add-on” to the curriculum in which their role was limited to being either an “attention grabber” at the beginning of a lesson, a “reward” for having paid attention during other instructional strategies, or as a “fun activity” to do during a break from “real” instruction. The expectation for “serious” use of the arts meant that a teacher who embraced WSI should not be able to go through a single day of teaching without using the arts in some way. To use the arts with any less frequency would suggest that a teacher did not regard arts infusion was not integral and essential to the learning process.

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Of the nearly 200 teachers interviewed during 2002-2003 who had daily regular classroom instructional responsibilities, half said that they used the arts daily, although not necessarily in all subjects; one-third incorporated the arts several times a week; and the rest relied on the arts once a week or less. On the face of it, then, the arts had a considerable presence in the participating sites. Only one school did not have a teacher who said that arts use was a daily occurrence. Even if the sample of interviewed teachers were biased in the direction of arts users, one would still have to be impressed with the opportunities students probably had to encounter art, drama, music, and dance outside their special classes.

An analysis of these interviews showed that teachers judged the effectiveness of arts integration in terms of what students learned, what they retained, and how much they enjoyed the activity. Initial comprehension and retention were both high on teachers' assessments of the consequences of arts infusion, as was discussed in the value-added section of this report earlier. Illustrative of teachers' comments were the following:

*"When we tested them, they were able to pass the test."*

*"They remembered previous lessons... They talked about it..."*

*"(The effectiveness is seen in the) Response from the children's reaction. It helped to make sense for them. Months later they talked about Ruby Bridges."*

Teachers also claimed that enjoyment and excitement accompanied the activities that led to this learning and they seemed to associate one as enhancing the other:

*"(The lesson was effective because) They took an interest and did not get bored, and then they talked about it afterwards."*

*"(The lesson was effective because) They were completely confident with their work and could tell everyone else what it meant. I base my teaching on myself, if I think I would get bored I would not do it. They really enjoyed what they were doing."*

The ways in which teachers used the arts varied, but when they described what they considered to be the best example of their use of the arts, nearly every one of them noted an activity that had a connection to student learning. Some of the comments reflected arts integration that was part of students' initial learning of subject matter:

*"(I did) The unit of the human body. They had to learn all the parts of the body. They traced their bodies and labeled them."*

*"(We) Took a box of toothpicks and made lines, angles, and created three polygons and named them."*

Other comments suggested that the arts were effective at broadening and/or deepening of what students were learning about, particularly in getting students to actually visualize or feel what their teachers wanted them to learn: *At the beginning of school I read stories that they acted out what I read, they became the character in the reading.*

*"During Black History Month we read about Ruby Bridges and Martin Luther King. The children did not know about the bus boycott. (We) drew a huge bus and they put themselves in the bus. That is when it all came alive for them."*

*"Nursery rhymes...we acted them out, made puppets, and integrated math - like counting the number of characters, action words, position words - and science - for instance how the candle made Jack be nimble."*

Some teachers used the arts as a way of increasing student choices in how to portray what they had learned:

*"When we did the ocean unit, the children were given the opportunity to complete two ocean models. They could do a mobile, a book report, a play, anything they wanted to do; they just had to be able to show they knew the material."*

*"Our solar system lesson. They were very creative. They could depict the solar system any way they wanted. Some made mobiles. Some did drawings. They created their own style"*

*"In social studies when we had to compare the Aztec and Maya Indians. We compared their housing, how they were made from different materials. They had to create their own villages."*



There were other learning-related uses as well: To reinforce initial learning, to generate some excitement about what they were going to learn, and to culminate a unit.

Across the teachers interviewed, it would appear that teachers viewed arts integration as a “serious” instructional approach. Yet, at the same time, the Initiative was called “Whole Schools.” Thus, whether one would argue that “daily” use of the arts was an indicator of how “serious” implementation was or settle for “several times a week” as equally indicative, there were still teachers - even among a group that probably was over-represented by arts infusers - who relegated the arts to the periphery of their instructional repertoire. Similarly, teachers’ examples of their “best” use of the arts were overwhelmingly connected directly to what they were teaching in class. Teacher interviews, field advisor visits to schools, and principals’ comments indicated that this connectedness to class content was not representative of all the arts activities that teachers offered students.

Thus, a critical question was: Why would an instructional approach that many teachers deemed effective both instructionally and motivationally not become part of the daily routine in every classroom with every subject?

One teacher may have pointed to a part of the answer in saying:

*“(Using the arts) Students knew the story and the details and understood the characters. They took the test and got better scores. It was a lot of hands on - and it takes a lot of time.”*

The teacher seemed to be saying that although it was valuable, serious arts infusion required a lot of work on the part of the teacher. As the next section discusses, the burden of implementation, when placed squarely and solely on teachers’ shoulders, will probably inevitably lead to a mixed bag of arts usage in the schools, even if most teachers value it highly. Serious change requires substantial support if arts integration is to become, as one teacher put it, “just a natural part of what we do.”

### **Substantial Support**

As mentioned throughout the previous sections, support came in several forms, with the three most prominently noted being materials, time, and assistance. The absence of any of the three greatly increased the necessity for teachers to make heroic efforts to infuse the arts. Any reform whose ultimate success hinges on someone’s expending considerable energy for an extended period of time without concomitant signs that their actions are valued highly is, quite obviously, likely to fail.

Two role groups primarily determined whether teachers received needed support in the WSI: the Whole Schools reform leaders, including the Mississippi Arts Commission staff and the field advisors, and building leaders. One could argue that the bottom line of whether Whole Schools had adequately supported participating sites was the number of schools that came close to implementing serious and sustainable arts infusion. And, one could argue that the bottom line of whether building leaders adequately supported classroom teachers was the number of them who did serious arts infusion (using the definition proposed in the previous section of daily use of learning-connected arts activities in every subject) in the classroom.

Support was a signal. The type, frequency, and extent of it gave those who were to receive it an indication of how committed potential support providers were to the reform and, therefore, of how attentive they should be to implementing proposed changes.

Across the schools, participants reported mixed signals. For example, with respect to the Initiative itself, school staff who attended the Summer Institute and the retreats were nearly unanimous in praising the high quality of the training provided. To be sure, MAC received some critical comments in training evaluations but these targeted very specific aspects of logistics or a particular event. Overall school people had gotten the message that the Initiative had put an incredible amount of time and effort into designing the best professional development experiences possible.

School staff acknowledged that they could have always used more funds to support their efforts. They fully understood that due to the current economic climate, budgets were tight and, thus, did not look at funding levels as an indication of MAC's commitment to the Initiative.

However, some school people outside the region where the Summer Institute was held did regard the decision to remain at that site as an indication that the Initiative was not as sensitive as it could have been to the demands that travel and being away from home put on participants. Several schools used the location as a reason to not attend the Institute or to not push staff very hard to attend. Thus, the issue of location became a symbol to some about whether the Initiative was serious about its assertions that all schools should send several staff and the principal to the Institute. The MAC showed its recognition of the importance of what messages its choices sent when the venue for the 2004 Summer Institute was shifted to another region of the state.

With respect to building administrators, the particular way in which they provided support to staff to infuse the arts was less important than whether those actions sent an unequivocal and consistent signal that arts integration was expected to be a routine part of instruction. In one school, the principal did this by making sure that teachers understood that all reform projects were part of an "integrated approach" to improving student learning through tying all activities to the state frameworks and by "inspecting what I expect." This latter step was taken by looking for arts infusion activities as part of the formal evaluation system. Another principal made sure that the staff had adequate time to design and implement detailed lesson plans associated with grade-level thematic units, with each lesson plan having specific arts activities embedded daily in language arts, math, science and social studies. The two actions were different, but in the context of everyday school life in those buildings, staff interpreted both to mean that the principal was backing up words of encouragement with substantial actions.

Interviewees noted other important actions as well. Four examples follow. First, administrators in some sites made it possible for the project director to have enough released time to work with classroom teachers. Second, in several other sites, leaders made sure that teachers had time to plan, discuss, and revise arts-infused lessons together and that this time was used for that purpose. Some of the more satisfying arrangements, according to teachers, were to free them up every four to six weeks for a block of time or for arts specialists to have "roving" time built into their schedules so that they and the classroom teachers could interact inside and outside the classroom. Third, in a couple of other sites, principals used discretionary funds beyond the local matching requirement to enhance the Initiative, such as using Title I money to pay for a part-time project director position. Finally, teachers appreciated being appreciated for their efforts, even if the initial attempts fell short of their expectations. In other words, when activities did not work well, reflection about what to do differently was more productive, according to teachers, when they were not worried about being unduly criticized for the failed attempt. Instead, in these environments, such experiences were regarded as important learning tools for improving instruction in the future.

The major point was that words of encouragement did not go as far as actions in communicating how valued arts infusion was. Equally important, the failure to act invariably caused the words to ring hollow in the ears of staff.

## Sustainability

A sustainable Whole Schools Initiative transformation had several key elements: (a) infrastructure - a critical mass of trained professionals with access to arts specialists, a project director, and sufficient opportunity before, during, and after the school year to plan, modify, and share the outcomes of instructional segments (units, modules, or individual lessons); (b) resources - which, other than human capital (e.g., professional development, expertise, and possibly arts specialists), would include such examples as having the ability to leverage other monies to allow arts infusion to be implemented (as opposed to treating it as an independently funded enterprise); (c) a clear understanding at all levels of what successful arts infusion comprised - implying that administration and faculty knew about and shared the vision and that there was support from the administration and endorsement by the faculty; (d) seamless integration of arts activities in support of learning, and not a laissez-faire system of having teachers do what they pleased or being able to ignore arts infusion altogether, not having the token unit(s) or lesson(s) implemented in the token grade(s), and not hand-wringing about thinking that arts infusion competed with successful instruction or that attention to the arts prevented schools from showing satisfactory performance on state tests.

Schools faced many different challenges in keeping the Whole Schools Initiative going, such as turnover in faculty or staff, few or no arts specialists, few external resources, concern by central office staff of the educational utility of the Initiative were just a few. Yet, participants came up with a variety of ways that help to increase the likelihood that the reform could be self-sustaining. These included:

*Identifying resources.* Community partnerships, with commercial and nonprofit institutions and agencies, were commonplace in Mississippi schools, and many project directors and principals pointed to these partnerships as a fruitful source of monetary, in-kind, and human resources. Local arts councils were of considerable importance for several of the participating sites, mostly for the access to expertise rather than for monetary support. In some cases, there may have been other grant programs that complemented, rather than competed with, an arts infusion focus. Several principals identified clever uses of existing funding (e.g., title funds) to create arts specialist positions when there were none previously.

*Being consistent with the message.* Just as within-year continuity was enhanced by having frequent acknowledgement of the importance of, frequent reinforcement of attempts at, and relentless spotlighting of arts integration to the faculty, parents, central office, and community, so was the sustainability of the reform. Project directors, principals, and field advisors noted that ideas as simple as (a) having digital pictures printed and posted for all to see; (b) making scrapbooks; (c) working to increase newspaper and television coverage of arts infusion and performances; (d) asking teachers to share their successes with others in faculty meetings; (e) asking teachers to highlight the arts infusion activities in their lessons that were turned in for review; (f) dropping in to observe classes whenever arts infusion was scheduled to be a part of the lesson; and (g) having time set aside at faculty meetings for Whole Schools issues all conspired, without monetary cost, to make the message that the arts were valued clear. In one of the more urban sites, the parent advisory committee took a strong, advocacy role in “vetting” candidates for a new principal. They were adamant that dropping the school’s arts emphasis was simply not an option as far as they were concerned.

*Developing the curriculum.* Often, initial fumbling with implementation underscored the lack of coherence in the curriculum within and across grades. On one hand, teachers did not want to “add-on” the arts just for the sake of doing so but on the other they at times were unclear how what they were doing fit in with the actions of their peers in addressing state standards. The need for curriculum mapping then became evident. When undertaken with an eye toward marrying the state framework objectives with the arts, the concerns about the arts being an “add-on,” being in competition with, or being unrelated to enhancing performance on state-tested skills seemed to be more easily overcome. Likewise, thoughtfully-developed units, once tried and refined, became part of the corpus of resources that could be handed to incoming or new teachers, facilitating their professional development (and lightening their preparation load) as part of an arts infusion school.

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*Building human resources.* Within the school, the arts or steering committee for the Whole Schools Initiative represented a critical source of expertise, advocacy, and continuing vision for arts-infused instruction. As a result, most coordinators indicated that the arts committee needed to be comprised of those who shared the vision and may have been themselves proselytizers on behalf of arts infusion, rather than folks who simply needed another committee assignment, in the eyes of the principal. Parents having specialized skills or connections, community resources, the field advisor (especially if in close proximity to the school), arts educators, and MAC staff were all named as additional, important examples of human resources essential to a school's continued progress.

*Creating and protecting faculty time.* Common planning times, set-aside times during professional development days and faculty meetings were perhaps the most frequently-cited ways of building in opportunity for teachers to meet with one another or with arts specialists (in those schools that had them). In the schools where these fairly simple schemes were not implemented, teachers consistently expressed concern about being able to develop new lessons or units in a way that honored the vision of arts integration with the school's curriculum. Sometimes, novel approaches to gaining this time were tried, such as a school that had teachers come to a Saturday work session in exchange for letting them skip a few after-school faculty meetings.

*Keeping people pumped up.* There was a seemingly endless set of additional demands placed on the teachers, and sometimes it was easy to overlook the successful approaches that worked or to abandon in mid-stream an initiative with dim prospects. Having mini-retreats, celebrating successes, having "lunch and learn" sessions (especially when the school could pay for the lunch) for sharing of ideas, and holding "make and take" activities during open houses so that the excitement could extend to parents and students were some simple, low-cost ideas that coordinators and teachers mentioned. It was just as important that the principal be re-energized periodically, too.

*Keeping the focus.* There were many good ideas offered for how the arts infusion focus could be maintained. One example was having teachers submit lesson plans to arts specialists ahead of the lessons. This allowed the specialists to customize their activities to support the framework objective(s) being covered. Another approach was meeting with teachers (usually within a grade level or subject area) to discuss what everyone was covering during the coming week. Similarly, when principals commented favorably on displays, activities, or lessons seen throughout the buildings that reflected arts infusion, focus was maintained, as it was when the principals asked that teachers invite them to observe when the arts would be an integral part of a lesson. In fact, in several sites, principals asked teachers to highlight where in their submitted lesson plans they planned to incorporate the arts. Though introduced as a part of the WSI, it seemed that several schools hoped to continue to revise the change journey maps as another simple way of keeping the focus. Finally, several principals and project directors noted that the principal had undertaken to "filter" some of the central office or state-level mandates, so as to keep teachers' attention on successful instruction.

Any intervention or reform initiative can be sustained with appropriate support, resources, and focus. The more that arts integration became a routine and embedded part of school life, the more likely it was to persist. There was undoubtedly a need to cultivate the infrastructure to have roots sufficiently deep and healthy to maintain the life of the initiative. Resources, though necessary, were not solely monetary, nor were the amounts extravagant. Indeed, one principal indicated that teachers would have been satisfied with just a supply of arts materials. The vision of arts infusion had to be shared by all; supported; and kept in the spotlight. When arts infusion was customary and not rare, supportive of framework objectives and not an add-on or seat-work time filler, when teachers and students became enthused each day and saw connections that otherwise might have gone unnoticed, when parents could tell that the displays of student work were clearly in support of important learning outcomes, when visiting faculty from other schools admired a successful arts infusion program, then the chances were good for a long, healthy life for the arts in such situations.



The implementation discussion to this point has been global. It drew from educators' comments from across all of the participating sites and teased out general lessons about what seemed to facilitate and hinder arts integration. At times, the text hinted at differences between schools where infusion occurred more seriously and systematically. The next sections will be more blatant in this regard and examine concretely how teachers at high implementing schools perceived their schools differently from schools that were lower implementing of the Whole Schools model.

### **Differentiating High from Low Implementing Schools**

Using the composite rating of implementation described earlier in this report (see Table 1), the four schools with the highest implementation ratings were chosen and compared with the four schools having the lowest implementation ratings. Based on the survey data from Fall 2003, there were obvious patterns apparent. Some of these are summarized below, in sections focused on arts integration, varied instruction, professional development, and coordination of effort within the school. While the following discussion is organized conceptually around the four categories of implementation discussed in the WSI/NCLB portion of the report, it draws more widely from the items contained in the teacher survey and zeroes in on individual items from the survey that help to identify concrete ways in which the two sets of schools differed. Table 5 presents the statistical comparisons, all of which were statistically significant.

*Arts Integration.* In general, high implementing school faculty (n = 107 responding teachers) believed both that arts integration was more important and that they had made more progress due to the WSI than did low implementing school faculty (n = 115 responding teachers). Some examples of this include: (a) stronger endorsement of arts infusion as important (unweighted mean scores of 4.7 and 4.1, for high and low implementing schools respectively, on a 1-5 scale where 5 is "extremely important") and belief that more progress had been made toward arts infusion (means = 4.5 and 3.7 for high and low implementing schools on a 1-5 scale where 5 is "significant progress"); (b) stronger endorsement of infusion of subject area goals into arts instruction as important (means = 4.7 vs. 4.1) and that progress had been made (means = 4.5 vs. 3.6); (c) stronger belief in advocacy for arts integration as important (4.7 vs. 3.9) and that progress in this advocacy had been made (4.6 vs. 3.7); (d) stronger belief that students should have opportunity to demonstrate arts-related skills (means = 4.7 vs. 4.2) and that progress toward this goal was made due to WSI (4.5 vs. 3.9); and (e) belief that having more arts-related performances is important (4.6 vs. 4.2) and that WSI involvement resulted in more such performances (4.5 vs. 4.0).

These differences were perceived as carrying over into routine teaching practice. High implementing schools faculty were more likely than low implementing schools faculty to report: (a) incorporating arts into lesson plans (means = 3.5 vs. 2.6, respectively, on a 1-4 scale where 1 = "never" and 4 = "always"); (b) using hands-on instruction methods (3.6 vs. 2.9); and (c) feeling comfortable about using arts in the classroom (3.6 vs. 3.0).

Perceptions also differed with respect to whether arts infusion was effective. Among the responding faculty, those from the four highest implementing schools were more likely to agree that arts-infused lessons were effective for meeting the Mississippi standards in all subjects than were those from the four lowest implementing schools (means = 3.8 vs. 3.2, respectively, on a 1-4 scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 4 = "strongly agree"). These perceived differences also emerged in whether teachers believed that performance in their classrooms had improved since WSI was implemented in their school (3.6 vs. 2.8) and whether such performance improvements were attributable to WSI (3.4 vs. 2.5). In summary, the high implementing schools had faculty whose beliefs and practices in arts integration were more positive and more frequent, respectively, than faculty from lower implementing schools. That student performance was also perceived as more likely to have improved and that this improvement was a direct result of WSI involvement suggests a compelling argument for higher levels of implementation.

**Table 5**

Statistical Comparison of Implementation Items for High and Low Implementing Schools

*Implementation Categories and Items***Arts Integration**

Importance of infusing arts instruction into math, language arts, social studies, and/or science lessons.

4.68

4.12.

.000

Progress because of WSI in infusing arts instruction into math, language arts, social studies, and/or science lessons.

4.52

3.68

.000

Importance of building mathematics, language arts, social studies and/or science content into arts instruction.

4.66

4.13

.000

Importance of building mathematics, language arts, social studies and/or science content into arts instruction.

4.45

3.59

.000

Importance of advocating for arts integration.

4.65

3.94

.000

Progress because of WSI in advocating for arts integration.

4.57

3.67

.000

Importance of arranging opportunities for students to demonstrate arts-related skills.

4.70

4.20

.000

Progress because of WSI in arranging opportunities for students to demonstrate arts-related skills.

4.51

3.90

.000

Importance of providing more arts-related performances.

4.63

4.17

.000

Progress because of WSI in providing more arts-related performances.

4.47

3.96

.000

I incorporate the arts into lesson plans.

3.54

2.62

.000

I use hands-on instructional methods.

3.58

2.90

.000

I am comfortable using the arts in the classroom.

3.60

3.02

.000

Arts-infused lessons are an effective way of helping students meet the MS State Standards in all subjects.

3.83

3.17

.000

Student performance in my classroom has improved since Whole Schools began in our school.

3.58

2.79

.000

Improvement in student performance in my classroom has been a direct result of Whole Schools activities.

3.38

2.49

.000

**Varied Instruction**

I use multiple ways of assessing student achievement.

3.50

2.88

.000

I know about and tap students' multiple intelligences in my lessons.

3.26

2.58

.000

My classroom practices have changed due to my participation in Whole Schools.

3.44

2.77

.000

## Implementation Categories and Items

### **Professional Development**

I have had training in integrating the arts in math, language arts, social studies, and/or science.

3.48

2.61

.000

My in-service training experiences related to the Whole Schools Initiative have been valuable additions to my teaching.

3.60

2.82

.000

My in-service training experiences outside the Whole Schools Initiative have been valuable additions to my teaching.

3.53

2.78

.000

Participation in Whole Schools' professional development has been available to all teachers in our building.

3.84

3.62

.005

### **Coordination of Effort**

I plan instruction with subject/grade level peers.

3.64

2.69

.000

I talk with other teachers about integrating the arts into math, language arts, social studies, and/or science.

3.16

2.37

.000

I know the content objectives that are covered in the grades before and after mine.

3.37

3.03

.001

Every teacher covers the school's full curriculum at their grade level.

3.42

2.92

.000

Other teachers in this school know what students are taught in my class.

3.08

2.67

.000

The purpose of doing Whole Schools in our building is clear to me.

3.82

3.45

.000

Whole Schools is a top priority in our building.

3.77

3.04

.000

I get more instructional support and help from my colleagues now than before Whole Schools began in our school.

3.45

2.58

.000

Our school has made a point about thinking ahead about plans to continue Whole Schools after special funding ends.

3.67

3.02

.000

When new staff are hired, serious consideration is given to how they will fit into our Whole Schools effort.

3.56

2.58

.000

The other improvement priorities in our school are well-integrated with Whole Schools.

3.56

2.93

.000

The stability of leadership in our building has contributed to our progress in infusing the arts in classrooms.

3.67

3.26

.000

Our school should continue to be in Whole Schools.

3.85

3.32

.000

**Varied Instruction.** Instructional practice differences also emerged in other parts of the teacher survey. Faculty from high implementing schools were more likely than those from low implementing schools to report using multiple methods to assess student achievement (means = 3.5 vs. 2.9, respectively, on a 1-4 scale) and to know of and incorporate ways to tap students' multiple intelligences in their lessons (3.3 vs. 2.6). As mentioned in the above section, teachers in high implementing schools reported greater use of hands-on activities (3.6 vs. 2.9). Finally, they were more likely to claim that their teaching practices had changed as a result of WSI participation than were teachers from low implementing schools (3.4 vs. 2.8).

**Professional Development.** Teachers from high implementing schools were more likely than teachers from low implementing schools to report: (a) having had training in integrating arts into traditional subject areas (means = 3.5 vs. 2.6, respectively, on a 1-4 scale); (b) that in-service training related to WSI was valuable for their teaching (3.6 vs. 2.8); (c) that other in-service training, outside of WSI, was valuable for their teaching (3.5 vs. 2.8); and, to a lesser extent, (d) that participation in WSI professional development was available to all teachers in the school (3.8 vs. 3.6). This last comparison brings up an important point: Professional development in WSI was perceived as being available by faculty in both high and low implementing schools whereas fewer teachers in low implementing schools report having had such training. In fact, 80 percent of the faculty in the four highest implementation schools had attended the Institute and/or a retreat as compared to 59 percent in the lower implementation schools. This difficulty in getting teachers to participate in the WSI in-service, especially the Institute and retreats, was a point frequently mentioned during site visits among the lower implementing schools.

*Whether these differences were coincident with or a result of a consistent effort to implement WSI, the high implementing schools manifested more collaboration and a greater awareness of the curriculum in their schools*

**Coordination of Effort.** The degree to which the WSI effort was coordinated, recognized, and implemented school-wide was also a distinguishing characteristic of high from low implementing schools. Within this arena, three separate threads emerged from the teacher surveys: curricular awareness, a building-wide focus, and proactive administrative support. Each is briefly discussed below.

Teachers from high implementing schools were more likely than their peers from low implementing schools to report that: (a) they plan instruction with subject or grade level peers (means = 3.6 vs. 2.7, respectively, on a scale from 1-4); (b) they talk with other teachers about arts infusion (3.2 vs. 2.4); (c) they are aware of content objectives covered in adjacent grades to their own (3.4 vs. 3.0); (d) teachers at the school cover the full grade-level curriculum (3.4 vs. 2.9); and (e) that other teachers in the school know what is covered in this class (3.1 vs. 2.7). Whether these differences were coincident with or a result of a consistent effort to implement WSI, the high implementing schools manifested more collaboration and a greater awareness of the curriculum in their schools.

The focus on WSI was reflected in responses from faculty at high and low implementing schools. Teachers from high implementing schools were more likely than those from low implementing schools to report that: (a) the purpose of doing Whole Schools was clear to them (means = 3.8 vs. 3.5); (b) WSI was the top priority at their school (3.8 vs. 3.0); and, as a byproduct of implementation; (c) they received more instructional support from colleagues than prior to WSI (3.5 vs. 2.6).

Administrative support and the clarity of the message that WSI was important was a final area in which the teachers at high implementing schools differed from their counterparts at low implementing schools. These differences showed up in how often teachers reported that: (a) their school was planning ahead for how to continue WSI after the funding ended (means = 3.7 vs. 3.0 for high and low implementing schools, respectively); (b) new staff under consideration for hiring were judged for goodness of fit into the Whole Schools effort (3.6 vs. 2.6); (c) other initiatives in the school meshed well with WSI (3.6 vs. 2.9); and (d) leadership in the school contributed to the progress in arts integration (3.7 vs. 3.3). A related aspect of the difference between high and low implementing schools was revealed in how likely teachers were to report that their school should continue to be in Whole Schools (3.9 vs. 3.3).

All of these differences were helpful in depicting variations in the degree to which schools seriously and systematically intended to enhance instruction with and through the arts. At schools where teachers participated in in-service oriented toward arts infusion, collaborated with one another, had an awareness of the overall curriculum, and sensed that the

WSI participation was a priority at their building, it was more likely that these would be the schools at which a higher proportion of teachers frequently use arts-infused instruction, believe that it was effective in their teaching and that believed that the change toward arts-infused instruction was not only possible but valuable as a way of yielding better student attainment of state framework goals.

### **Focusing on High Implementing Schools**

Some of the reasons that high implementing schools were different from low implementing schools might become more apparent from enumerating some observations from site visits over their participation cycle. This section gives some examples of the differences.

*Sustained effort lasted longer than a specific individual.* Among the highest implementing schools, several had had personnel changes in key positions. In one such school this year, the acting principal came on board in November due to illness of the principal. In one of the legacy sites that persisted as among the highest implementers of WSI, a change in the principalship a few years back also resulted in no diminution of the reform effort. Moreover, only a third of the faculty that originally began WSI was still in the school in the 2003-2004 school year! In each case, the incoming principal was willing to let the teachers continue on a course that he/she saw as being effective and teachers new to the school entered grade-level teams with a commonly-designed curriculum that immediately shaped their classroom instruction. In a similar vein, several high implementing schools have had changes in project directors without any loss of momentum. In all such cases, though, the incoming person did not feel threatened by what was in place and somewhat compelled to support the arts tradition in the buildings. At some low implementation sites, incoming principals may have felt more pressure to change things no matter what, lest they be judged as not trying to “make a difference.” In any event, staff turnover - long noted as a primary obstacle to lasting change - proved to be of little import in schools that structures supportive of arts integration in place.

*Teachers collaborated often.* An earlier section of the report spoke of how an absence of common planning time created challenges for teacher collaboration. At high implementing schools, teachers may well have had more structured opportunities for collaboration, but it was not uncommon to see a project director informally crossing paths with a teacher and, in a few short moments, iron out plans for an upcoming lesson. The effective WSI schools had teachers who communicated often, and not always in formally-planned sessions.

*Teachers were comfortable with arts infusion.* One distinguishing feature of high implementing schools was the large number of teachers who, by their reflections on arts infusion, suggested that the approach was completely comfortable to them. Some characterized arts infusion as “the way I’ve always taught (or wanted to teach).” In schools that had few teachers engaged, a common comment of the principal, project director, or field advisor was that, for many, arts integration represented a huge step outside of their “comfort zone.”

*Principals knew what went on in the classroom.* At high implementing schools, the principals were more likely to know exactly what each teacher or subject area was covering during a given day or week of the semester. Advance reviews of teacher lesson plans, regular “drop-in” visits of classes, and a constant reminder that the arts were important (and giving recognition when arts integration was observed) were some of the ways principals gained this awareness and, at the same time, conveyed the message that arts-infused instruction was a priority for the school. At schools where the principal was detached from classroom goings on, the prevalence of arts integration seemed predictably lower.

*Arts activities were integral to instruction, not add-ons.* At high implementing schools, there was ample evidence that the arts activities directly supported the state framework’s goals. Teachers reported that they were most definitely not activities tacked onto a class period to fill time or keep students busy (e.g., “seatwork”) or put them in a good mood before they went back to their “regular” work. This implied that some planning and/or development had taken place so that the infusion would support the attainment of curricular goals. In low implementation schools, the planning did not take place, or teachers did not collaborate in their planning.

*The effective WSI schools had teachers who communicated often, and not always in formally-planned sessions.*

*Multiple interventions were coordinated.* Several initiatives other than Whole Schools were a part of the reform landscape of WSI participating sites. In high implementing schools, these efforts were coordinated in such a way as to enhance the mutual goals of the faculty and administration. For example, in planning activities in support of reading instruction, one school brought in the arts specialist to work cooperatively with the teachers to develop activities that married both projects. At low implementation schools, it was more likely to be the case that “today’s program is (project X),” whereas “the meeting tomorrow is (project Y)” and never the ‘twain shall meet.

*While teachers were under pressure to have their students perform well on the standardized achievement tests, high implementing schools did not shut down arts integration during the lengthy period of time prior to the test.*

*The focus did not change.* While teachers were under pressure to have their students perform well on the standardized achievement tests, high implementing schools did not shut down arts integration during the a lengthy period of time prior to the test. In fact, at one of the highest implementing schools, teachers pointed out how arts-integrated lessons helped the students think of alternative ways of answering questions that otherwise might have stumped them. By spending time recasting the problem, the students in fact probably built their ability to transfer skills from one problem setting to another. Another example was a principal who, in describing the degree of teacher “buy-in” to Whole Schools, said “they are committed (to WSI) for the most part; it’s all but one or two...if by next year the holdouts aren’t converted, they’ll be gone (from this school).”

*Project directors had an understanding of the faculty.* Just as the principal was cognizant of what went on in classes in high implementing schools, the project directors in general well understood the styles and needs of the faculty. This meant that project directors had to have the opportunity to work with the teachers on a regular basis; for many, the start of these productive, collegial relationships was common attendance at the Institute and/or retreats. Even if relatively new to the job, the project directors could frequently recite, off the top of their heads, what sorts of arts infusion was going on in their schools. Several were clearly proactive; one commented in response to a description of something another school had tried, that (two specific) teachers in her schools would probably “jump at the chance” to try it there.

*The school environment celebrated arts integration.* Student work was far more often on display in high implementing schools than low implementing schools. Students, when asked, could immediately lead a visitor by the hand to show one or multiple instances of their work on public display. Even as the school year wound down, high implementing sites were profusely decorated with examples of student work (and the explicit links of that work to curricular goals). Any parent visiting would be convinced of how arts infusion supported academic outcomes.

From the site visits, it was clear that successful implementation of the Whole Schools model could and did occur. However, that occurrence was not accidental; it was designed, managed, overseen, encouraged, nurtured, reinforced, and represented a coherent and central goal for the school.

### **Why Did All WSI Schools Not Become High Implementers?**

There were many reasons why schools did or did not engage fully in the WSI reform. Some of these have been mentioned in other sections. However, all are important challenges that need to be overcome in order for schools to succeed in implementing WSI and are worth reiterating at this stage of the report.

*Lack of models.* Most of the participating WSI schools served elementary grades. For the few that had middle or upper grades, a continuing concern was that the Institute and retreats tended to have fewer examples of demonstration lessons tied to upper grades, specific subject areas or both. Whether an excuse of convenience to cover an unwillingness to try or genuinely an insurmountable hurdle, it became easier for upper-grade teachers to “opt out” of trying to implement WSI if they could claim that there simply were not sufficient models of well-developed lessons tied to the state framework. Staff at several participating schools spent time compiling sets of such lessons or units as resources for the teachers, whether in notebooks, resource rooms, learning/discovery labs or other sites (several mentioned development of a web site for this very purpose, though not yet implemented) as ways to counter this complaint and to offer some continuity for incoming teachers who might have been new to arts-infused instruction.

The creativity of the project director, field advisor, and principal was important in overcoming this concern. The fact that the WSI participating schools having grades of seven or higher were more likely to show up as low implementation schools suggested that this challenge was one that needed immediate attention.

*Turnover.* Changes in faculty, project directors, arts specialists, principals, and/or central office administrators posed a continuing challenge in some schools. Without the kinds of supportive structures mentioned in the previous sections, schools facing such turnover had to conquer the WSI “learning curve” virtually from scratch each year. In one school, the project director and principal changed in the same year; it was only through the efforts of the central office that any continuity was attained at all.

In a few instances, the lack of turnover may have served to inhibit the progress toward implementation. As an example, one of the lower-implementing schools had a principal in place for many years who apparently never saw the value of WSI as a reform model. Not surprisingly, the impetus to have that site participate in WSI came from the central office. As a result, there simply was no “buy-in” from the building administrator to support WSI. At other schools, project directors and principals talked of the teachers who had been teaching the same way for decades and were unwilling to try to change. At these schools, it often became a game of waiting for the retirement of such faculty as the means to make more progress. Indeed, at one school, the principal, while giving a tour of all the classrooms during school, would point out the reluctant teachers with the relieved comment, “This is (his/her) last year.”

*Mixed messages, or no visible means of support.* Whether because of competing interventions or an absence of support from the administration, teachers were not always getting the message that WSI was a priority. For example, at one school, teachers were actively discouraged from using arts-based activities on the grounds that to do so would take away too much time from preparing students for the standardized curriculum tests. If the arts activities were saved for after-school clubs, that was fine, but not during the school day. In another school, the principal did not attend any of the arts steering committee meetings during the year. In a third, teachers were told to prepare a presentation for their peers after coming back from MAC retreats, and then the principal would not ask for this presentation at the subsequent faculty meetings. These examples, from lower-implementing schools, illustrated that an inconsistent message from the administration would certainly not advance the implementation of a reform and may well have done irreparable harm by giving the impression that the reform was not important. By the same token, among the higher implementing schools, visitors were immersed in a sea of striking student work representing different arts specialties, displayed in abundance and the link to framework objectives was made clear. As one set of co-project directors put it, “We know that the message is out to parents (that ours is an arts-infusion focus school) because we gave out more hot dogs (to parents/guardians at an evening arts festival held that week) than (we have) students.” Among the lower implementing schools, something as simple as displaying the Whole Schools Initiative banner was not even done consistently or was not located in a spot likely to be noticed by visitors or students. Likewise, some of the principals at lower-implementing schools did not want student work on display outside of the classrooms.

*Could not use field advisor to best advantage.* A recurring theme among lower-implementing schools was that they simply had not discovered the best ways in which to use their field advisor. For some, this may have been because of principal and/or project director turnover so that neither had a good understanding of how the field advisor could propel their progress toward arts integration. For others, it may have been due in part to reluctance on the part of the field advisor to insinuate herself/himself into the school’s efforts without being asked. In only a few instances did it seem to be the case that the field advisor was simply unable, due to other commitments or distance, to visit or work with the school staff when invited. More often among low-implementing schools, field advisors would report that they came to a pre-set meeting and found key teachers, the principal, or the project director absent without explanation. Regardless of whether field advisors were characterized as coaches, advisors, mentors, or professional development resources, schools definitely needed guidance in how best to use this position to their advantage.

*Only a small core of teachers would attend MAC meetings.* Among the lower-implementing schools, it was not uncommon for the arts-engaged teachers to be in the minority. One symptom of this was when relatively few of the other teachers would attend a first or subsequent Institute or retreat. Some schools struggled to get any people to the MAC-sponsored meetings. Not all of the principals would attend or be involved if they did attend, which also



sent a message to the teachers as to the perceived importance of WSI. As one project director put it, “If a teacher says ‘no’ (to attending an Institute or retreat) for a year or two, it just gets easier to continue to say ‘no’ in the future, especially if the principal doesn’t (force the issue).” Higher-implementing schools were more often successful in encouraging more, if not all, of the teachers to attend Institutes or retreats. Any school that embraced the model of gradually building the flock via the meetings built in the incentives or requirements that teachers participate. One stumbling point appeared to be the matter of stipends for the Summer Institute; some schools were able to offer these to teachers and others were not. Not surprisingly, schools that did not offer stipends seemed more often to report difficulty in enticing teachers to attend.

*WSI would compete with rather than facilitate framework attainment.* Pressure to have students perform well on tests dramatically increased since the start of WSI. NCLB, the state curriculum tests, and the annual growth goals put school staff in a difficult place. Schools that had been challenged to facilitate pupil attainment of framework skills in the past were, if left to their own devices, generally hard-pressed to coordinate and change their instructional practice to rely on arts integration as a way to increase that pupil attainment. When asked what sorts of outcomes they sensed from participation in WSI, many principals were quick to say “(I hope that the forthcoming) test scores (will be) going up,” with outcomes such as “well-rounded students,” or “reaching students who can’t be reached through traditional instruction” being mentioned far less frequently or only with some prompting. It may very well have been the case that under-performing schools would find development and implementation of WSI more difficult than adopting a highly-scripted instructional model, especially if the schools held out hope for quick payoff. Of course, the very beginning of this report suggested that the time invested in arts integration may have been well worth their consideration.



*A change in a school's agenda.* Some current and former WSI schools had adopted other interventions, apparently without regard for congruence with WSI. In fairness, sometimes these other interventions come courtesy of the central office administration. Two former WSI schools visited this year had gone in completely different directions from WSI and each other. In one instance, the intervention of the year was chosen apparently because of a concern on the part of the principal that student behavior was not in control; in the other a reform model was chosen due to perennially low test scores in writing and reading and the apparent endorsement of the Mississippi Department of Education. At each school, the degree of implementation observed for the non-WSI interventions was judged to be low, suggesting that a continuing challenge for low-performing schools was an inherent inability or unwillingness to implement adequately any reform effort. When teachers were faced with a seemingly never-ending set of interventions, none of which were fully engaged, supported or sustained, it was not hard to understand why they might not have been in any hurry to change their current practice. Yet some schools appeared to be able to coordinate multiple interventions to accomplish common goals, so the task was not impossible, just more challenging.

*Professional development not coordinated with WSI.* Each district and school had to plan how to use the professional development opportunities during the year well in advance. In the case of some lower-implementing schools, WSI planning or development activities almost never seemed to make the agenda. Instead, the professional development was oriented toward some other area of perceived need. Ideally, as in the case of curriculum mapping as a school or district goal, the two efforts could be complementary. However, that was not always the case. For some current and former WSI schools, the other path chosen as offering hope for school improvement was pursued in a way that seemed to shut out WSI rather than enhance, reinforce or otherwise support WSI.

*It's the "vision thing."* At high-implementation WSI sites, there was little ambiguity about the school's desire to move to an arts-infused curriculum. When one saw student work on display, there was an explicit link of that work to support attainment of one or more state framework objectives. Elsewhere, student work may have been only tangentially related to the framework goal or represented an end-of-unit activity that, in and of itself, supported no particular academic or artistic goal. Such add-ons made it harder for parents, teachers or the community at large to see the virtue of arts integration. Some lower-implementing schools had the appearance of arts integration but somehow did not always take advantage of opportunities to promote serious infusion, such having schoolwide performances (e.g., a pageant in December) or bringing in visiting artists for a performance that either did not reinforce curricular content or did not connect to classroom instruction or being fortunate enough to have one or more full-time arts specialists and yet scheduling them so fully with classes that they had no time to interact with teachers. There were

several instances of WSI schools that were in close proximity to one another wherein one manifested a notably higher degree of implementation than the others. In such cases it was clearly not financial resources, the nature of the student clientele served, or other convenient reasons that differentiated the sites. Instead, it was a matter of choosing to embrace the vision of arts integration as central to teaching and learning.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations: The Issue of Implementation Variability**

Many readers will not be surprised to find that the accomplishments of the participating WSI schools varied largely as a function of the degree and quality of implementation of WSI. When the achievements of the high implementing schools were scrutinized, their students performed very well on the state tests used to monitor attainment in Mississippi, a higher proportion of their teachers endorsed WSI as the source of viable instructional resource, they were more often able to coordinate WSI with other initiatives in the school in such a way as to be mutually beneficial, and more of their staff and administration were likely to have engaged in curricular planning in which arts infusion was a central focus.

The challenge for MAC and its WSI, therefore, is to identify ways in which the WSI reform approach can become more thoroughly implemented in participating sites while at the same time honoring the specific environment and culture of the schools. The remainder of this section will focus on (1) the conclusions that seem warranted based on the data gathered during the four-year evaluation of WSI and (2) recommendations for what MAC - or any agency sponsoring a school reform model - might do to increase the chances of successful implementation among all participating schools.

### **Conclusions**

The evaluation leads to three straightforward conclusions:

- 1. Students benefited when WSI was soundly implemented in a school;*
- 2. Choices schools made about working toward implementation mattered;*
- 3. There was and will continue to be variation in the degree and quality of implementation.*

First, whether one looked at (a) test scores, (b) school progress on NCLB criteria, (c) the reactions of students, teachers or parents, or (d) the school environment, students won when their schools implemented the WSI approach. While the achievement test results were noteworthy, an equally important outcome was the added value of participation in WSI. Based on the direct testimony and survey responses of students, teachers and parents, the process yielded much benefit on its own. Students reported feeling better about themselves as learners and as individuals; they commented frequently on enjoying class and school more as a result. Teachers, especially those fortunate enough to attend the MAC Summer Institute, came back full of exciting ideas about how they might change their instruction to capture these powerful possibilities. Based on the survey results, teachers at high implementing schools were more likely than those at low implementing schools to assert that (a) the curriculum at their school was understood by all and was coherent across grades; (b) arts infusion found its way into their daily teaching and the students' experiences more regularly and routinely; (c) arts infusion was an effective way of enhancing student learning; and (d) students' academic, social, and personal growth had improved as a result of the WSI implementation. In short, the environments at the high implementation schools were qualitatively different from those at low implementation schools.

Second, some strategies appeared to work better than others in embedding knowledge and skills with arts integration into the fabric of school life. Schools seemed to make more progress toward implementation when they: (a) had and sustained a vision about what Whole Schools should be; (b) communicated clearly and consistently the message that the WSI reform was important and a priority at their school; (c) had a principal and project director who knew what went on in the classrooms and monitored the development and delivery of lessons during the year; (d) leveraged their resources so as to get as much "bang for the buck" as possible; (e) developed lessons that addressed the needs of their students given the state framework and coordinated the curriculum within and across grades; (f) worked effectively with their field advisor; (g) had a high fraction of teachers engaged in the reform; (h) built-in opportunities for teachers to collaborate; (i) evaluated and made available lessons and units that had been

*Based on the direct testimony and survey responses of students, teachers and parents, the process yielded much benefit on its own. Students reported feeling better about themselves as learners and as individuals.*

tried in the past; (j) coordinated professional development to reflect the WSI involvement; and (k) built, maintained and managed the human resource expertise to allow the reform to continue and not depend on any one individual.

Third, because of the unique characteristics of each school, no two were exactly alike in how the WSI model was implemented. However, geographic, economic, and local cultural differences were not found to be primary explanatory factors for differences in the degree and quality of WSI implementation. The mix of high implementing schools were located in urban, suburban, and rural settings; served predominantly poor, predominantly wealthy, and diverse economic student populations; and came in all sizes. These differences certainly shaped how the schools went about putting arts integration into place but eventually all of the schools made choices that boosted rather than diminished the possibility that a child would encounter the arts no matter what grade level or subject or teacher the student had. Instead, the choices mentioned above (or their absence) appeared to be more salient reasons for differences observed across sites.

These conclusions therefore establish a challenge for WSI as it continues to evolve in the future: How can the WSI work with schools so as to increase the degree and quality of implementation in all sites?

### **Recommendations**

There are 12 recommendations that the evaluation proposes to assure a higher level of WSI implementation. Many of these ideas would also transfer directly to virtually any school reform effort. Keep in mind that reducing variability means having participating schools all attain higher levels of implementation, not that the WSI reform should attempt to be a vehicle for “homogenizing” schools that have important differences in environment, culture and tradition. The recommendations are in two sets. The first set addresses issues related to selecting schools to be a part of WSI and the second set concerns schools already a part of the Initiative.

#### **For Schools Wishing to Join WSI:**

*1. Insist on “informed participation” on the part of an incoming school.* MAC staff should require that any school proposing to join WSI provide evidence that the administration and staff are mindful of what participation entails, that they genuinely wish to work toward arts infusion and that WSI can be meshed with any other ongoing initiatives in the school. In order to assure that faculty and administration understand what arts infusion is and the many demands of participation in WSI, a first step should be a presentation by knowledgeable educators from outside the school, such as MAC staff or select field advisors or arts educators. Subsequently, there should be a vote in which a high fraction of the school’s faculty (perhaps 80 percent) concur that undertaking the WSI model is their choice; is consistent with the unique characteristics of their school; and that they agree to give it the effort and attention it requires. Likewise, the administration must concur that electing to try the WSI model is a choice they will support and make a priority for the school. Additionally, there needs to be full disclosure of other initiatives ongoing in the school as well as any under consideration and that all such initiatives can be coordinated in a way so as not to diminish the focus on WSI. Finally, part of the rating of a proposal for a new participating site should hinge on the degree to which WSI is seen as viable given the other initiatives that are or may be in place.

*2. Consider evidence of faculty/staff expertise and predisposition in judging an incoming school.* Several key positions are critical for the success of WSI in a school. Among these are the principal, project director (coordinator), and arts specialist(s). These persons ideally would have the background and record of advocating for the goals of WSI, even if they are not artists by training. Some schools may also be fortunate in having teacher aides who have arts experience or arts education backgrounds. This sort of resource will be invaluable at the beginning of a school’s journey toward arts-infused instruction. The initial school survey mentioned above could not only address predisposition toward the WSI model, it could also be used to describe teachers’ expertise and frequency of planning and using instruction that recognizes multiple intelligences, weaves in “hands-on learning” opportunities, or in reaching out to learners who are challenged by traditional approaches. Provision for a schoolwide (or communitywide) steering committee should also address the expertise and predisposition of those under consideration for membership. Finally, a school with no arts specialists and no plans to bring one or more on board will be harder pressed to implement WSI.

*3. Require a plan to build teachers' knowledge and proficiency in developing, adapting, implementing, and evaluating arts integration.* There are many ways in which teachers' skill in and frequency of using the arts may be improved. However, there should be a realistic, coherent plan for how that improvement will come about. High on the list of requisite elements for the plan should be an explanation of how all teachers will be able to participate in the Institute, retreats, or, ideally, both. Perhaps for the first year of participation, schools should be encouraged or required to bring a team of at least 12 to the Summer Institute, so that the immediate impact of the training might reverberate more thoroughly through the school. Second, any plan should address how outside arts educators, specialists, or consultants will help achieve this goal. For example, it would be better for the fledgling school to have fewer performing artists if the ones they did contract with stayed over and worked with faculty as part of their involvement rather than just putting on the performance and bidding adieu. A third component of the plan should address the extent to which and how the local professional development days will be spent in support of WSI. A fourth component could be addressed in #5 below, but is no less important: How the teachers within a school may be used to build skills of each other. A fifth component should address the coherence of the school's overall curriculum. Schools that have not yet or not recently undertaken a curriculum mapping project should be encouraged to build this in as part of their early efforts to build toward implementation.

*4. Train school staff in how best to use field advisors.* The strategic selection of an external, field advisor as a component to the WSI model offers schools much potential, though this potential has not always been realized. Therefore, part of the early training for both schools and field advisors alike should be oriented toward effective and appropriate use of the field advisor. Toward this end, some thought as to the most suitable school-advisor relationship and responsibilities should be given, so that the role described offers the best opportunity for the schools' success. Whether this redefinition of role more closely approximates an instructional coach or a leadership coach is one decision that will have to be made. Likewise, it may be the case that some field advisors simply cannot manage their other obligations in such a way as to work most effectively with the school (though it appears that the much more common instance is the other way around). Periodic review of the field advisor-school partnerships should also be made part of the process.

Once the role of field advisor has been elaborated, then current and new field advisors should be brought in and given guidance as to the functions they are expected to fulfill. There is probably a need for specialized training of or consensus building among the field advisors as to the scope and responsibility of their jobs. These sorts of changes may also require adjustment to the method and amount of compensation that is offered to field advisors (see also recommendation #11).

*5. Require a plan that permits teachers to collaborate, with each other and with arts specialists.* During the class day and during regularly scheduled faculty meeting time (both after school and during professional development release), there needs to be the opportunity for teachers to collaborate. For some schools, this may necessitate a change in the schedule so as to allow teachers common planning time. Whether it makes more sense for that time to be common by grade or by subject area will depend on the school. However, if there has not been any concession made or consideration as to how to make this common time available, then it is doubtful that such a school can make serious progress toward arts integration. Similarly, there needs to be planned opportunities for the arts specialist(s) to work with the teachers.

#### **For Both New and Participating Schools:**

*6. Develop or identify more models for upper-grade teachers.* Schools serving students beyond the sixth grade seem to have more difficulty "selling" arts infusion, and one reason that consistently bubbles up is the apparent scarcity of grade-appropriate examples. There are not as many model schools (other than specially formed magnet sites) that exist locally, either. Therefore, one area for development would be that of models, lessons, and units for upper grades. One possibility might be to have such schools band together to hire an arts educator specializing in secondary or middle school grades, even if just part-time. Such a "mini-cooperative" might encourage the schools to collaborate with each other, thereby accelerating the development and dissemination of successful lessons and units. Dissemination of existing plans, lessons, and units appropriate for these schools via the Web site should also be a priority.

*7. Track annual progress toward implementation.* Any grant renewal application should incorporate some sort of assessment of progress toward implementation. Whenever MAC staff visit schools, questions about progress being made should be high on the list of issues addressed. Most of the project directors appeared to do a good job of capturing the goings-on over the course of the year in terms of arts events and activities. However, these compilations did not always address the frequency and regularity of quality arts-infused instruction that took place. Perhaps principals or their designee(s) should be encouraged to observe classes on a regular basis; those observations could be used as evidence of the level of in-class implementation. At a minimum, the school staff should be able to show, based on lesson plans, increasing levels of in-class implementation each year. Periodically, the schools should also be asked to complete surveys that would tap perceptions of implementation of WSI (the teacher surveys used this past year could be condensed somewhat and adapted to this purpose). The field advisor could be used as an independent source in this effort.

*8. Add implementation as a strand to Institute/retreat meetings.* Sometimes educators simply need to hear from peers what has worked for them. Schools that have managed to implement WSI more fully might be useful resources for others just getting started or that are struggling to make progress. Over time, this resource has been used informally, as when a school sends a team to another site that has made further progress in implementation. This recommendation argues that this resource should be institutionalized in WSI training by pairing high implementing school staff with arts education specialists, administrators, MAC staff, etc., to offer concrete ideas for ways to advance in implementation of WSI.

*9. Review the process for judging applications for WSI grant renewal.* It may be the case that the review panel process could be swayed by a lower-implementing site turning in a well-written proposal than by a higher-implementing site submitting a proposal that is not so well prepared. However, just as teachers need to make sure that students understand clearly how assignments will be graded, so too does WSI need to make clear that the renewal process is based primarily on signs of progress, with those signs being looked for spelled out explicitly. It may be that WSI should also triangulate the school reports with information from others, such as the field advisor. Great care must be taken in this regard to not weaken the field advisors' potential as an instructional resource by putting them in an evaluative capacity. For that reason, instituting site visits prior to renewal time may also be warranted.

*10. Revisit communications with the schools.* At most participating schools, administration and staff praised MAC's communications and updates, noting that the emails were frequent, timely, that follow-ups would often be made when a school's representative did not respond and that queries were quickly answered. However, some principals claimed they did not use email or failed to use it on a regular basis. This made for a few instances in which time-sensitive information was not received or the perception formed that MAC did not "keep in touch." Whether an excuse of convenience or a reality, the impact was the same.

All of the above recommendations have assumed little, if any, change in how MAC organizes its resources or in the level of Initiative funding. If MAC staff were to entertain the idea of changing the resources and funding, then the following two suggestions are offered.

*11. Designate an administrator's coach.* The role of the field advisor may be too-far stretched if he/she is to act as content/pedagogical expert and school change agent expert. The latter function might require the assistance of a second, external advisor, whose primary client is the school administrator. This person could team with the school representatives when implementation is part of the MAC meetings (see #8), then work with the principal to develop ways to make the WSI implementation work more smoothly, take hold more thoroughly, and keep the WSI focus clearer throughout the year. These kinds of skills may not always be found in every principal's repertoire, and may need nurturing just as the do the teachers' skills.

*12. Tailor the size of WSI grants.* Early in the implementation cycle, a school may need more external resources in order to get broad training for staff quickly and to have sufficient opportunity to acquire the materials and teaching resources to facilitate the trial of arts-infused instruction. Some of the bigger ticket items, such as bringing in experts to work with specific subject area or grade level teachers, or paying for released time for teachers to receive continuing training and have an opportunity for developing lessons and units, might be built into earlier year grants and

reduced over time. In this way, more of an effort to get a school in motion faster and more thoroughly during the first year could be part of the design.

What MAC cannot afford to have happen is for (a) WSI to be perceived as an easy way to obtain some additional grant monies; (b) WSI to be judged as ineffective when it may not have been adequately implemented in a school; or (c) students to enjoy an enhanced educational experience only by luck of having attended a WSI school that took implementation seriously and made it a focus for the campus, while other students are relegated to inconsistent, idiosyncratic instructional patterns that may or may not meet their academic and personal development needs. Based on the evaluation evidence, there is no reason for either to occur; it is entirely a matter of the school's willingness to commit to arts integration and having the appropriate support mechanisms in place to assure that all staff can and will infuse the arts in their classrooms.

### **Closing Statement**

In this accountability-focused environment that American education finds itself in, educators and experts frequently bemoan the tendency for curricula to be narrowed, for time on a topic to be truncated in order to cover all that is on the test, and for teachers to have little room in the school day for "extras" - even if educators openly acknowledge that these extras are important in the education of the whole child. Nevertheless, the concern in some WSI sites that were experiencing intense pressure to improve test performance - as reflected throughout the country - was that they could not afford to take time from direct literacy instruction to do the arts. The findings from this evaluation strongly hint that perhaps such schools could not afford NOT to embrace the arts. When insinuated seriously and systematically into classroom lessons, the arts broadened a teacher's reach to include many children who had not thrived in school previously and engendered opportunities for those who traditionally did well in school to stretch themselves further. In such situations, the arts were most definitely not add-ons; they were an equal partner, a fourth R, in students' education. As stated clearly above, one mission of WSI is to now insure that students do not have to be lucky to be assigned to a teacher, grade, or school that is committed to serious arts integration by working with and for participating schools in such a way so as to enable all participating sites to effectively and thoroughly infuse the arts throughout their buildings.

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