



For more information:

Rob Henken
President, Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240 or 414-708-4392 (c)
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

For immediate release
April 25, 2014

Arts Education Leaders in Milwaukee Could Learn From Other Cities

In its latest report on the arts in Greater Milwaukee, the Public Policy Forum finds a set of common characteristics shared by successful arts education efforts in other cities that may be instructive to similar efforts to expand arts education for Milwaukee schoolchildren.

“In Milwaukee and across the country, educational leaders and arts advocates have argued that there are strong linkages between the arts and a range of important education outcomes, such as increased student achievement, improved student motivation and engagement, and development of creative thinking skills,” says Forum researcher Anne Chapman, the report’s lead author.

“Our research describes the approaches taken by other cities that have embraced arts education as a major part of their education landscape, and it should provide food for thought on the potential for similar action here.”

The report is the second in a research project commissioned by the Herzfeld Foundation that involves exploratory research on how other communities have found success in implementing community-wide arts education initiatives, and the current state of Milwaukee’s arts education landscape.

In June 2013, the Forum released an initial report that took a broad view of 10 cities that had undertaken large-scale efforts to deliver arts education. The second report – released this morning – hones in on four initiatives that may be particularly relevant to Milwaukee: Boston’s BPS Arts Expansion Initiative, Dallas’ Big Thought, Denver’s Think 360 Arts, and Portland’s The Right Brain Initiative.

Among its observations, the report finds that the four cities are characterized by the following structural success factors:

- **Widespread community engagement** that strategically elicits the input and offerings of at least three sets of stakeholders: top civic leadership, arts and educational institutions, and grassroots constituents such as parents, teachers, and teaching artists.
- **Civic leader champions** such as mayors, school district superintendents, and school board members.
- A **“backbone” structure** to help carry the community’s vision and to coordinate the overall effort, usually in close partnership with but external to the major school district.
- **Shared governance and accountability** that is exercised through a number of different avenues from decision-making executive bodies, to working committees, to the use of formal agreements and contracts.
- **Data-driven advocacy and strategic planning** that often includes a community-wide inventory that identifies arts education offerings and monitors access.
- **School district commitment and leadership** including vocal support from the superintendent and robust financial investments in arts education staffing, external partnerships, professional development, and curriculum development.
- **Meaningful evaluation and shared measurement practices** that show a commitment to engage and invest in ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness and impact.
- **Capacity to overcome common challenges to collective action** related to the financial and political constraints on schools, districts, and arts providers.

The report uses observations of other cities’ large-scale arts education initiatives to assess arts education as it exists on the ground in Milwaukee today.

“Over the last decade or so, Milwaukee, like other cities, has seen resources for the arts in public schools slashed amid drastic cuts in the number of school art teachers,” says Chapman. “To cope with this, schools and school districts have turned to the community’s rich array of external arts organizations and teaching artists to bring the arts into classrooms. But this approach is fragmented and has been insufficient to provide equitable access to arts education.”

Despite that overall assessment, the report finds several assets that could form the basis for a community-wide arts education initiative in Milwaukee including the commitment of the outgoing MPS superintendent and current Milwaukee Board of School Directors; strong out-of-school time efforts at MPS and other providers; arts specialty schools throughout the city; networks of artists and teaching artists that could play a potential role; an effort to restore funding for arts specialists across MPS; committed private funders; and a vast array of arts program and professional development providers.

The report was undertaken both to inform Milwaukee policymakers and other stakeholders about how established models in other cities have achieved success and to spur dialogue on Milwaukee’s own aspirations for its arts education landscape.

A copy of the report – as well as the June 2013 initial assessment – can be downloaded at the Forum’s web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

#####