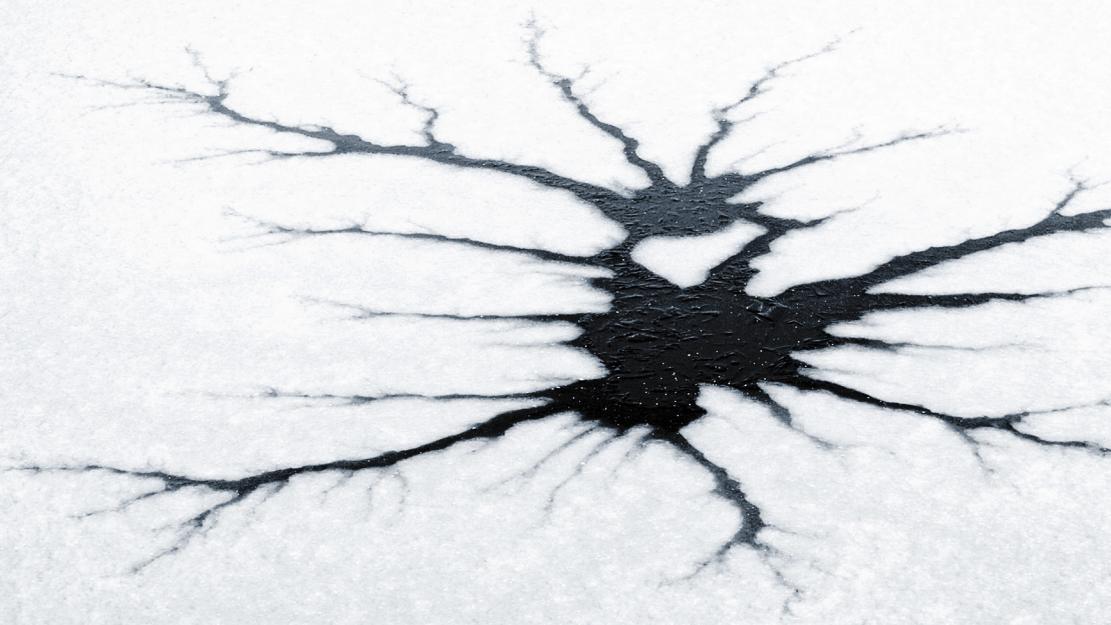


January 2009

# ON THIN ICE

*Arts Education in Alaska Schools*



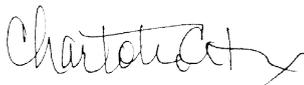
*Produced by*

Alaska State Council on the Arts, in partnership with Alaska  
Arts Education Consortium, a member of the Kennedy  
Center Alliance for Arts Education Network

On Thin Ice comes at a critical time in our state's history. While celebrating 50 years of statehood, we are also examining the quality of education in Alaska, and whether we are preparing students for success in school, work and life.

National studies indicate that the arts are a significant part of education: students who study arts as part of their K-12 education score higher on SAT tests, have a higher literacy rate and improved critical thinking skills – all crucial skills for preparing a 21st Century workforce. However, as “On Thin Ice” demonstrates, the arts are disappearing from the Alaska educational landscape.

It is our hope that this study brings the current cracks in arts education to light and begins a new, positive conversation about how we can move forward. It will take parents, public officials, educators, artists and students working together to improve the statistics outlined here. However, it can be done – and must be done – if we are to provide Alaska's students with all the educational opportunities they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlotte Fox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Charlotte Fox  
*Executive Director*  
*Alaska State Council on the Arts*

In 2008 the Alaska State Council on the Arts collaborated with the Alaska Arts Education Consortium and the Alaska School Administrators Association to conduct a statewide, comprehensive survey to look what is happening with the arts in our schools.



This first-of-its-kind study was designed to provide useful, baseline data to policy makers, district administrators, parents, teachers, University faculty, business leaders, arts advocates arts organizations and the Alaska community at large. “On Thin Ice” dramatically illustrates that there is much to do, to ensure that the #1 goal for all Alaskan students - access to high quality arts experiences as a basic component of their K – 12 education —is truly met.

**Thirty two districts (59%) responded, serving 118,794 (89%) of Alaska’s 133, 288 students** in both urban and rural settings across the state (see list of responding districts, page 14).

The Alaska arts education survey was timely. As Alaska celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> year of statehood, this is the ideal opportunity to measure our mettle. Does today’s citizenry have the unbounded creativity, raw courage and stubborn tenacity that defined the men and woman who settled the Alaskan territory alongside its indigenous peoples? Is our education system preparing students for future, undefined adventures in unknown territories? Will they have the imagination, creativity, and sense of innovation that their forebears displayed? Will they be equipped to solve complex problems, climb uncharted mountains and resolve diverse disputes? Will they tell good stories?



The survey was also timely given changes at the national level, a time when “federal leadership can amplify the capacity of the arts to help our nation meet its goals of increased prosperity, international diplomacy and community vitality.” (from *Arts Policy in the New Administration Recommendations*, November, 2008) It is a time when “We have more assets to work with than in the past. We know that a whole host of careers, jobs and industries require arts learning and the skill sets gained through what the arts bring to education in every subject.” (from *A New Hope for Arts Education*, Arts Market, November 11, 2008) Finally, it is a time when Alaskans were asked by the Commissioner of Education Larry LeDoux at the November 2008 Education Summit to re-consider what we hold most dear and most important in our public schools. Where are the arts in those deliberations?

The information in this report can serve as a catalyst – to generate and articulate goals and strategies, identify resources, and summon leadership and partnerships on a broad scale. It serves as a baseline for measurement, a tool to assess progress over the next decade to determine whether the arts are more of a priority, to see if the Arts Council goal is closer to fulfillment, to judge whether the arts are undeniably one part of Alaskan education.

### **The Survey Process**

In late September, 2008 Alaska’s 54 district superintendents were invited to complete an online survey regarding arts

education which had been drafted and reviewed by colleagues the previous spring. Their participation was encouraged by Dr. Mary Francis, Executive Director of the Alaska Association of School Administrators and by the regional board members of the Arts Education Consortium.

The survey queried Superintendents and other key administrators about key components of a comprehensive arts education. As identified by other states and national organizations the basic components include district arts curriculum, highly qualified and/or trained arts teachers, district allocation of funds for instructional and human resources in the arts, students both elementary and secondary having regular, sequential instruction and experience with the arts, and professional development in the arts for the teaching corps.

For purposes of this survey the four arts disciplines contained in the Alaska State Standards were referenced: **Visual Arts, Music, Drama and Dance**. Native arts are woven into these four disciplines in the Standards.

The 2008 Arts Education Survey results reflect some of the difficult challenges Alaskan districts face in these times. Even those with best intentions and community support have shifted priorities over the last five years to meet federal and state accountability demands.

### *Barriers to Providing Arts Instruction*



# Survey Findings

## Curriculum And Instruction

**73%, or 23 of the districts reported they had no written district arts curriculum.** Of the ten districts which do, 10 have a district curriculum in music, 9 have one in visual arts, 4 have a curriculum in Native cultural arts and only three districts—Kodiak, Kenai and Fairbanks – have written curriculum in both Drama and Dance.

**Six Alaskan districts require one credit in the Fine Arts for graduation.** Haines, Wrangell, Pribilof Island require one arts course; Kenai requires three credits in the arts/industrial arts; Juneau and Delta Greely require one credit of either Fine Arts or World Languages.

*There has been a requirement for over a decade that Alaskan districts have written curriculum in the ten areas where there are state Standards; the Arts is one of those ten areas. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development no longer monitors districts for compliance with this regulation.*

**In at least 20 districts, elementary students in Alaska receive formal arts education on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, typically for 30 to 40 minutes at a time.** Nine districts reported that their students receive NO arts instruction; two said it only occurred rarely. Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Yukon Koyukuk, Yakutat and Mat Su districts have Elementary Visual Art Specialists who travel to schools teaching children and modeling lessons for teachers so that they too learn principles and elements of design. Fifteen districts have at least one elementary music teacher to deliver music instruction to students.

**Secondary students are most likely to have the opportunity to take elective classes in Band (21 districts), General Visual Arts (20), Photography (20), Choir (19), Drawing/ Painting (17).** To a lesser degree students may elect to take one semester classes in Video/Film Production, Ceramics, Alaska Native Arts, Digital Art, or General Music. Few have the chance to take classes such as Music History, Orchestra, General Theater, Stage Acting, Printmaking, Art History or Crafts.

None of these districts conduct any district wide assessments in any of the four art disciplines. Twenty-three districts reported that teachers develop their own arts assessments. Several districts indicated that Art and Music are subjects graded on elementary report cards.

## Art Teachers

Most arts instruction for elementary students is taught by their classroom teachers. At the high school level Visual Art and Music courses are intended to be taught by Highly Qualified teachers, designated as such by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. In 2007 of a total of 1,353 arts classes taught, 81% of them were taught by a Highly Qualified teacher with background and training in the discipline they were teaching.

***One third of responding districts have no Highly Qualified (HQ) teachers in Visual Arts (10 districts) or Music (13 districts). Twenty districts have no HQ teachers in Drama.***

***There is a total of 138 HQ teachers in Visual Arts, 114 in Music and 20 in Drama in these districts.*** With a total teaching force in the state of roughly 8,000 teachers this equates to less than 2% in Music and Visual Arts and less than 1% in Drama.

At the same time there are likely to be teachers who are not Highly Qualified who are teaching secondary courses, particularly in rural Alaska. Parents are notified when their students are not being taught by an HQ teacher. Anyone teaching visual arts or music courses are encouraged to join the Alaska Art Education Association or the Alaska Music Educators Association, both of which are state affiliates of national organizations that provide support and advocacy.

*There are K - 12 State Standards in Visual Arts, Music, Drama and Dance, adopted by the State Board of Education in 1996. There is no graduation requirement in the Arts at the state level. Alaska does not specify any instructional time allocations*

**A May 2005 Harris Poll** on the attitudes of Americans toward arts education, commissioned by Americans for the Arts, revealed strong public support. Among the findings:

- 93% agree the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education for children
- 86% agree an arts education encourages and assists in the improvement of a child's attitudes toward school
- 83% believe that arts education helps teach children to communicate effectively with adults and peers.

**Students who participate in arts learning** experiences often improve achievement. A well documented national study found students with high arts involvement performed better on standardized achievement tests, watched fewer hours of TV, participated in more community service and reported less boredom in school." "Involvement in the Arts and Success in Secondary School", by James Cantrell, 2002.

**The Artist in Residence program** of the Alaska State Council on the Arts provided residencies in 39 schools across Alaska during the 2007 – 8 school year. Teaching Artists did residencies in Drama, Dance, Visual Arts, Music, Storytelling, Mural Making, and Creative Writing. Schools and districts matched state and federal dollars to enable these residencies, which enriched whatever regular arts instruction was provided locally.

**A four year follow up study** of the 2004 Professional Development Basic Arts Institute in Juneau found that:

- Every participant gained confidence to teach the arts; most valued learning research and rationales for why the arts are important for all students.
- More of these teachers now teach the arts on a daily basis than they did before the Institute.
- Teachers perceived increases in student motivation and interest in schooling, improvements in behavior, growth in knowledge, skills and perception of the arts, and transfer of attitude and knowledge to other subject areas.

- 161 Alaskan educators have attended Basic or Advanced Arts Institutes thus far.

—“Lasting Impact: A Four Year Follow Up Report on the 2004 Basic Arts Institute”, by Annie Calkins, 2007.

## Glacier Valley Elementary School

in Juneau, Alaska was selected as one of five Schools of Distinction by the Kennedy Center in 2007. It was the first time an Alaskan school was awarded this distinction. Sixty five students traveled to perform “Tides and the Tempest” on stage at the Kennedy Center.



## For 27 years, the Fairbanks School District

has funded the legendary Visual Arts program, staffed by five Highly Qualified visual arts teachers who design and teach comprehensive visual art lessons in classrooms across the district, modeling for teachers how to deliver high quality arts instruction. Lessons are developed into Art Kits and made available to teachers for their own use for years to come. Over 400 kits, many of which are tied directly to other subject areas are routinely rotated to teachers upon request. In 2005 the district was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Model Development and Demonstration grant to revise the kits, conduct research on the impact of teacher professional development and student art instruction in Juneau and Kotzebue, export sets of kits and training to Alaska schools, and provide two week summer Visual Arts Institutes in Fairbanks . Results of the three year research study, which compared classes where trained teachers used the kits to those without, will be available in March, 2009. Sixty-six teachers have been trained in Summer Institutes and over 60 trained in two to three day workshops; 830 kits have been distributed to Alaskan districts.

**The Anchorage School District's** Music Program has long been highly recognized and applauded. From Kindergarten to Grade 6, all Anchorage students attend Elementary Classroom Music, where they learn fundamental music concepts and apply this knowledge in many activities - listening, performing and creating. K – 5 children receive one hour of instruction each week, usually presented in two 30 minute classes. Many elementary schools have before or after-school performing groups such as choir or recorder ensembles. In 6th grade students receive one 30 minute class per week and are offered their first elective music class: either band or orchestra. 6th Grade Band/ Orchestra introduces them to traditional instrumental ensembles and prepares them for continued study during middle and high school. Orchestra and Band are taught as separate classes three times a week for 45 minutes. Middle and High Schools offer music classes as electives, which are either standard or alternative. Standard electives are based on curricula written and approved by the district and are more “traditional” in nature. They usually have instructors who are specialists in that particular elective area. Alternative electives are special interest courses, like Beginning Guitar or Keyboard, and provide learning opportunities based on student interest, faculty expertise and community involvement. Over the last three decades Anchorage music students have received many honors, earning them and the district regional and national recognition.

## **Resources And Opportunities**

*There is no designated budget for arts education at the Alaska Department of Education. Every year, the Alaska State Council on the Arts provides approximately 40 Artist in School residencies across the state. In addition, through a contract with the Rasmuson Foundation, they administer \$60,000 in grant funds for K-12 arts education opportunities outside the school day.*

***72% of responding districts have no line item budget allocation for the arts.*** Of the districts who do, funds spent last year ranged from \$1 - \$1,000 (7 districts) to in excess of \$75,000, in Anchorage and North Slope Borough school districts. Eighteen districts reported that they spent no funds on the arts.

***Half the districts surveyed indicate they have had no outside sources of funding to help provide arts instruction to students in the last three years.*** Of those who do maintain on-going partnerships with local arts agencies and cultural organization, they solicit and receive financial support from sources such as the Alaska State Council on the Arts, Alaska Arts Education Consortium, local PTAs, federal grants, local/regional businesses, Native corporations, local arts councils, private foundations and city/borough governments.

Fourteen superintendents mentioned funding as the key to increasing arts education in Alaskan schools – for staffing, equipment, materials and space. *“Funding for small Bush schools is the major issue....more and more NCLB seems to be driving instruction. We try our best to offer some basic Visual Arts courses and a beginning guitar class with support from the staff and community.”*



## **Professional Development**

*At the state level, regular professional development in arts education is provided through the following opportunities: Anchorage School District Summer Academy, Alaska Arts Education two-three week summer institutes, University of Alaska courses offered on an on-going basis, and through events like the Fairbanks and Sitka summer Fine Arts Festivals.*

***40% of the districts surveyed had no professional development in the arts last year.*** Another 40% offered workshops for staff with professional artists or local arts groups. One quarter cited workshops offered by Artists in Residence. Six districts hosted building-level in-services, credit courses, or large group presentations with visiting performers.

***According to these superintendents the Greatest Need is for professional development where teachers learn skills and strategies to integrate the arts across the curriculum.***

Over half indicate there is a Great Need for professional development in the Visual Arts. 40% cite a Great Need for teacher training in Native Cultural Arts, Theater or Music.

## Overall Observations

- ▶ Although most Alaskan school districts offer some arts education, arts offerings vary dramatically.
- ▶ Access to the arts for all students is a major challenge. Thousands of Alaskan students do not receive any formal arts education.
- ▶ Some schools are doing a great job of providing Visual Arts and Music education in particular to students.
- ▶ Drama lags far behind Visual Arts and Dance is almost non-existent in Alaska's public schools.
- ▶ If Alaska students are to be ready, well equipped and competitive for 21<sup>st</sup> jobs and careers they will need the skills and habits of mind that are taught and practiced in the arts.
- ▶ Districts rely on partnerships with local arts councils, Alaska State Council on the Arts, businesses, the Rasmuson Foundation and tribal councils to support arts experiences and instruction for students.
- ▶ Many districts need arts curricula to guide what should be taught.
- ▶ Classroom teachers, especially elementary teachers, would benefit from training in arts integration, to strengthen their repertoire of effective teaching strategies, better meet the needs of diverse learners, and increase student motivation, interest and joy in learning.
- ▶ District superintendents cite No Child Left Behind mandates and a lack of funding as the main challenges to providing more arts education.
- ▶ There is interest among school leaders for more assertive leadership and advocacy on behalf of arts education.

## Alaskan Districts Responding to 2008 Arts Education Survey

Anchorage	Lower Yukon
Annette Island	Matanuska Susitna
Chatham	Mt. Edgecumbe
Delta Greely	Nenana
Denali	North Slope
Dillingham	Northwest Arctic
Fairbanks	Pelican
Galena	Petersburg
Haines	Pribilof Island
Hydaburg	St. Mary's
Iditarod	Skagway
Juneau	Southeast Island
Kenai	Unalaska
Kodiak	Wrangell
Kuspuk	Yakutat
Lower Kuskukwim	Yukon Koyukuk



## **The Alaska State Council on the Arts**

is a division of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The Council has, as one of its major goals to “ensure access to arts education” across the state. Strategies for achieving this goal include:

- (1) Increasing arts education experiences for K – 12 students
- (2) Developing opportunities for lifelong learning through the arts; and
- (3) Supporting professional development for artists, arts educators and classroom teachers.

