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Culminating Project Narrative

Wisburn Unified School District Arts Planning Process

Sequential. Comprehensive. Equity. These are the some of the words that echoed in my ears for three months while I participated in the district arts planning process for Wisburn Unified. Being in the special position of working for an arts provider that delivers programs to the district's elementary and middle schools, I was invited to participate in a much-needed revamp of their arts plan. We held two and a half days of meetings across three months in early 2016, facilitated by a planning coach from Arts for All. The results of our planning process and my subsequent meetings with district officials highlighted three main areas for work in the next three years: 1) Creating sequential pathways in the arts disciplines that are currently offered, 2) Positioning Wisburn as an art-rich school district by offering a comprehensive arts program, and 3) Adding programming to ensure that students in each elementary school receive equal access to arts programs.

Upon examining current arts offerings in the district with Superintendent, Tom Johnstone, we discovered that music and visual arts were the most offered disciplines across schools. However, there was not always alignment in skills taught from grade to grade and school to school. For this reason we identified as a priority aligning curricula in each discipline by convening teachers and providers in each area and identifying gaps in skills and instruction. The intended result will be K-12 pathways in both music and visual arts for students at every school.

The district's arts offerings survey that went out to principals from each school also revealed a real lack of opportunities for students in the areas of theatre, dance, and media arts. Only some students at some schools in certain grades could have access to after-school programs, electives, or short-term in-school residencies in these three areas. Our Community Arts Team was collectively very committed to increasing offerings in theatre arts, and the new arts plan outlines an increase in theatre programming, plans for theatre facilities in the new high school, and regular arts planning meetings to work toward the goal of more comprehensive offerings in the performing arts.

Being a relatively small school district, with three elementary, one middle, and three charter high schools (that will soon be combined into one), Wisburn USD is able to allow each of its schools to operate rather independently, with principals making decisions about programming for their sites based on the needs of their unique school communities. However, that has resulted in some schools offering arts programs the other schools do not (and in some cases, didn't even know about). So the unintended, I believe, result of arts programming decisions being made at the school level is an variable inequity of access to the arts across the district. Fortunately all administrators, teachers and community partners are committed to making a high quality arts education available to all of their students. Through further arts planning meetings, we will align arts offerings at all three elementary schools.

Through my participation in the ACTIVATE cohort I was able to network with other arts education professionals while learning valuable skills about how to communicate and advocate for the arts to a variety of audiences. I was invited on to the arts steering committee for my district through my organization's relationship to them as an arts provider, but having the support of Arts for All along the way made it so much richer of an experience for me. Now that the revision of the district arts plan is complete, the Superintendent has asked me to lead ongoing meetings of a smaller arts steering committee to keep the district arts plan on track and moving forward. We hope to convene early this summer and continue meeting quarterly through the next year, with some big goals in the distance, and always moving toward building a more sequential, comprehensive and equitable arts education program for the Wiseburn Unified School District.