

ACTIVATE Arts Education Advocacy Proposal:

Connect with other media arts educators and community arts partners to create a task force for Rory Pullens, to gather all the data of industry partners, equipment donated available to schools severed against Arts Equity Index to be the connection between the industry expertise, students and schools and effective curriculum.

I started the nine-month training in arts education advocacy not knowing what to expect nor having any specific project in mind. I did hope it would help bolster my struggling media arts program, Mobile Film Classroom. Although I've been teaching arts education to grades 3-12 to students of diverse backgrounds throughout Los Angeles County since 2008, I remained fairly ignorant of the bureaucracies and the people who create policies for, or counter to, strong arts education programming. It was time I learned. The ACTIVATE program encouraged us to become solution partners, not to simply point out what is broken, but to become the one that helps fix it. When Rory Pullens, the fairly new Executive Director of LAUSD's Arts Education Branch, met with the LAUSD cohorts at The Armory in January, I listened intently as he outlined his efforts to increase arts education throughout the district by enlisting Hollywood studios to "adopt" schools and provide students with equipment, mentorships and training as a way to reverse the layoffs that have decimated the curriculum. I thought "ok, great... but who is going to teach the educators and students how to use this gear? Will industry professionals know how to translate their expertise in a way that students can understand? Will it be talks or will it be hands on learning?" My program came into being in the early 2000's to fill these very gaps. In the 8 years I've been working in schools, I've been brought in to teach after award winning filmmakers tried to teach kids to make their own films with little success. Time and again, teachers and administrators found our program was more successful teaching students the technology, team work, problem-solving and to authentically tell their story. I thought putting together a "task force" of media arts programs and educators to advise and serve as a bridge between the industry and the classroom, since we regularly move between those cultures, would be my project. I met Rory's project

manager, Jill Beale, at the March Community Arts Partners meeting and pitched her my project. Jill assured me she'd bring it to Rory's attention. I followed up but didn't get an answer until mid-April. I learned that Alyson Reed, who was hired to reach out to industry partners and manage donations didn't want to bring any additional actors into the process at this time. My project had hit a major road block. I was overwhelmed with running my organization and lacked any resources to hold a gathering of other media arts educators. I did however keep the conversation going with Jill. We discussed how, in Los Angeles, the home to the film industry, there wasn't a city wide youth film festival and we want to see what we can do to change that. Part of being a solution partner is listening and creating relationships. I introduced Jill to Jennifer Cano, Director of Digital Learning with LA's BEST. Jennifer and I are founding members of the Los Angeles Digital Literacy Alliance, a volunteer coalition of stakeholders involved in expanding digital literacy to all Los Angeles students and connecting people and organizations to resources. My initial task force idea didn't get off the ground but through making these connections and building relationships, I will continue to advocate and develop instructional programs around media literacy and to educate our youth to bring more diversity to Hollywood.

Fast forward to early May, a fellow LAUSD ACTIVATE member, Paul Robak emails and says he has scheduled a meeting with Rory Pullens on May 12th, and asks if anyone one else wants in. I was the first to respond "hell, Yes!" Paul Robak, Sylvia Hathaway Chavez, Moza Mjasiri Cooper, Sarah Holland, Angela Dyborn and myself had a conference call the night before the meeting to discuss our goals and concerns and come up with an agenda for the meeting. A quick look on the Arts Education Branch website showed that there wasn't a vision statement, so we decided to begin the meeting by asking Rory to share the vision of the Arts Education Branch. This meeting was going to be about listening and finding out his goals and how we can align ourselves to them to help increase arts education throughout the district. Our goal collectively is to be involved as part of an "Arts Education Advisory Council." What we learned at this 45-minute meeting was Rory's vision for the Arts Education Branch and

he expressed the goal to collaborate and partner with the broader arts community: Industry, Community Arts Partners and Philanthropy. He emphasized the workforce pipeline, that skills learned through arts education can lead to an occupation, especially in a region where 1 out of 6 jobs are in the creative industry. Access and equity are key priorities with 84% of LAUSD schools qualifying as Title I. Greater visibility of what arts education currently exists is needed to see the disparity between local districts of what arts disciplines and programs are available. Rory said a key focus is on vertical alignment - a coordinated use of community arts partners (CAP), especially in middle school where the least amount of arts education is being offered. We also learned he has a five year \$5,000,000 budget allocated for CAP at \$1,000,000 per year.

He does have several task force committees set up looking at issues like vertical alignment. There is also a pilot of 46 schools in East and Northeast of a “Creative Network” in grades 2-6 of every arts discipline. Current duration is 9 weeks, goal is to lengthen it to one semester. Unfortunately, LAUSD just reduced middle school arts from one semester to 9 weeks, but Grades 9-12 will get to add one elective teacher. The decision for which art disciplines at which school still rests with the principal. He suggested the initial areas that ACTIVATE could be of use were through social media and to work with local districts to put on arts festivals, as well as being able to speak up at school board meetings in a way that someone with LAUSD bureaucracy is unable. We closed by thanking him for his time and asked for follow up meetings, as well as the possibility of having input with his advisory committee.

At the end of nine months of training with ACTIVATE, I learned much more about how LAUSD operates, began relationships with key decision makers and discovered that it is much more effective to work in a team, as the six of us did in meeting with Rory Pullens, to advocate for a seat at the table and to get into a position where my voice can be heard. I will continue working with Paul and the others to have input as part of an arts education advisory council, work with Jill to establish a youth film festival and

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continue to ask questions about the effectiveness of working with the industry, since according to a recent article by Christine Armario revealed that “Most of the donations have not reached students yet. [Alyson] Reed said the district is still assessing how the equipment will be dispersed.”