

# **Arts for Academic Achievement**

## **Perspectives of Long-Term Teachers and Principals**

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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes perspectives of teachers and principals who have been involved in Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA) for multiple years. Through teacher focus groups and telephone interviews with principals, the study participants talked about the benefits of AAA that they had observed for students and teachers, and what they had learned over the years about integrating the arts and partnering with artists.

### Results from Teacher Focus Groups

The results from the teacher focus groups indicate that the teachers value arts-integrated instruction because of the benefits they see for students. In their discussions they eagerly described the multiple ways that AAA had helped their students including the following:

**A Place to Shine.** Teachers noted that arts-integrated instruction gives students who struggle academically a “place to shine” and gives them “a feeling of success in school.” Arts-integration can also help students see themselves differently and find their niche.

**Value for Students who are English-Language Learners.** Several teachers made a point of mentioning how arts-integration has helped their students who are English language learners. Two of the teachers mentioned examples where they think arts-integration helped ELL students to understand vocabulary because it gave them a visual representation or a kinesthetic experience to connect with the words they were trying to learn.

**Peer Relationships** Several teachers mentioned that arts-integration helped students develop skills in working together and built community in a school. Through arts-integration projects students learned to collaborate and suspend their assumptions about each other

**Academic Learning.** The teachers also noted how arts-integration has helped students remember and understand the academic content of the arts-integrated lessons.

In addition to student benefits, teachers described how their involvement in AAA had changed their practice and given them an opportunity to see new capacities in students. Looking back on the arts-integration projects they had participated in over the years, they noted how the connections between the arts and the curriculum have gotten more substantial. They also noted their changed perspective on artist and teacher roles during arts-integrated instruction and the importance of planning and reflecting together.

Overall, the teachers were very enthusiastic about and appreciative of the opportunities they had received by participating in AAA. They were also realistic, however, in mentioning some of the challenges of this work, such as making time to collaborate with an artist and integrate

the arts given increased class sizes and the pressure to improve students' scores on standardized tests in reading and mathematics.

## **Results from Principal Interviews**

Principals' perceptions about AAA are very similar to those of teachers. Their interview responses indicate that they see AAA as a means to accomplish the school's goals rather than an initiative that stands apart from what the school is already trying to do for students. The principals readily described how their school's involvement in AAA was beneficial. Dominant themes in their comments were that AAA levels the playing field for all students and provides a wider range of ways to teach students.

Principals were asked to think back to when their building first got involved and reflect on what they have learned about having AAA in their building. One principal was initially concerned about how AAA might take time away from the classroom. Now, he/she sees that "if the program is set up correctly" it benefits classroom learning goals. Another described how his/her expectations have grown from viewing AAA as a residency experience to expecting that AAA projects will enhance what teachers are already doing in the curriculum.

## **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

The voices of long-time AAA teachers and principals strongly indicate that involvement in AAA benefits students and teachers. Each of the participants was unequivocal in their support for AAA, even though they recognize that it takes time and energy to execute it successfully. The experiences they described illustrate the value of AAA's policy of providing multiple years of support for teachers and artists to develop their partnership and multiple years to develop, implement, and refine their arts-integrated instruction. The participants were also frank about the challenges of integrating the arts, particularly in the present education context with its emphasis on standardized testing and annual budget reductions. To continue to support Minneapolis teachers and principals in fulfilling the vision of AAA, program staff may want to consider the following:

1. Continue to develop the role of AAA coach to help deepen teachers' understanding of how to integrate the arts and support teachers as they attempt to navigate a complex education climate that often presents obstacles for achieving the vision of AAA.
2. Explore options for spreading the knowledge of long-term AAA teachers and principals beyond schools and classrooms most typically involved in AAA.
3. Continue to work with district staff and administration to align AAA and the other major initiatives present in the district. The alignment must go beyond the philosophical in order to make a difference in the day-to-day realities of teachers.

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## Introduction

This report summarizes perspectives of teachers and principals who have been involved in Arts for Academic Achievement for multiple years. Through teacher focus groups and telephone interviews with principals, the study participants talked about the benefits of AAA that they had observed for students and teachers, and what they had learned over the years about integrating the arts and partnering with artists.

### Design and Methods

As noted above, the purpose of the study was to gather perspectives from long-time AAA teachers and principals about the benefits of AAA that they had observed for students and teachers, and what they had learned over the years about integrating the arts and partnering with artists. In June 2007, CAREI evaluators facilitated three 90-minute focus groups with AAA teachers. One focus group involved specialist teachers who were AAA teachers, site coordinators, or both. A second focus group included non-specialist AAA teachers and a third group involved non-specialist AAA coordinators. CAREI evaluators also conducted individual telephone interviews in June with principals whose buildings had been involved in AAA for multiple years.

AAA staff provided the evaluators with a list of candidates for each focus group and the principal interviews. The sole criterion for inclusion was that the person had been involved in AAA for multiple years. Participation in the study was voluntary and teachers were offered an incentive of \$45 to participate. The evaluators developed a set of questions for each focus group and the principal interviews in consultation with AAA staff. Each focus group discussion and interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. To encourage frank responses, participants were assured that their comments would remain anonymous. The evaluators reviewed the transcripts to identify themes in participants' responses.

A total of 18 teachers participated in the focus groups. Five were specialist teachers who served as the AAA site coordinator in their building and 13 were non-specialist teachers, 6 of whom were the AAA site coordinator in their building. Over half of the 18 teacher participants had been involved in AAA since it began in 1998. A majority of the teachers worked in either a K-5 (6) or a K-8 building (6), but 4 worked in a middle school and 2 worked in a high school. Of the 5 specialist teachers, 2 were visual arts specialists, 2 were music specialists, and one was a dance specialist. Only 2 of the specialists had worked with an artist in their art classroom; their primary role in AAA was to serve as the site coordinator.

A total of 4 principals participated in an interview. Two were principals at a K-5 school, 1 was the principal of a K-8 school, and the other was the principal of a middle school. Each of them had been a principal for at least 5 years in a building involved in AAA.

Caution is recommended in generalizing the findings in this report to long-term AAA teachers and principals as a whole. The number of participants was small relative to the large number of people who have been involved in AAA over the past decade, and teachers and principals who chose to participate in the study may have had experiences that are notably different than those that did not participate. Because none of the principals and only two of the teachers were from a high school building, the results may best portray the experiences of teachers and principals working in grades K-8. Nonetheless, the information in this report does present the voices of many long-term AAA participants and this fact, in itself, has value for understanding the program and its consequences for students and teachers.

## Results from Teacher Focus Groups

By collecting data from teachers and principals who had been involved in AAA for multiple years, the evaluators and staff hoped to gain an understanding of the outcomes of AAA over time. For example, what are the cumulative effects of AAA involvement on teachers and how does this affect the students they work with each year? AAA staff were also interested in understanding the extent to which changes in the program are reflected in the understandings and practices of AAA teachers and principals, and what could be done to strengthen the program in the future. This was clearly a productive strategy. The participants could reflect on the numerous partnerships they, or their schools (in the case of coordinators who had not worked with arts partners themselves), had been involved in over the years and draw on this depth of experience to answer the questions.

### Benefits for Students

The teachers value arts-integrated instruction because of the benefits they see for students. In their discussions they eagerly described the multiple ways that AAA had helped their students.

#### A Place to Shine

Teachers noted that arts-integrated instruction gives students who struggle academically a “place to shine” and gives them “a feeling of success in school.” Arts-integration can also help students see themselves differently and find their niche. As some of the teachers said,

*“For those that aren’t necessarily as good at the stiff, academic kinds of stuff, and really I think we all need the fine arts, they really show themselves so much in the fine arts. They may not show themselves in reading, they may not show themselves in math, they may not show themselves in science, but when you do it through the fine arts, it’s amazing what they can do and accomplish and how good they feel about themselves. And I think that’s so very important for all of us and for many of the children that we’re working with, that they feel good about themselves. And I think the fine arts really play a big part in that, the exposure to it.”*

*“I had 3 kids that won the talent show and their talent was reading poetry. And they really, really believe they are not just writers, but poets. And they look at themselves differently because of that experience. They believe that they see the world through the eyes of a poet, that they look at the world more closely and more carefully than other people do. And it’s a very empowering thing to do. . . . They explore; they’re willing to play with language in a way that I haven’t had [in students] before I started so intensely in poetry. I have a handful of [middle school] boys who really love writing poetry and they do it in their spare time.”*

*“I think it [poetry, spoken word] fits the niche for the kids who don’t necessarily fit into a group, especially the academic group. And being able to compete; and they’re winning. They’re not the sports kids, they’re not the academic kids, and they’re not the drama kids. They’re the hip-hop kids and they have a place and they feel comfortable. They feel a part of school. And I have kids now who’ve been doing this and moved into high school who are on the radio. It’s just become part of their lives.”*

### Value for Students who are English Language Learners

Several teachers made a point of mentioning how arts-integration has helped their students who are English language learners. Two of the teachers mentioned examples where they think arts-integration helped ELL students to understand vocabulary because it gave them a visual representation or a kinesthetic experience to connect with the words they were trying to learn. As one teacher said,

*“When you show them a picture of a tree they can say root, and branch, and leaves, trunk, and tree. They can identify it and I really believe it’s not just because we had the science poster up with the tree. It’s because we did that activity with the artist where each child became a tree. This is your trunk [points to torso]; your feet were what you planted to the ground, and then you had your branches [spreads arms and fingers]. Then we had the children lie down and they became roots. One child remained standing as a tree and the others grabbed onto their legs as roots. And then the tree started to sway in the wind.”*

### Peer Relationships

Several teachers mentioned that arts-integration helped students develop skills in working together and built community in a school. One teacher, who said that over the years he/she has had a lot of success, through arts-integration projects, in helping students learn to collaborate and suspend their assumptions about each other noted,

*“How amazing it is when you’re really intentional and build possibilities for kids to be really successful as collaborators. . . . Some of the things that I’ve seen again and again in these projects have to do with learning how to suspend your assumptions about others. And being more reflective about your own work, but also about the work of others around you who you have assumptions about because you sit in classes all day and people think certain ways about them.”*

Teachers also talked about how students have learned to respond to each other’s work and have started to feel it is safe to share their work with their peers.

### Enduring Value

Many teachers talked about the lasting value arts-integration projects seem to have for students, either in terms of long-term learning or as a powerful, memorable experience in the classroom. As an example, one teacher told a story about 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, who recalled a song they had written for an opera the previous year,

*“Here’s 4 boys on the floor in the hall on this big piece of paper painting a forest fire for their opera [this year]. And they’re singing the song they wrote for the opera. Meanwhile, at the end of the hall the 5<sup>th</sup> graders come down to their lockers. About 5 boys noticed the students on the floor painting and singing and the 5 boys burst into one of their songs from last year. And it was like dueling banjos. The ‘Natural Disasters Happen Naturally’ got louder and ‘Jambo’ got louder. And I stood there and laughed because I thought ‘What more could you ever want than to have the kids remember those kinds of things?’”*

Others remarked on the long-term value of arts-integration for their students,

*“Our art experiences are what they talk about when they come back, when they hang out with each other. I had a group of kids that I had probably 4 or 5 years ago come back yesterday. And that’s one of the things they talked about. ‘Remember our puppet performances? Remember when the head fell off?’ And even when we didn’t have an artist in, but just an arts-integrated thing, students talk about it and they remember and it inspires them. And you hear about it much later. ‘Remember when we did those plays about dadada?’ Or, ‘Remember when we did our poetry performances?’ You know, it’s what they remember and it’s pretty deep learning when they come back. When they have it in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then they come back in high school or after high school, and they still remember 6<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s pretty big learning for them.”*

*“I think that the arts bring the joy back into learning as well as the depth of the experience. It’s something, as you said, that they bring with them into high school. It’s not the rote worksheets they’re going to bring with them. I think that’s a huge part; it may be immeasurable, unquantifiable.”*

### Academic Learning

The teachers also noted how arts-integration has helped students remember and understand the academic content of the arts-integrated lessons. For example, one teacher talked about her first experience with an arts partner and how incorporating movement helped students learn,

*“And we sat down and we developed a lesson around the solar system, rotation, and revolution. And he designed these dance movements to teach those concepts. We went out on the front yard at school and we practiced them and we pretended that we were planets, and approaching planets and getting into the gravitational space. And then later, I was giving a quick review for a test and the kids just looked at me like they had no clue what was I talking about, like we hadn’t studied it at all. And then I stopped and I had one of the kids come up. I didn’t say a single thing to them, but I started doing the motions. And after that, the kids just, all of a sudden, they knew all of the answers.”*



Another teacher talked about gains he/she has documented in mathematics and how students have come to see the artist's involvement as a solution to content they struggle with,

*"I do see a lot of academic gains. And I'm sure you all do, too, it just hasn't been said. So just for the record, we know a lot of kids do show academic gains by bringing in artists, which is pretty amazing. I have the kids from 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and I have them for 8<sup>th</sup> grade math this year. It's just a little story to add to all these stories. [In previous years], students [have struggled] with negative and positive integers. And I said to them that when [artist name] comes this year, that's what we're gonna focus on because they've been having so much trouble. And one of the kids just was, like, "Thank gosh." They couldn't wait for her to come because they were thinking that she was gonna fix the problem for them. 'That's the avenue. She's gonna come up with a strategy that [teacher name] hasn't come up with yet that I can't figure out.' And that's what I see. They see this as another way to think that hasn't been come up with either by themselves as a student strategy or a teacher strategy. Now we're gonna have another idea coming in and we're gonna see how it works. But as far as the statistics and the data, as far as my math class, I mean, the kids went from, I don't have it with me, but in the 20's and 30 percentile for being able to do addition and subtraction of negative and positive numbers to the between 70's and 90's. And so it was phenomenal. Pretty amazing. I don't know if they'll retain it, but they did within the last couple of months. So it was really amazing and the data's there."*

A coordinator described how the school's long-term involvement in AAA has been a factor in raising academic achievement,

*"We've done so many things to work on raising our academic achievement, but I think our AAA relationship since 1998 has really helped us academically in terms of the big tests. This past year our school was third from the top in terms of expected gains and first in terms of beating the odds [in reading and mathematics]. And the credit goes partly to the resident artist because we've been working with her for 6 years now."*

Another teacher concurred that there are academic gains and expressed frustration that the change doesn't show up on the tests, while another noted that the benefits may not be visible until sometime in the future,

*"I know there have been academic gains, but it doesn't come out in the tests. The things that I've done, it doesn't show up, because now they're thinking differently and they're using different word choices [than those they hear in hip-hop lyrics] because they can't swear in their homes or with me so they have to think of different words and different ways to express things. So I know it's making a difference, but it doesn't show up traditionally."*

*"It might not be something that you're gonna see by June. It might not be something you're gonna see at all, but the future people may see it because you planted a seed."*

### Positive Challenge for Academically-Inclined Students

Finally, teachers talked about how arts-integration also benefits students who usually do well in academics because it “makes them stretch,”

*“Conversely, it also give students who normally do well academically, who can do all the worksheets, it kind of makes them feel uncomfortable and makes them stretch and grow, which is amazingly good for those kids, too. Because a lot of times they’re not very challenged in school.”*

### **Benefits for Teachers**

Although the benefits of arts-integrated instruction for students are clearly dominant in teachers’ minds when they are asked to look back at their years in AAA, the teachers also provided detail about how AAA has changed their practice and how they view students.

### Change in Teacher Practice

One benefit of AAA for teachers is how their work with an arts partner has expanded their tool kit of instructional strategies and, in general, helped broaden their vision to include other possible ways of teaching. Several teachers describe specific ways their practice has been affected by their work with an artist:

*“There are all the different kinds of movement strategies I learned from [artist name] to take back into my classroom and do more than I had ever done before. And more understanding that you have low space, middle space and high space, and that you really do need to take advantage of all those spaces. And really help kids understand that there are different levels.”*

*“The strategy of assigning students skits to show what you know from a unit is used in 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies and language arts throughout the year.”*

*“I just find myself integrating a lot of the things that I’ve learned from the artists to be so helpful when I’m teaching other subjects. I had a visitor in my classroom today and I just kept doing things. I was articulating to her, ‘This is a theater game and the reason we’re doing it is for focus.’ And it was not a theater lesson or anything; it was a transition-type activity.”*

*“This year I worked with a visual artist because our kids do not have an actual art class and I did not know how to teach them drawing. It felt like I was able to give them that opportunity, but then I was able to connect it to the work they were doing — whether they’re illustrating a math problem, their own stories, or doing a story map with pictures, things like that.”*

*“What you learned as a teacher really adds to the way you teach. When the artist isn’t around you can still use the word, you can use the vocabulary, and you can still talk about the drawing. And it just enriches what you’re able to give the children.”*

*“I’m always thinking kinesthetically now since dance math. As the kids are sitting in math class I’m thinking, ‘How can we get up and do this?’ I’ll think back to when we taught angles or three dimensional shapes and we’ll have a mini-lesson based on what I remember. I’m always just thinking multiple intelligences; outside the box. I bring a lot more songs into my day, and theater. The arts have enhanced my teaching so much.”*

Two teachers who had participated in an AAA course that focused on specific instructional strategies noted how effective the courses were for changing their practice,

*“We did the poetry writing. And you did 5 nights and then you have to write a paper. And then I also did Readers’ Theater with [artist name]. And so that means I went to a class, then we met. She came to my classroom, she modeled. Then we had a meeting. We talked about what she did and what I was going to do. Then I did it and she watched and took notes. Then we met again, so there was a lot of reflection, a lot of talking about what we were doing. And I thought that was a great way to set it up, to actually teach teachers how to integrate and use it more effectively. So that definitely changed my practice, because now I’m much more comfortable teaching Readers’ Theater, but really teaching Readers’ Theater.”*

*“And I’ve noticed a difference between just kind of taking some of the things I’ve learned from an artist and having an artist say, ‘This is how you do it.’ And I’d like to see AAA go more into that because I really think if the goal is to get teachers to integrate, and really apply what they’re learning from the artist, having the artist actually tell you what they’re doing really helps. It was a big step for me. And I have had [artist name] in my classroom the year before and I was using her tool kit and doing lots of the things that she had taught me. But having a class in which I sat down, I wrote and I used the tools in my writing. And then I had to take those same skills and go back to the classroom with them with like an assignment. Just say, ‘Okay. Now you did this with me, now go do it with your students.’ I thought that was a really effective way to really apply what you’ve learned.”*

The second teacher agreed,

*“Yeah, after going to a couple of ArtsLiteracy workshops, I definitely used a lot of reading strategies that we used in ArtsLiteracy. I used a lot. I mean, I’ve always had kids write after they read, but some of the ideas that they do with the writing, have the kids walk around with their writing, share just a line of their writing, instead of reading the whole thing which gets a little bit tedious sometimes.” After someone makes a comment, she continues, “So having them share a line, having them perform a line, having them do all those things with kind of shorter bits and pieces of text all that they’ve read and written. So I’ve used a lot of those ideas from arts literacy.”*

In addition to some specific strategies they picked up from their work with an artist, several teachers talked about how their experiences in AAA have expanded their comfort zone in

the classroom and their perspectives on the value of structure and flexibility with students. For example, one teacher commented,

*“I think for myself it’s just a step out of my comfort zone as a teacher. I’m the type of person that I want this to be done and this is the structure of my classroom. Well, that doesn’t work for everybody. It doesn’t work for all the kids and for me working with an artist, it’s just saying, ‘Okay. Let’s step over here, let’s go wild. You know, we’re gonna do this and that’s what’s gonna happen today.’ And that’s something that has really changed me as a person and as a teacher, to be able to do that and to allow these other avenues for the kids to follow.”*

Another teacher talked about how working with the artist had “freed her up” to be more accepting when students don’t follow the directions in certain situations. He/she had asked students to use crayons to color some leaves green for a springtime tree, but one boy made his leaves red. As the teacher said,

*“He does this kind of thing all the time. I mean, he loves colors. Everything is bright. The artist asked me what I wanted to do and I said ‘Well, I want to save them. We need to save them because I don’t want him to think that what he did isn’t important. On the other hand, part of this is following directions.’ So we saved what he had done for when we got to the autumn trees later on. Then, during a time of his choosing, he was able to make green leaves. But it was hard for me at first, because my initial reaction was to say ‘Look what he did.’ I think it’s about opening yourself up to being more creative, to taking chances. There are times students have choices and then there are times that if I give a direction, I would like students to follow them. Part of being in school is learning how to follow directions. So I try to give many opportunities for both.”*

Based on their enthusiastic remarks, teachers seem to value highly both the specific strategies they’ve incorporated from their work with artists and the broadened perspective they’ve gained. They feel AAA gives them options for meeting the needs of more students, students they may have been struggling to reach or not reaching at all.

### Seeing New Capacities in Students and Gaining Empathy

The teachers also remarked often on how AAA has helped them see capacities in students that they hadn’t seen before. Teachers describe seeing students in a different light,

*“It’s a cliché, but it should be on the record: the kids who love it the most are always the kids who never do very well [academically] in school. Those kids who don’t do well in reading or math, there’s always 1 or 2 that really shine. And you suddenly find out they are a great public speaker. Or, they have great stage presence. You know these things that you just had no idea about a kid and you look at them differently.”*

*“I think it’s helped me see some students in a different light. Different art forms bring out different characteristics in kids that I wouldn’t have seen otherwise. So, for me, it helps me at times to see kids in a different way and find different strengths that maybe I wouldn’t have given them the opportunity to show if I wasn’t working with an artist.”*

Teachers also talked about how some of the experiences they've had with artists in their classroom or as part of AAA workshops have helped them better understand what students might feel like when they're struggling to learn something or taking a risk.

*"I did several dance things and I'm so uncomfortable doing that. I chose to do that, but I knew that I wasn't going to be that good at it and I didn't want to take off my shoes or do anything. But I knew I needed to try. And it was with regular classroom teachers as well as dance artists. So you had the classroom teachers that were good at dance and you had the dance artists that were really good at dance, and then you had me who was a classroom teacher not good at dance. And I just was so uncomfortable. So it really helped me empathize with how my children feel when they're trying to learn something new that they don't think they can do very well. And so I could be much more gentle and more patient with them in any area because I know what it feels like."*

*"I think it's really helped me understand risk-taking, being with these kids, and then how to address that in a classroom. And how to walk through it and how to go through the stages of creation with kids. Some of them get stuck on the first page, you know, starting out with nothing and ending up with something, a finished product that's their own and can be proud of. And everything in between has really helped me understand that and, again, be more patient and calm, reassuring and sometimes kind of pushy. 'You have to do this. It's show time, come on.'"*

## **What Teachers Have Learned about Integrating the Arts and Partnering with an Artist**

In addition to asking teachers to reflect on how their long-term involvement in AAA has benefited their students and their teaching practice, the focus groups also gave teachers a chance to reflect on what they've learned over time about integrating the arts and working with an artist.

### Connecting Arts and Academics

As teachers considered the numerous arts-integration projects they had participated in over the years, they noted how the connections between the arts and the curriculum have gotten more substantial. The arts have become less of an add-on to the instruction and instead have become an integral part of the teaching process. For example,

*"I don't know if it was an assumption or just not being aware of how deeply you can integrate it into your curriculum. The connections are much stronger now and much more relevant with the more experience that I have with both working with artists and with the curriculum."*

When asked to give an example, the teacher replied,

*“One year I worked with the same artist at two different schools in two different grade levels. It was a puppeteer; and just the ability to use it within the 1st grade curriculum for reading and, also, the 3rd grade curriculum for reading where it wasn’t just someone was coming in and teaching us how to make puppets. He was coming in and also doing a lot with story structure for kids and character analysis, and then got into, and we actually went through production of, you know, how exactly do you paint. Things like that. So the kids were getting things about the art form, but also getting a lot of information about the curriculum through the art form. Very authentically, I thought. It didn’t feel like it was an add-on or doing it just because it looked like a fun project. It seemed very relevant and very connected to what they needed to know and learn; and they were able to express that knowledge through an art form versus a pencil/paper test.”*

Another teacher described the role of the arts standards in arts-integrated instruction,

*“I thought it would be much easier to do. Then we learned that you’re not just teaching the academics, but you’re also teaching the standards of the arts. And that’s what I found to be very exciting because I learned so much more about the arts. When I’m teaching the children a song or a dance or something, I can bring the standards of the arts into play at the same time as I’m teaching the language arts or math or whatever academic subject I’m teaching. I just find that so fun. . . . I really learned that they have to be of equal value, the art, as well as the academic, to really meld them and to do both at the same time.”*

One teacher told how testing pressure, in part, led her to change art forms and do projects that were more closely tied to the text they were using or themes from the curriculum,

*“With all the testing pressure, I know we haven’t spent as much time integrating the arts. Like I haven’t felt we have a week to create puppets, so we don’t do that anymore. But we have gone more towards Arts Literacy and Arts Literacy strategies where it’s more text-based, but kids are still performing and moving and using many different parts of things. But it’s not as much extra creative time, which is kind of sad, but kind of okay, too, because they’re still performing. . . . It’s [the arts content] just more deeply integrated. Because we still talk about performance and they’re creating with their bodies. It’s still very creative; it’s just that the basis is usually more text-driven or more thematically-driven. And the time that’s used is used more productively.”*

In her definition of arts-integration, another teacher illustrated the close connection between the arts and the academic content as, “Not less academics, but a different way of addressing academics.” Another said, “The artist and the teacher create a new thing. It’s not just equal partners, like oil and water that don’t mix. It’s the two coming together synergistically to create something new.”

### Importance of Collaborating with an Artist

Many teachers talked about their changed perspective on artist and teacher roles during arts-integrated instruction and the importance of planning and reflecting together. For example,

*“I used to think the artist should just come in and do their thing. That I needed to make it as easy as possible for them. That I needed to do the discipline so they didn’t have to. I thought my role was to make it easy and appealing for them to come in and do their thing. . . . Now I think it works better if the students see us teaching together. We share discipline; we share teaching.”*

*“She has a lot to offer, and I know the students, so I had a lot to offer her in terms of how things might work. I learned how important it is to have collaboration [planning] time with the artist so that you’re co-teaching instead of one teacher always knowing what was going on and the other one is just following, which is what a lot of my residencies had been prior to that. . . . If you don’t plan time in for the collaborating, the collaboration doesn’t get done. And then it isn’t as much of a team effort as it is a leader and follower effort.”*

*“I think a lot of that is being at the table together and planning together, because if you team teach you wouldn’t just say, ‘Okay, you’re gonna cover this.’ You’d think about what it is that happens in the classroom. For me the only time that really happens is if you’re really planning together and that takes time. And a different level of commitment.”*

*“She [the artist] is really able to do the co-planning with the teacher. The teachers have said they actually do plan how to make something new. It’s not just the artist coming in and doing their song and dance that they do all over the place. It’s completely different from that. It’s a brand-new project that’s developed between the teacher and the resident artist, so they’re actually co-teaching; they develop the curriculum together.”*

When asked to define co-teaching, a teacher illustrated the multiple roles teachers and artists play during arts-integrated instruction,

*“Sometimes it’s the artist introducing something and I might be doing more of the discipline modeling with students. Or sometimes it’s me doing a project with the actual artist. So, for example, with the puppeteer, I might do more about the story structure and he’s doing more about the puppets, but we’re both still involved in both aspects of it. When I was doing story structure, he might have been the participant with the kids.”*

Another teacher emphasized the value of the teacher and the artist identifying concepts that are shared across their disciplines,

*“We’ve been spending a lot of time developing just the shared concepts, so that when the artist is talking concepts in their art area, the teacher can talk about, ‘Well, that’s like such-and-such kind of learning.’ For example, rhythm in poetry and rhythm in music, so that when you’re talking about rhythm, even rhythm in speaking, rhythm in reading. And the artist comes in and talks about rhythm in music, then kids understand that there’s a concept that really permeates all academic areas and all parts of life because you’ve got rhythm in heart and stuff like that, too. But that to me is where we have to go with this.”*

Teachers have also realized that sometimes one of their roles in the partnership is to help an artist learn to work with education goals and with students. Two teachers described this realization as follows,

*“In working with an artist, maybe now I know not to assume that an artist understands educational goals. Maybe at first I would have thought they understood that more, but why would they? They’re an artist coming in so I’ve learned to be more articulate with them on our academic goals as well as our art goals. And AAA has helped with that by emphasizing academic goals and artistic goals.”*

*“Maybe the artist hasn’t worked with children before, so behavior and those kinds of things are new to them. But that’s something they can learn through you, just like you’re learning from what they’re doing.”*

Another teacher noted the challenge for some teachers in taking on this role with artists,

*“It’s just the fine balance between stepping on someone’s toes when they’re presenting something and going ‘Wow. If you modeled this it would really, really help them see what you’re doing.’ And just looking at things like pacing and classroom management. I have loved my experiences with artists, but sometimes I think there’s just a fine balance for both players. And sometimes I wonder about how to make that balance more equal. So it can be a true partnership.”*

As they reflected on their experiences over the years, several site coordinators noted that it can be difficult sometimes to find an effective artist. As one teacher said,

*“An artist may be knowledgeable about their art form, but may not have much experience working with students.”* Another teacher noted, *“Artists can be really wonderful artists, but this whole idea of working in the public school classroom or with a public school group – you just have to have another set of skills.”*

Over time, several coordinators have recognized the benefit of getting artist referrals from other coordinators or teachers who have worked with the artist, or even having the artist do a “try-out” with students at the school before either the artist or the school commit to each other for a full project.

## **Challenges**

Overall, the teachers were very enthusiastic about and appreciative of the opportunities they had received by participating in AAA. They also valued their long-term involvement in AAA because of what they’ve learned about connecting arts to the curriculum and working with an artist. The teachers were also realistic, however, in mentioning some of the challenges of this work.

The most common challenges mentioned by teachers who served as site coordinators were as follows:

- Getting teachers to make time to plan with the artists.
- Making sure the arts are integrated into the curriculum rather than an add-on.



- Getting more teachers in their building to participate.
- Fulfilling their coordinator duties when they are in the classroom full-time.

While some of these challenges may be inherent to implementing a program like AAA, some of them may be exacerbated by the pressure teachers feel to ensure their students make adequate yearly progress on standardized tests in reading and mathematics. One coordinator described how teachers still wanted their students to have the arts-integrated instruction, but they were reluctant to give up instructional time [in reading and math],

*“I noticed the teachers feeling pressured and feeling like they couldn’t give up time. And they started wanting it to happen in other places; ‘Well, let it happen during specialist time, or something’ because they, especially the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, felt like they had to be ready for testing and they just couldn’t afford to give up that many hours. They want it to happen but they don’t want it to come out of their time.”*

The role of site coordinator has gotten more complex as AAA has developed and asked teachers to use tools and processes to guide projects from planning through a final reflection. Many coordinators, especially those who teach full-time, said they found it difficult to facilitate the planning process with teachers on the various AAA projects in their school. With these added responsibilities they also struggled to make time to contact artists, handle contracts, and prepare reports for AAA. Several coordinators were appreciative and enthusiastic, however, about the AAA coaches who came out to their building in the past year to help with the materials. As one coordinator described, reflecting the words of many,

*“By having a coach that is helping with the materials, that’s helped a lot. Because, before I had a coach who would come in and help the teachers do the paperwork, I just did the paperwork. I’d say, ‘What are you doing for your project?’ and I would write it up. And I would tell them, ‘Your essential question is’ and I would just write it down, because I didn’t have the time. It is so lingo-loaded that I didn’t have the time to explain to them. And so I would just write it for them and they’d go, ‘It’s kinda like an objective.’ And then we’d do a lot of that. Having the coach come in and help the teachers do the planner has helped a lot. And so I do see that the world has changed some and now I feel much more like a facilitator. . . . Now I don’t feel like I have to be at every single meeting, because I just can’t. I mean, there’s no way. And that’s really been an improvement in AAA.”*

Teachers themselves talked about the challenges of making time to collaborate with artists and integrate the arts given increased class sizes and the pressure to improve students’ scores on standardized tests in reading and mathematics. Several teachers remarked that they now have less flexibility in how they can teach these subjects and this affects their opportunities for arts-integrated instruction. As one teacher said,

*“We plan to have as big of a block with the artists as we can, but given how we teach reading and math, there’s not as much flexibility. Under NCLB some things have become much less flexible. Our administrator last year had specific ideas about how to teach reading and math and it didn’t lend itself to doing things across content areas.”*

Many teachers also mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the multiple initiatives their buildings were involved in beyond AAA, such as Reading First, TAP, and IFL. Although most said

they recognize the overlap in the philosophies of some of these initiatives, such as AAA and IFL, the result was still too many meetings for them to attend and too many competing priorities for how they should teach. One teacher remarked, *“All these initiatives come in and nobody sits down long enough to say, ‘This is how they all fit.’”* When asked what effect the initiatives may have on how AAA occurs in a building, one coordinator replied,

*“What happens is that you think you can do it, that you know this artist or that you know how to collaborate with an artist, so you just shortchange the planning with them. You just have a quick conversation, or you just have them come in because you are so busy there isn’t time to develop it together.”*

Another coordinator said that AAA does take time, even if it is a way to address goals the school is already working towards. As a result, teachers are hesitant to participate,

*“We have so many [teachers] that feel so pressured and we have so many initiatives going on at school that teachers aren’t often willing to take on one more thing. And not because it’s necessarily one more thing, because I know that they see the inherent value. But it does end up taking more time. It takes time to sit with an artist, it takes time to plan; it takes time to do all that. And when you don’t have very many free minutes to begin with, it’s just been hard.”*

A final challenge results from the success of AAA in some schools and the increased number of teachers wanting to work with an artist. As more teachers in a school become interested in AAA, in most cases that means there is less AAA funding for each project. When funding for individual projects within a building gets tighter, it often means that teachers and artists don’t spend as much time planning together. This, in turn, can have a negative effect on the arts-integrated instruction and the ability of teachers and artists to develop a collaborative relationship. Reduced funding also means that the artists’ time with students is likely to be reduced; as one teacher described,

*“In the two years I’ve been at this school, our hours were cut this year because of the funding cut. So the artist wasn’t able to spend as many hours with the children as last year. And if the artist can only be there 6 times versus 10 times, and I’m not saying quantity is all that’s important, quality is certainly important, but it’s just that when there’s a lack of funding, something gets lost. She wasn’t able to spend as much time with the students or do as many things.”*

## **Results from Principal Interviews**

This section of the report summarizes the responses of principals during individual telephone interviews with the evaluator. As will be seen, principals’ perceptions about AAA are very similar to those of teachers.

## Benefits of Having AAA in Their Building

The principals' responses indicate that they see AAA as a means to accomplish the school's goals rather than an initiative that stands apart from what the school is already trying to do for students. As a principal noted,

*"It provides different materials and techniques to get us to the goals that we have as a school." Another said, "The idea is to think of it in terms of an integrated piece that complements something you are already doing, that impacts the delivery model for the teacher, and impacts the learning for the kids."*

The principals readily described how their school's involvement in AAA was beneficial. Dominant themes in their comments were that AAA offers a different perspective, provides a wider range of ways to teach students, and reaches a wider range of students. One principal remarked,

*I think it levels the playing field for all students. It gives students that may not necessarily excel in the academic areas of maybe reading and math and the core curriculum, but certainly they have skills and talents that are brought out through the arts. It gives them a feeling, and I think from that feeling of accomplishment and excelling that carries over into the classroom and it does affect and it does improve the learning in the classroom.*

Further, this principal described how arts-integration can provide a positive challenge for students who typically do well academically,

*It is also beneficial to students that may be on the flip side of that: students that excel in academic areas, but may not be able to excel in the arts. They are able to relate to some of the struggles that their peers are experiencing when they are concentrated on just math and reading.*

Just as AAA brings diversity to learning experiences, principals also see the arts as a way to bridge the diversity in their student population. As one principal noted,

*I think of the arts as a great melting pot, where all the cultures can come in. They used to think of America as being the melting pot. I think of the arts as having that kind of role. You can bring children in from various cultures, and various socioeconomic groups, and various circumstances and have them interact in a way that is humane. I think the arts will enhance that.*

Another principal, from a school that has a large proportion of Somali students, talked about how, through an AAA project, her students, who typically do Greek myths, had worked with Somali folktales.

The principals also see benefits for teachers because AAA expands their perspective on how to teach effectively. One principal said,

*“They see that doing things differently can be a real advantage to their classroom, not just an add-on. I think that has certainly opened their eyes and broadened them.”* Another principal described an artist residency as, *“A week of learning and reflecting and watching their class from a different point of view.”*

AAA also offers teachers an opportunity to realize new strengths in their students. One principal reflected on the effect of an artist’s work with students in a drumming workshop,

*“It allowed teachers to see children in a different light -- children they thought of as cast-offs as children having potential. And from that day they have been encouraging some of the special education children to join the band.”*

Another principal said,

*“I think AAA has been very positive. Teachers have seen how their students, all students, and especially those students that might struggle in math and the academics and reading, they are able to express themselves in new and different ways. So I think the teachers seeing what’s good for kids and seeing that all kids are more likely to be successful in one way or another, that I think the teachers certainly appreciate it and respect what does happen.”*

Principals also described how arts-integrated instruction can help students discover their strengths, gain confidence, and find their place in school. Noting cautiously that this was anecdotal evidence, one principal told a story about how participation in an AAA project helped a student who had immigrated recently,

*“He’s not a brilliant boy, but I think with acting he found his niche. [Name of arts-integrated project] has made a difference in him. It’s made a difference in the way he interacts with people, the way he interacts with other students and his level of confidence in his ability. He’s gotten more interested in school. His teacher tells me that he has done a better job academically this year since he has been succeeding in [project name]. We have something here called the 100 Books Club and this boy had never been a member. This year he was a member. So it just makes a big difference in the children.”*

Another principal talked about how students look forward to going to the class the artist is going to be working in. He described how middle school students experience an annual poetry slam residency,

*“The residency starts off with sort of a demonstration, a poetry slam where the resident artists are doing it for the kids. You get 100 or 200 middle school kids in an auditorium and to have them sit quietly and be focused with little to no disruption, that’s an amazing feat, and that’s what happens. And then as a result they all get pumped up to want to go back and do some writing and then some of them like to be in the final poetry slam and be the poet on the stage. So the residencies generate an enthusiasm and therefore a level of engagement that you don’t always see.”*

## What Principals Have Learned

Principals were asked to think back to when their building first got involved and reflect on what they have learned about having AAA in their building. One principal was initially concerned about how AAA might take time away from the classroom. Now, he/she sees that “if the program is set up correctly” it benefits classroom learning goals. Another described how his/her expectations have grown,

*“I would say, as the principal, I have expectations now that when I was first here it didn’t occur to me to be thinking about. So things like, for us, AAA often plays out in terms of supporting residencies and a residency is a nice thing. Somebody comes and does something for a week or two or three or whatever it is and then they’re gone, and that’s a great experience for what it is. But we’ve tried to get smarter about not making them just drop in things, but it’s something that is coming and then we figure out ways to make it fit with curriculum that’s already existing, so it’s enhancing what we are doing. Not another add-on piece or a random thing. And then look for ways that, when the residency is over, what can we take from that experience and embed in practice along the way.”*

Another principal recalled surprise in learning that some of the staff did not share his/her enthusiasm for incorporating the arts, “Some of the staff see it as a hindrance, as one more thing -- ‘Oh, my god, that too! These children don’t need to be distracted by that. They can barely sit down and now you bring them in here and some people are energized even more.’” The principal noted that over time some reluctant teachers have come on board because they have seen what arts-integration has done for some students in their school.

Although the principals’ remarks indicate their strong enthusiasm for AAA, they were also realistic about the challenges. The most commonly mentioned challenges were making sure arts-integration supports the curriculum, finding artists who can work well with their population of students, and encouraging teachers who are reluctant to participate or don’t want to make time for planning with the artist.

## What New Principals Need to Know about AAA

In addition to what they had learned over time about having AAA in their building, principals were asked for suggestions on how AAA staff could help principals whose buildings had not yet been involved in AAA become more familiar with the program. The principals offered several very practical ideas. Most importantly, they noted that a new principal may need opportunities to hear and experience what AAA can do for students, especially if they haven’t had an opportunity to see how the arts can affect student

engagement, student development, and student achievement. Several emphasized the value of having a new principal experience how arts-integration affects students. As one principal explained,

*“They should experience how it affects their students, or some students, and understand that some students need to be energized to learn. I would describe it as a hands-on activity. Unless you are in there to see it, you won’t know what is happening to your students. You have to go in, and you have to be a part of it. You have to know what’s happening. You have to be able to see beyond children getting up, moving, and doing things, and you have to see beyond. You have to see the learning that’s happening because of their interactions.”*

This principal also noted that visitors to his/her building often remark on students’ posted work because they recognize the depth of student learning that has occurred. This could be another avenue for helping new principals understand the value of AAA for their students.

Another principal noted the importance of showing new principals the evidence that arts-integration can support the curriculum,

*“I think taking the evidence and the data that shows that the arts do support the core curriculum and, with all the emphasis on test scores and so forth, that it isn’t going to have an adverse effect, and very likely, more than likely, it’s going to have a positive effect on those scores. So much of the time we are concerned that we get in our 120 minutes of reading or 90 minutes of math, and any time we are pulling students out we are affecting those minutes. But those minutes can be still addressed and still met by integrating arts into the curriculum and by classroom teachers and specialists collaborating together to make sure that that happens.”*

In addition to helping new principals experience and understand the value of AAA for students, one principal said it would be helpful to give new principals a one-page handout of arts-integration examples, *“like when you are applying for a grant and you can pull up a list of who got the grants and what they actually did. At least it would whet their appetite or show them what the options are.”*

The principals were also asked if there were things a new principal should understand about AAA in order to have success with the program in their building. In response, they indicated that new principals should understand the following: principal support is critical; each building needs a site coordinator with sufficient time available to work with AAA projects in their schools; arts-integration is different from art class; and that students need to be energized to learn.

- Principal support is critical. *“I think it has to be verbal support. They have to know that we think that’s important. The principal has to be at least a little bit of a cheerleader, be in those classrooms sometimes and see what’s going on and say it’s good or it’s not good so the staff knows what the principal thinks is important. So you need to do that. There’s always a little bit of money or a little bit of time. You’ve got to rearrange a schedule or you’ve got to do this or that. If the principal is a roadblock to that it can be done, but it certainly isn’t done in a supportive way. I think some of it is symbolic and some of it is a few bucks, just a little bit of time.”*

- Each building needs a site coordinator with sufficient time available. *“Well it doesn’t happen by itself. So somebody has got to have the time to coordinate it all. . . . When I say coordination that means a variety of things. It’s coordinating just the logistics if you get this pot of money, however big or small it is, and what you are going to do with it. There’s the managing of the budget and that whole piece of it. . . . But the other part of the coordination is in the planning process for thinking about residencies and working with teachers, helping them - somebody has got to sort of guide that process. Whether it’s somebody on a team of teachers that steps up and says we’d like to do this, or in a department if it’s a middle school and the language arts teachers say it together we want to do this in language arts. But in the end, it’s got to be somebody who is going to sort of pull it all together. I’ve seen teams of teachers that say ‘oh, we’d like to do something with poetry’, but because they are not necessarily connected to the arts or the arts community they don’t know beyond that where to go or how to make it happen. So if you’ve got somebody that’s in a coordinator capacity they can do that sort of legwork for people.”*
- Arts-integration is different from art class. *“There’s not just an art class where some kids take it, some kids don’t, or where the focus is on art skill to some degree. This is coming into a classroom and taking the content and the focus of the class and getting at it through an arts perspective. So it’s more generic. It’s more inclusive.”*
- Students need to be energized to learn, and this may make some principals or teachers uncomfortable initially. *“You have to be ready for organized chaos. All learning does not take place with a pencil and a piece of paper. You have to be energized. Your brain has to be interactive for you to learn, and maybe things will happen, and maybe your body will move, too. Maybe your mind will move.”*

## **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

The voices of long-time AAA teachers and principals strongly indicate that involvement in AAA benefits students and teachers. Each of the participants was unequivocal in their support for AAA, even though they recognize that it takes time and energy to execute it successfully. The experiences they described illustrate the value of AAA’s policy of providing multiple years of support for teachers and artists to develop their partnership and multiple years to develop, implement, and refine their arts-integrated instruction.

The participants were also frank about the challenges of integrating the arts, particularly in the present education context with its emphasis on standardized testing and annual budget

reductions. To continue to support Minneapolis teachers and principals in fulfilling the vision of AAA, program staff may want to consider the following:

4. Continue to develop the role of AAA coach to help deepen teachers' understanding of how to integrate the arts and support teachers as they attempt to navigate a complex education climate that often presents obstacles for achieving the vision of AAA.
5. Explore options for spreading the knowledge of long-term AAA teachers and principals beyond schools and classrooms most typically involved in AAA.
6. Continue to work with district staff and administration to align AAA and the other major initiatives present in the district. The alignment must go beyond the philosophical in order to make a difference in the day-to-day realities of teachers.