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Creating Multiple Pathways In The Arts: A New York City Case Study

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Abstract

Increasingly, education policy makers understand the importance of students and families having access to a range of high quality educational opportunities inside and outside of school, 365 days a year. This paper explores the concept of multiple pathways in arts education to further conceptualize and build upon such opportunities, inside and outside the regular school day. Using a mixed-methods approach, we examine the arts pathways schools provide for their students, the relationships that exist between pathways and academic benefits, and the work of cultural and art

partners in supporting pathways. Implications for future research and arts education policy are addressed.

Introduction

Increasingly, education policymakers understand that student learning needs to expand beyond the traditional six-and-a-half hour school day. Research increasingly points to the importance of students and families having access to a range of high quality educational opportunities inside and outside of school, 365 days a year (Bigger, Bolder Approach, 2011). Given the powerful association between social and economic disadvantage and low student achievement (Condon, 2011), access to these opportunities becomes even more critical for minority and low-income students. Unfortunately, education reform movements in the United States over the past 25 years, most prominently the federal No Child Left Behind Act, have seriously constrained school districts and local school sites when it comes to delivering relevant, innovative teaching and learning through the narrowing of curriculum, especially in underperforming schools (Nussbaum, 2010; Pederson, 2007). The disciplines aligned with perceived national economic benefit – math, reading, science – have become the primary aims and goals of K-12 education institutions taught primarily towards basic proficiency, i.e. passing district and state-level mandated tests (Darling-Hammond, 2009). What makes these trends especially troubling is they exist in a time of increasing evidence and calls for recognizing the value of art and design in K-12 education (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thomson, 2012; President’s Committee, 2011; Robinson, 2006). In New York City specifically, there are continuing reductions in the hiring of new state certified arts teachers, cuts in funding, as well as reductions in arts education in elementary and middle school years (Israel, 2011). Having access to a range of high quality arts opportunities, inside and outside of school, what we refer to in this study as an arts pathway, is a challenge for many K-12 students in the New York City school system.

Given the emerging research on restructuring schooling and the potential role of the arts in contributing to high quality educational experiences, researchers at a university-based research institute and a local non-profit organization that provide support to high schools in New York City, explore how these opportunities, via multiple pathways, are being developed at four small urban arts-focused high schools. These findings are then examined in relation to academic benefits for the students at the school sites.

Research Questions

Given the growing interest in conceptualizing and building educational opportunities that extend beyond the regular school day, this paper focuses on our findings related to the following research questions:

- What pathways do a selected group of small, arts-based high schools provide to their students?
- What relationship exists between engagement with arts pathways and positive academic benefits for students, such as graduation from high school?
- How do cultural and partner art organizations support pathways in the arts?

The literature on multiple pathways led the research team to think about their applicability to the arts, specifically to high schools with a focus on the arts. While there is emerging research in multiple pathways (Oakes & Saunders, 2008) there have been no studies, to our knowledge, that address the pathways concept in the context of arts education. Nor has there been an exploration of the kinds of policies and supports needed to build arts pathways at the secondary level. This research addresses both gaps in the literature.

Multiple Pathways in the Arts

We understand high quality educational opportunities to include deep, multiple connections to higher education and careers, as well as deeper, sustained relationships with related social supports in surrounding community institutions. These can include health centers, museums, local businesses and religious organizations. What is understood is the importance of basic academic skills and cognitive growth as part of a larger set of educational objectives that also include “physical health, character, social development, and non-academic skills, from birth through the end of formal schooling” (Bigger Bolder Approach, 2011, p. 2). Perhaps most importantly, such an approach assigns value to the new knowledge and skills that young people need to become effective participants in a global environment, including citizenship, creativity, and the ability to respect and work with persons from different backgrounds (p. 2)

This re-conceptualization of learning for young people that includes aligned in-school and out-of-school educational opportunities will require significant collaboration across educational, municipal, cultural, and private organizations or what Simmons (2007) refers to as a “smart education system.” One of the key components of any “smart education system” is the ability for students to select among a number of rigorous and high quality *multiple pathways* to college and/or a career (Oakes and Saunders, 2008). Such pathways require coordination and collaboration of school systems with higher education and the private sector.

While writing and research on multiple pathways has tended to focus on programs in science, engineering, and technology, there is a surprising lack of descriptions of what pathways in the

arts might look like. In the New York City Public School system alone, there are over 130 performing and visual arts-centered high schools¹. Moreover, there is increasing interest in the links between arts-based learning and science, technology, engineering and math education (STEM to STEAM)². On a broader scale, the arts are a significant economic driver (President's Committee, 2011; Bradshaw & Iyengar, 2008; Cohen, Davidson, McCloskey, Pena, Shiu, & Wester, 2007), and large numbers of young people express an interest in and assign value to creating and participating in the arts both in the USA and internationally (Maguire, Donovan, Mishook, Garcia, & de Gaillande, 2012; UNESCO, 2006, 2010).

The concept of multiple pathways in education has increased in popularity and attention over the past seven years, beginning with reports from a group of like-minded organizations – such as Jobs for the Future, the National Governors Association, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – that cite the increasing demands of a globalizing economy and a mismatch between the skills and knowledge gained through high school instruction and the needs of the twenty-first-century workforce (Jobs for the Future, 2005). While originally linked primarily with career and technical education (CTE), the multiple pathways concept has recently extended to arts-career-based programs and small, themed high schools.

Coinciding with the expansion of the definition of multiple pathways, a theoretical and conceptual literature has emerged to better define the aims, goals, and components of high schools with high-quality multiple pathways programs. Jeannie Oakes and Marisa Saunders (2008) conceptualize schools with high-quality multiple pathways as having four “essential components” (pp. 6–7):

A college-preparatory academic core that satisfies the course requirements for entry into a state's flagship public university through project-based learning and other engaging instructional strategies. These strategies intentionally bring real-world context and relevance to the curriculum by emphasizing broad themes, interest areas, and/or career and technical education.

A professional or technical core well grounded in academic and real-world standards, in the case of this study, visual and performing arts education.

¹ See: www.nyc.gov/schools/ChoicesEnrollment. This number does not include the growing number of charter schools or private schools, which also include arts-themed secondary schools.

² See Art of Science Learning (<http://artofsciencelearning.org/>) and STEM to STEAM (<http://stemtosteam.org/>).

Field-based learning and realistic workplace simulations that deepen students' understanding of academic and technical knowledge through application in authentic situations.

Additional support services to meet the particular needs of students and communities, which can include supplemental instruction, counseling, transportation, and so on.

Inherent in this conception of multiple pathways is student choice of a particular pathway or pathways based on individual interest. As well, advocates for multiple pathways believe that in addition to the “economic competitiveness” argument put forward by Jobs for the Future and others, developing multiple pathways for student learning and achievement will provide other benefits, including increased student engagement, enhancement in learning for all students through project-based learning and student-centered instruction, and increased high school graduation rates and college readiness (Oakes and Saunders, 2008).

While the literature on multiple pathways has focused primarily on technical careers such as engineering and science, there has been relatively little attention given to pathways in the arts. We believe this oversight needs to be addressed, given that secondary schools, arts organizations, and higher-education institutions have been at the forefront in developing robust partnerships (Arts Education Partnership, 2008; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). K-12 schools have long integrated arts disciplines with traditional academic subjects (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006) and the arts contribute significantly as an industry and job creator (Americans for the Arts, 2007, 2010; California Arts Council, 2004). Moreover, the current discussion around “twenty-first-century learning skills,” where a different set of skills and capabilities are needed if we want our youth to graduate from high school and be equipped for college or work beyond high school is aligned with the research on the benefits of arts education (Catterall, et al., 2012; Fehr, 2009; Garber, 2004; Robinson, 2006).

The past thirty years of research on arts education has revealed a number of skills and dispositions fostered through the arts, including cognitive skills, qualitative and relational thinking (Catterall, et al., 2012; Efland, 2002), problem creation (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976), and the use of diverse symbol systems (Gardner, 1982; Perkins, 1981). Moreover, the arts have positive and uniquely affective outcomes for students (sometimes referred to as intrinsic benefits), especially on attitudinal and behavioral measures (Catterall, 2012; Ball & Heath, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi & Schiefele, 1992; Hanna, 1992; Heath, 1999; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004), as well as releasing imagination (Greene, 1978), giving pleasure (McCarthy et al., 2004), and facilitating communication among people (Dewey, 1934). Contemporary arts education understands that the skills and capabilities we help develop in our students are not based solely on the delivery of knowledge, but on the fostering

of collaboration, networking, play and stimulation (European League of Institutes of Art, 2011). A pathways model in the arts provides expanded opportunities for all students to build on basic skills and cognitive growth as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for building successful lives beyond high school.

City Context

The Small Schools Movement

New York City was among the first cities to explore small schools as a possible solution to the growing achievement gap between low-income and high-income students. The first wave of small high schools in New York City was created between 1960 and 1990 with most designated as “alternative” schools focused primarily on giving struggling students a second chance to graduate. Some of these schools were established by independent entities, and others were created under the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE).

By the early 1990s, some twenty alternative high schools were serving nearly 10,000 New York City public school students. At the same time, New York City, through the encouragement of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Children First initiative and the support of Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Open Society Institute, became “the epicenter of the national small schools movement” (Fruchter, 2008, p. 97). More than 100 small schools were created between 1993 and 2000 and between 2002 and 2006, more than 200 small schools opened (Fruchter, 2008). Many of these are arts-themed high schools.

Since the arrival of mayor control of the NYCDOE in 2000 there has been a recentralization and then rapid decentralization of authority within the district (Hill, 2011). While a discussion of mayor control of school districts is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that decentralization leaves most budgeting, hiring, and scheduling decisions to school-based administrators. Thus the type and quality of arts programming varies greatly across the district.

Arts Education and the NYCDOE

The four small high schools in this study exist within a policy environment that at once affirms and challenges art’s place in the school curriculum. In the past, NYCDOE art education monies were allotted to schools under the umbrella of *Project Arts*. In 2007, this budget line item was deleted, and arts monies were channeled into larger school budgets to be spent at the discretion of school principals. In response to an outcry from the arts community, spearheaded by the Center for Arts Education, the NYCDOE has taken some steps to ensure that the arts do not lose ground in New York City public schools. These steps are outlined in

the NYCDOE-supported *ArtsCount* initiative, which delineates a range of strategies aimed at accountability and quality-improvement initiatives at the school and district levels. These strategies, including surveys and the *Annual Arts in Schools Report*, currently in its third year, are intended to assist the NYCDOE in identifying underserved schools requiring additional, targeted support to improve arts instruction. The results of these reports reveal a picture of diminishing arts programming. Indeed, a report by the Public Advocate for the City of New York showed that most schools did not comply with the state's minimum requirements for arts education (Brown, Woltman, Dyer, Han, Brodsky, & Rosner, 2008). The decline in arts education at the K-12 levels in 2008 continues today and mirrors a national trend documented in several studies (MetLife, 2012; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

Approximately half of New York City high school graduates exceed the state requirements in arts education credits, but not all individual community school districts offer rigorous arts education programming, including sequential arts offerings, a component of an arts pathway. During the time of this study (2006-2009) only 29 percent of high schools in New York City offered at least a three- to five-year sequence in the arts, with the Bronx having the lowest percentage of high schools offering an arts sequence. A comparison of the high school data provided in the last three Annual Arts in Schools Reports showed that there was a 46 percent decline in the number of students who had taken three or more credits in the arts from 2006-2007 to a low of 28 percent in 2008-2009 (Israel, 2009). Furthermore, a June 2011 study from the Center for Arts Education found that New York City lost 135 arts teachers since the 2006-07 school year, close to 23 percent of city schools have no licensed arts teacher on staff (Israel, 2011, p. 1) and the district continues to have in place a hiring freeze that includes arts educators. These kinds of cuts combined with factors such as limited comprehensive facilities due to co-location and the high school selection process has made the creation of pathways in the arts more difficult because there is uneven access within the district when it comes to the arts. Thus, while the NYCDOE, with the support of numerous arts and cultural institutions, continues to strive to provide and support K-12 arts education in New York City, the current fiscal and education reform environment makes providing arts for all a continuing challenge.

The Study

School Participants

This research focuses on student-reported opportunities and experiences in four arts-themed small high schools in New York City, each newly established in 2003 with the support of various private foundations.

Table 1. School Site Information

2007/08	High School One		High School Two		High School Three		High School Four	
Year Opened	2003		2003		2003		2003	
Size	361		379		489		406	
Demographics	BL	32%	B L	82%	BL	47%	BL	36%
	W	2%	W	2%	W	1%	W	2%
	HI	65%	HI	10%	HI	50%	HI	61%
	AN	1%	AN	1%	AN	1%	AN	
	AI		AI	2%	AI	1%	AI	
	O		O	4%	O		O	
	M	40%	M	26%	M	46%	M	30%
	F	60%	F	74%	F	54%	F	70%
Title I Eligibility	68%		63%		84%		80%	
Graduation Rate	67.1%		83.6%		81.2%		60.8%	
Attendance Rate	88.77%		86.36%		90.48%		81.89%	
Arts Focus	Music is integrated into all areas of the curriculum with focus on learning a musical instrument and practicing vocal skills. Visual and performing arts courses offered.		Integration of the performing arts and core knowledge in science, math, language arts and social studies. Visual and performing arts courses offered.		Students learn all subjects through the variety of disciplines that make up the concept of theatre. Visual and performing arts courses offered.		Interdisciplinary study of the arts, specifically dance, music, visual arts, and video.	
Location	Bronx; shares campus w/4 other schools		Brooklyn; shares campus w/3 other schools		Bronx; shares campus w/3 other schools		Bronx; shares campus w/5 other schools	
Lead Partner	College		Theatre non-profit		n/a; has various informal partners		Theatre non-profit	

*BL: Black; W: White; HI: Hispanic; AN: Asian; AI: American Indian; O: other.

Methods

We used a mixed-methods research approach, utilizing student surveys and follow-up focus groups and interviews, as well as educational outcome data and program information provided by the high schools, New Visions, and the NYCDOE to answer the research questions. We deliberately focused on the student experience in order to provide the schools with data and analysis not typically available in education reform literature (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Ginwright, Noguera & Cammarota, 2006; Mitra 2007).

Student Survey

The survey was designed using literature and existing surveys across the core features of the pathway model. Specifically, the role of *college-preparatory academic core; professional or technical core in the arts; field-based learning and realistic workplace simulations; and additional support services* focused on preparing students for graduation from high school and college/job readiness after high school. Part one of the survey included a series of questions that mapped students' arts learning pathways and opportunities both inside and outside of school. These opportunities included art course offerings, after-school arts clubs, partner art and cultural organization activities. While we assumed students participated in a range of arts-learning activities in school, we wanted to map the specific types of opportunities provided in each school setting, as well as where and how students supplemented what the schools did not provide in the classroom setting. Part two of the survey asked students to respond to a series of questions aimed at identifying the range of supports identified as integral to college readiness linked to the pathway model.

Survey validity and reliability were addressed by conducting a preliminary series of focus groups with high school arts students to identify their arts experiences and the language they used to describe such experiences. A draft of the completed survey was also piloted to a second group of high school students.

In the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008, the quantitative survey was administered across the four schools to 560 tenth- and eleventh-graders that received written permission from their parents or guardians to participate in the study. The overall participation rate was 65 percent, and the students who took the survey reflected the overall demographics of each school. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the survey data. This data was then used to design a series of follow-up focus groups and interviews with school personnel, arts partners, and students as a way of expanding and deepening our understanding of what the students reported in the surveys.

Arts Capacity Index

While engaged in the analysis of the survey, we recognized a gap in our data regarding the extent and relative quality of the arts programming available at each school site. In order to supplement what the students were reporting in the survey data, we created an Arts Capacity Index utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. Table 2 shows the data we gathered for each school site.

Table 2. Arts Capacity Index

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and cultural partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of arts teaching staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget allocated for arts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space/facilities (black box, studio, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and participation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Arts instruction per grade – Arts sequencing in school by discipline – Arts included in other subject matter

The Arts Capacity Index allowed us to compare and contrast the arts programming across the four sites and provided an additional data source to compare student survey and interview responses with their respective school reports and data. This triangulation of data sources assisted us with enhancing the validity of our research findings (Creswell, 2003).

Focus Groups/Interviews

In the fall of 2008, we conducted follow-up student focus groups, principal interviews, and partner interviews. At each school, small groups consisting of six to nine eleventh- and twelfth-graders were chosen by school administrators to participate in this phase of the study. These students were interviewed in groups by grade, independently of school staff. They were asked open-ended questions regarding the level and type of academic and social support they received from school staff and administrators, family, community members, and peers, as well as their preparedness and plans for life after high school. Principals were interviewed individually and asked questions involving arts curriculum and integration, recruitment, extended-day arts opportunities, and college preparation at their school. Education directors at

partner organizations were asked open-ended questions regarding the level and type of arts support they provided to the school and the students.

Data Analysis

The student survey data was entered and analyzed in SPSS. The data analysis had two parts: calculating overall student responses to each survey question and comparing student responses across the four schools in this study. Moreover, common descriptive statistics (e.g., percentages, frequencies, means) were calculated to determine student responses.

Audio recordings of the student focus groups and principal interviews were transcribed. Analysis of this qualitative data consisted of identifying major themes, as well as specific responses that supported and further explained the survey results. We also obtained data from the NYCDOE website to bolster our survey findings. Data regarding partnerships and after-school clubs were obtained from the 2007-2008 High School Directory. Attendance rates are based on the 2007-2008 Comprehensive Educational Plan, and graduation rates are based on the 2009 Graduation Report.

This research was an exploratory, descriptive study that was intended as a cross-sectional snapshot. Therefore, the data analysis did not include any long-term trends or follow schools as their partnerships evolved; all the schools were at an early stage of development. Also, the data included school outcomes but not individual student outcomes. More follow-up research is needed to document the development of school partnerships with arts organizations and to establish possible links with individual student outcomes.

Key Findings

Our findings are organized in two sections. The first analyzes data according to each school's alignment with the Oakes and Saunders (2008) multiple pathways framework. The second is an examination of student outcomes – attendance, graduation rates, and college aspirations – for each school site.

The Multiple Pathways System

College-Preparatory Academic Core

We first examined each school's *college-preparatory academic core*, specifically Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings and partnerships with external and cultural organizations.

Advanced placement courses. Rigorous academic programs prepare students for credit bearing, first-year college courses without remediation (Garvey, 2009). One strategy schools often implement to prepare students for college is to provide them with the opportunity to earn

college credit or to take more challenging coursework through AP courses. We believe that one of the pathways available to students can include opportunities for such coursework.

Table 3 shows that three of the four schools offered AP courses with School One offering a significantly higher number than the other schools. The courses across the sites included biology, chemistry, United States government and politics, music theory, Spanish language, and Spanish literature.

Table 3. AP Course Offerings by School

	SCHO OL One	SCHO OL Two	SCHOO L Three	SCHOO L Four	Overall Average
Number of AP Courses	8	3	2	0	4

Source: New York City Department of Education, High School Directory, 2007-2008

While there was a range of AP courses offered across the four schools, each school in the study also had a partnership with a City University of New York (CUNY) college through the College Now program, and students were able to earn college credit by enrolling in courses at the partnering CUNY institution.

Partnerships

In addition to offering opportunities for students to engage with advanced academic coursework, a rigorous academic program prepares students for college by building understanding across core subject areas and emphasizing connections between the real world and the classroom. To facilitate these types of integrated learning experiences, schools often forge partnerships with various outside organizations. As noted in the Center for Arts Education report (Israel, 2009), “such partnerships vary widely, from a single workshop serving a single class to a year-long, multifaceted design that serves multiple classes in multiple grades” (p. 14). A partner organization’s involvement with a school can range from low to high with a variety of expected outcomes.

The schools in this study fostered, on average, three formal partnerships with cultural and arts organizations. Partner organizations included theater groups, college music departments, professional and community-based music ensembles, and arts councils. Three of the schools had one lead partner, which was established during the creation of the school under the New Century High School Initiative, while High School Four was operating without a lead partner

at the time of this study. Lead partner organizations were involved with the school from its inception and viewed their involvement with schools as an opportunity to enrich the academic program at the school and to extend and develop their services by engaging with students on a regular basis.

According to Hirota, Hughes, and Chalusian (2008), in order to best sustain the partner relationship, the schools and organizations must work together to create and maintain the school's main academic program. The school and partner will collaboratively establish structures and processes that best integrate the partner organizations into the schools. This can range from a co-leadership structure to working artists teaching in a school, depending on the needs of the school and academic design. Hence, schools consider lead partner organizations part of their organizational structure and vice versa, and the relationship between the two entities is interdependent and mutually beneficial (pp. 44-45).

We found that schools One, Two, and Three all had evidence of partner integration but at varying frequencies. School One's lead partner, for example, was a neighboring CUNY, and students at this school reported using the facilities in the college's music building during ensemble rehearsal and performances. School One's principal explained that his school's building had limited dedicated spaces for music instruction, and having access to the college's facilities was therefore essential to arts teaching and learning at the school. The students were also encouraged to and did attend classes at the college.

Schools Two and Three both have the same theater organization as a lead partner. During an interview, the principal of School Two explained the kinds of services and supports the theater organization offered her school:

We use ... teaching artists. They come here and train the staff ... work with the kids on training them in every aspect of theater. So the kids do all of the lighting in all of the shows, the kids do all of the sound in every show, they build the sets, they do all of the set design ... Basically [they] prepare the kids to do [this] for everyone that uses the auditorium (Principal, School Two).

On the other hand, School Four had no lead partner during the time of our study and relied instead on individual arts partners that provided single workshops for specific students that would span a semester or a year, depending upon the nature of the workshop. According to interviews with students at this school site, arts opportunities linked to the short-term arts and cultural partners were only made available for selected students, not for the larger student population.

Schools One, Two, and Three had strong partnerships whose presence was deeply embedded into the school's organizational structure and culture. In all three schools, the lead partner was integral in expanding and enhancing the curriculum and increasing access to resources.

Professional or Technical Core

We then examined the *professional or technical core* (i.e., the arts) in each school, looking for examples of their academic rigor and grounding in real-world standards. To measure this, we looked at areas of opportunity for specialization in the arts and extracurricular activities offered in each school site.

Area of Specialization

For arts-themed high schools, offering a range of sequential elective arts courses in specific areas of the arts are an important mechanism for creating multiple pathways for students. When students can choose from a selection of elective arts courses, they have the opportunity to specialize in an arts discipline, fostering a range of skills, dispositions and capabilities related to success in high school and after graduation. They also have the opportunity to compile professional portfolios, used for admissions to institutions of higher education, as well as to gain meaningful post secondary employment as professional artists.

As Table 4 demonstrates, at least 60 percent of students in the schools in our study reported they were able to specialize in a specific area in the arts. However, one school, School One, had a significantly higher percentage of students reporting they were able to specialize when compared to the other three schools.

Table 4. Percentages of students reporting ability to specialize in their schools

	Percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement				
	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average (weighted)
At my school I am able to specialize in an area in the arts	87%	64%	66%	60%	69%

Source: Arts survey

Extracurricular Activities

Research shows that participation in extracurricular activities increases student engagement and commitment to school (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Arts-related after-school clubs and activities can complement and reinforce the lessons learned in required and elective courses. Students participating in arts-based extracurricular activities also have the opportunity to apply and further develop the skills they have learned in the classroom in real-world contexts.

Table 5. Offerings of extracurricular activities by school

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four
Number of Art Clubs/Activities	15	6	8	6
Types of Clubs/Activities	Saxophone quartet, string quartet, brass quintet, woodwind quintet, clarinet quartet, percussion ensemble, musical theater, gospel choir, men's choir, rock band, Latin band, pep band, student recital series, several performances and competitions throughout the Tri-State Area	Student producers, stage crew, guitar club, chorus, dance company, video production workshop, art club, fashion show, poetry slam	Student producers, stage crew, guitar club, chorus, dance company, video production workshop, art club, fashion show, poetry slam	Web site development, journalism, anime, dance, video/drama

Source: New York City Department of Education, High School Directory, 2007-2008; student focus groups.

Table 5 shows that all four schools offer a range of extracurricular opportunities focused on the arts with School One offering close to 50 percent more activities. It is also worth noting that all of the schools in the study hold annual schoolwide arts events including plays, visual arts exhibitions, talent shows, choir recitals, and orchestra performances, in which a

significant number of students participate (Student Survey). The kinds of extracurricular activities offered at these schools enable students to develop a range of capabilities such as the creative and technical skills that serve as a mechanism for engaging students while further preparing them for college and career success.

As Table 6 demonstrates, according to survey responses, virtually all students in Schools One, Two, and Four, and approximately three-quarters of the students in School Three, reported opportunities to participate in art clubs at the school site. Interestingly, a significantly smaller percentage of students across all four sites, took advantage of these opportunities suggesting a gap in access and/or interest, a finding reflected in field-based learning.

Table 6. Percentages of students reporting presence of arts-related clubs and activities in their schools

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four
My school provides clubs in the arts	92%	93%	72%	93%
I participate in school clubs in the arts	57%	52%	34%	42%

Source: Arts Survey

Field-Based Learning

Creating multiple pathways also involves exposing students to field-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships. These opportunities allow students to learn in a real-world context and to apply the skills they are learning in the process. Table 7 demonstrates that in each of the four schools in the study, close to half of the students surveyed reported having access to internship opportunities through their school. The percentage of students who had acquired an internship through their school, however, was less than 25 percent in all schools, suggesting that while the school might be developing internship opportunities, students are not accessing them.

Table 7. Percentages of students reporting presence and participation in arts internships

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average
My school provides internship opportunities in the arts	52%	55%	49%	54%	53%
I have gotten an arts internship through my school	16%	9%	22%	8%	14%

Source: Arts Survey

Additional Support Services

In-school counseling can have a positive impact on students' aspirations and achievements (Adelman, 1999). Through counseling, students and their families receive important information about credit accumulation, graduating on time, preparing for college, and applying for financial aid. Receiving counseling is especially beneficial to low-income students whose families do not have extensive experience with higher education and therefore can benefit from assistance with the college entry process.

According to survey responses, all of the schools in this study provided a range of college and career counseling services to their students with notable differences between the schools:

- At least 80 percent of students in each school reported that there was a designated place or person in their school where they could find information about college.
- At least 50 percent of students in each school reported that there was a designated person or place in their school where they could find information about career opportunities after high school. At School One, however, the number was higher, with 71 percent of students reporting access to these support services.
- In each school, more than half of students reported that school staff let them know what courses they needed in order to graduate and get into college. School One had the highest percentage of students reporting having access to this service.

Table 8. Percentages of students reporting access to support services

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average (weighted)
Does your school let you know of the courses you need in order to graduate?	98%	92%	89%	88%	92%
Does your school let you know of the courses that you need to get into college?	81%	66%	63%	67%	69%
Is there a designated person or place in your school where you can find out information about college?	95%	82%	85%	83%	86%
Is there a designated person or place in your school where you can find out information about career opportunities after high school?	71%	61%	50%	57%	60%
Average percentage over all four items of students reporting access to support services	86%	75%	72%	74%	77%

Source: Arts survey

Keeping students on track for graduation and informed about life after high school are critical counseling services. Helping students' transition to post-secondary life, however, also requires that schools offer a wide array of support services beyond basic counseling. Schools'

strategies for providing these additional services must include forming relationships with post-secondary institutions and career professionals. Successful urban schools also engage parents and/or guardians in discussions about students' postsecondary plans (Ascher & Maguire, 2008).

Table 9. Percentages of students reporting presence of services related to post-secondary success

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average (weighted)
Staff who work at my school arrange for me to visit colleges.	55%	65%	48%	77%	61%
Staff who work at my school arrange for colleges to visit my school.	37%	22%	14%	38%	27%
Staff who work at my school provide opportunities for me to be in touch with students who are now in college.	44%	28%	13%	25%	27%
Staff who work at my school talk to my parents about my plans after high school.	50%	38%	28%	35%	37%
Staff who work at my school help me prepare for my plans after high school.	72%	67%	46%	56%	61%

Staff who work at my school help me think about the job I want as an adult.	49%	46%	39%	54%	46%
Staff who work at my school connect me with people who have careers/jobs in the arts?	70%	60%	43%	48%	56%
Average Percentage of Students	54%	47%	33%	48%	45%

Source: Arts survey

As Table 9 shows, the schools in this study differed according to their levels of delivery of support services related to post-secondary success. The percentage of students reporting in the survey that their school connected them with current college students and people who have career/jobs in the arts varied significantly by school. Survey responses also show that school staff provided different levels of service delivery in terms of talking with students and their parents and/or guardians about post-secondary plans. At the same time, the four schools provided certain services to the same degree. For instance, even though less than half of students surveyed reported that colleges visited their school, 61 percent of students reported that their school arranged for them to visit a college campus.

In addition to college and career counseling services, the schools in our study offered academic support services geared towards test prep and improving academic performance. We found that all of the schools offered tutoring on Saturdays and/or after school. Even though students received a fair amount of Regents prep during school hours, staff took advantage of these extended hours to further prepare students.

Student Outcomes

Attendance and Graduate Rates

Links between school attendance and positive academic outcomes, including graduation from high school is supported by research (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Table 10 shows the average percentage of days students attended at each school during the time of our study. This data suggests that, on average, School Four had the highest attendance rate among the four schools, and School Three had the lowest. Moreover, School Three's attendance rate was

lower than average attendance rate across all New York City high schools while School One, Two, and Four had higher attendance rates.

Table 10. Average attendance by school compared with New York City average, 2007-2008

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	NYC (high schools only)
Attendance	88.9%	86.4%	81.9%	90.5%	84.7%

Source: New York City Department of Education, Comprehensive Educational Plan, 2007-2008

There are also significant differences in four-year graduation rates across the four schools although Table 11 demonstrates that each school's graduation rate for the class of 2008 surpassed the citywide rate. School Four and School Two had significantly higher graduation rates than School One and School Three. School Three had the lowest graduation rate of all four schools and was closest to the city's graduation rate. School Three's dropout rate actually surpassed the city's rate by 2.5 percent.

Table 11. Graduation and dropout rates by school compared with citywide average, 2007-2008

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	NYC (high schools only)
Graduated	58.3%	84.5%	58.0%	85.2%	56.4%
Regents Diploma	34.7%	67.6%	30.0%	70.4%	40.9%
Dropout	4.2%	1.4%	16%	4.9%	13.5%

Source: New York City Department of Education, Graduation and Dropout Report, 2007-2008

Students were also asked about their college aspirations. As Table 12 shows, School One and School Two had the highest percentage of students reporting they would like to attend a four-year college after graduating from high school.

Table 12. Percentages of students aspiring to attend two-year and four-year colleges, by school

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average (weighted)
When graduating high school, which of the following would you want to attend? Two-year college:	13%	18%	23%	21%	19%
When graduating high school, which of the following would you want to attend? Four-year college:	83%	82%	74%	78%	79%

Source: Arts survey

We also asked students if they believed their schools prepared them for two-year and four-year colleges.

Table 13. Percentages of students reporting their schools prepare them for two-year and four-year college, by school.

	SCHOOL One	SCHOOL Two	SCHOOL Three	SCHOOL Four	Overall Average (weighted)
Do you believe your high school prepares you to pursue a two-year college?	25%	30%	34%	25%	29%
Do you believe your high school prepares you to pursue a four-year college?	85%	71%	56%	65%	69%

Source: Arts Survey

As Table 13 demonstrates, School One and School Two had the highest percentage of students reporting they believed their school prepared them to pursue a degree at a four-year college. In general, this data suggests that students' college aspirations are in line with how well prepared they feel to engage in college-level work, though somewhat contradictory to the reported attendance and graduation rates.

Discussion

This paper examines the student-reported pathways that a selected group of small, arts-themed high schools in New York City provide for their students. It also examined the relationship between engagement with arts pathways and positive academic benefits for students and how arts and cultural organizations supported schools in developing arts pathways. The findings from this research raise a number of issues and questions about the potential for the arts to serve as high-quality pathways to prepare students for higher education, other types of post-secondary education, high-quality training, or the workforce after high school.

What pathways do a selected group of small, arts-based high schools provide to their students?

There were significant arts opportunities available to a range of students across the participating schools. While schools differed in their arts focus, all schools provided a robust range of arts courses and extracurricular opportunities for students. Some schools, however,

offered these opportunities to a smaller percentage of the student population making it difficult for other students in the school to participate in the pathways model.

Academic rigor was also associated with robust arts opportunities. While the sample of schools included in this study was small, it is noteworthy that the school with the greatest number of Advanced Placement (AP) offerings – School One – also provided the most opportunities in the arts, either through opportunities to specialize in an area of art or through participation in extracurricular arts activities and clubs.

What relationship exists between engagement with arts pathways and positive academic benefits for students, such as graduation from high school?

Surprisingly, schools with more developed pathways in the arts did not consistently produce the highest high school graduation rates for students. The school that offered the most AP courses and opportunities in the arts – again, School One – did not have the highest graduation rate. While it is difficult to speculate about these relationships given the limited data, a few possibilities stand out. First, the number of AP course offerings may not correspond to a similarly large population of students enrolled in those courses, thus overstating the impact of AP courses in the school. Second, the skills and knowledge required to pass Regents exams required for graduation may not be aligned with either AP coursework or the skills and abilities developed through the arts. Thus, there may be a disconnect between multiple pathways through the arts offered by schools and test-based accountability measures like the Regents. Third, it is possible that none of these schools has built a robust enough set of multiple pathways to have a reliable relationship to graduation rates. That is, none of the schools, even those scoring highly on particular pathways measures, has yet met a “baseline” set of pathways that has a significant impact on academic outcomes like high school graduation.

Finally, it is interesting to point out that while School One did not have the highest graduation rates, it did have the highest percentage of students of the four high schools indicating that their high school had prepared them to enter a four-year college. While it is not possible, given the data, to make any kind of causal inference, it is possible that schools with more developed pathways – but not developed enough to have an impact on graduation rates – have reached the interim step of raising aspirations for higher education.

How do cultural and partner art organizations support pathways in the arts?

We found a range of relationships between the schools and their partner organizations that included fiscal support, professional development, and in-kind contributions of performance space. Two schools had partners that provided extensive on-site professional development for

school faculty as well as arts opportunities for students in school and out of school. Another school utilized a range of short-term partners in their curriculum and programming. While this allowed the students to work with some well-known media organizations like MTV and the Apollo Theatre, the lack of a stable partner meant that fewer students had access to these experiences and the impact of the partnership was more difficult to assess. This school also expressed some concern regarding the partnership model in that the needs of the partner did not always align with those of the school.

This raises broader issues about partner fit and alignment with school mission, student access to opportunities provided by a partner organization, and long-term partnership stability. Partner arts and cultural organizations often participate with schools in both short- and long-term relationships and, indeed, all the schools in our study commented on the importance of both. But in the instance of School Four operating without a long-term partner, the lack of consistency has impacted the depth of the work, its ability to be a coherent component of the curriculum and teaching at the school, and the strength of its arts pathways and connections to the broader arts world.

Finally, research into faculty and staff employed in urban public small schools and the nonprofits that serve them typically show high turnover rates (Jacobowitz, Weinstein, Maguire, Luekens, & Fruchter, 2007). Moreover, in a school of any size, a “consistent application of instructional practice and learning routines across classrooms and grade levels” is an important factor in “creating a positive learning environment” (p. 26). The schools with the strongest survey responses on extracurricular activities, for example, show less turnover with key staff members. Indeed, one partner organization noted the negative impact of staff turnover on their ability to establish and maintain a rigorous presence in the school.

Implications

This research provides an initial portrait of arts pathways in four small arts themed high schools in New York City. The importance of reform partners such as local non-profits, as brokers and intermediaries emerged clearly, and our data suggests that arts pathways help students develop the “soft” skills that are necessary for success. The data on the impact of arts pathways on “hard” student outcomes were less clear. More research is needed to determine if such a relationship exists and, if so, how and under what conditions the impact might occur. Implications for creating and maintaining arts pathways also emerged in the study and are outlined in the following section.

Creating and sustaining high-quality pathways in the arts is a significant challenge in the current policy context

It should come as no surprise that even in the best of policy and fiscal environments, schools are challenged to build strong arts offerings in their schools and to create and sustain partnerships with external organizations. Within the context of New York City and its move over the past decade toward strong accountability measures that privilege achievement in reading and math above other subject areas, those challenges are magnified. And while the time period for this study was one of relative fiscal health for New York City, the recent deep recession has led to deep cuts across the board for schools, particularly in the arts (Israel, 2011). Additionally, the significant devolving of authority to individual school sites in New York City poses challenges to building system-wide multiple pathways in the arts. New York City and other large urban districts (e.g., Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Chicago) have over the past five to eight years significantly altered the functions of the traditional district central office to a more limited “portfolio” model (Henig, 2010). In such a model, the district provides greater autonomy for schools in exchange for being held “accountable” for student achievement results, expands the supply of charter schools, and has the ability to close charter or traditional schools based on student performance. District central offices gain what many characterize as punitive powers while losing others, including setting curriculum and teacher hiring policies. While portfolio models are still relatively new, the case of New York City demonstrates that arts offerings in such a system may decrease, or become concentrated in schools that focus specifically on the arts.

Small schools face challenges during periods of growth

New small schools have several advantages such as being able to focus on a particular theme like the arts. They have the ability to provide the kind of close teacher-student relationships that foster student engagement. And they are often able to attract highly motivated staff and administrators, which can create a tight-knit group of adults with the determination to deal with the challenges of teaching in an urban setting. Small schools, however, also face unique challenges, especially new small schools. Setting up a new curriculum, establishing policies, and adding grades as schools grow are significant challenges that may impact the development of multiple pathways in the arts during a school’s early years. Furthermore, initial partnerships with external organizations may be unsettled or even dysfunctional, which in turn can impact the kinds of opportunities students receive inside and outside of school. Indeed, in the case of School Four in this study, the initial partnership was dissolved within the first year of the school’s existence.

Continuing to build high-quality pathways and partnerships will require significant systemic changes in district-level policies, cross-sector partnerships, and strong relationships with intermediary organizations

At the district or city level, it is necessary to start building the infrastructure and relationships to create multiple pathways system wide. The current environment in New York City (and most other cities) is one where schools build these multiple pathways – in the arts or other areas – through their own local relationships, dedication, and ingenuity. While these “pockets of excellence” are inspiring, it is unlikely that such reform can be brought to scale in the current policy environment. In fact, according to one small school study in 2008, school success was largely dependent upon individuals and “heroic measures,” both of which are not sustainable or scalable in the long term (Ascher & Maguire, 2008).

No large urban school system has yet built a system of multiple pathways, but some districts have begun initial steps in that direction. For example, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools has developed “academies” that serve over-age and under-credited students who need an alternate pathway to graduation, and the district has invited national school development organizations like Big Picture³ to open schools that offer multiple pathways and clear connections to college and the world of work. In large urban districts like New York City, intermediary organizations, charter school networks, and district central offices can play a substantial role in building multiple pathways through *linking schools with external partners*, *supporting development of pathways*, and *tool development*. As part of its model, the intermediary organization associated with the schools in this study helped individual schools link with external partners that had expertise related to the schools’ arts theme. As we saw in this study, external arts organizations sometimes played a significant role in supporting a school’s pathways in the arts. In cases where the relationship between a school and its external partner may be strained, or where a school might need a new partner, intermediary organizations can provide recommendations and vetting for high-quality external partners.

Intermediary organizations (and districts) also have a role in supporting the development of pathways at schools through an insistence on high-quality academic content, high-quality courses in a technical/professional core, field-based learning opportunities, and robust student support services. Where those opportunities and services are not in place, such organizations should provide technical assistance to schools, as well as seek to influence district policy to encourage those pieces to be in place at all schools.

³ See <http://www.bigpicture.org/2008/10/nashville-big-picture-high-school/>

Finally, there is a great need for “multiple pathways” tools to measure the quality of pathways and whether students are college- and career-ready following graduation. It is critical to move beyond basic quantitative indicators like course credits and test scores to more robust and nuanced indicators of course/program quality, students’ social and emotional needs, and college readiness; intermediary organizations and districts, in collaboration with schools, are best situated to provide those tools.

Conclusion

The pathways model emphasizes the understanding that learning is a joint enterprise that takes place across multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships, inside and outside of school. Such a system or conceptualization of educational practices is essential as we begin to understand the increasing demands of a globalizing economy, the capabilities necessary to address the mismatch between the skills and knowledge gained through high school instruction and the needs of the workforce, and the connections necessary to engage with one another as citizens of the world. Current education reform conversations understand the need to move towards educational models that incorporate a systems approach towards change. Yet there remains a mismatch between findings from empirical studies that support this position and state and national reform movements that continue to privilege assessment in a limited number of subjects as a primary indicator of student success.

To build such pathways will be very difficult in the current policy environment. The traditional role of the school district – including providing standardized curriculum and staff guidelines for all schools – has historically helped preserve a baseline number of arts educators in schools. However, the rapid decentralization of authority from districts to schools in many large urban cities has left decision-making power in the hands of individual school leaders, who may or may not see the value of arts offerings. Combined with shrinking school budgets and accountability systems that are narrowly focused on achievement scores in English language arts and mathematics, the role of the in-school arts teacher is in a highly precarious position, especially in urban schools.

For these reasons, schools and districts are increasingly called upon to rely on out-of-school partners and providers to build the capacity for arts learning for young people, as the number of school-based arts educators will likely decline. This is unfortunate as it places a large aspect of creativity and innovation outside of the formal school curriculum. However, this realignment of in-school and out-of-school educational opportunities can encourage and indeed, will require, significant collaboration across all stakeholders – parents, schools, districts, city agencies, local arts organizations, and intermediary and umbrella education support organizations. These shifts offer hope for building robust pathway models in the arts, both inside and outside of school settings. The schools described in this case study show both the

promise and challenges in navigating a difficult education policy environment to build such supports for students

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