

2000 Issue Forum Final Report

Enriching the Community

Members of this forum group explored issues related to arts education in the public schools. Information was obtained regarding current arts standards in Florida, arts-education curricula in the public schools, and the relative importance of the arts to student performance and achievement.

Key findings:

- Declining arts-education budgets, decreasing arts class enrollment, and a lack of qualified arts teachers over the last few years have resulted in fewer classes for arts in the public schools. A statewide and local district emphasis on the three R's (reading, writing, and math) has contributed to this trend.
- Because of funding shortages, arts teachers must find creative ways to fund their classes, including seeking support from local businesses or obtaining supplies at their own expense.
- Although the Florida Department of Education established arts-curriculum standards, these have not been fully implemented in the public schools, including in Duval County, because of an increased emphasis on core subjects (i.e., the 3R's) and related tests (i.e., FCAT).
- Despite the availability of research showing that exposure to the arts is correlated with higher scores on both verbal and math portions of the SAT, with improved self-esteem, and with the acquisition of important analytical and communication skills, many public-school administrations continue to reduce the amount of arts-related courses from their daily schedules. Some schools have eliminated them altogether.

Action plan—Establish an ACE Coalition to Restore the Arts in the Public Schools:

Group members heard consistently and repeatedly from resource experts that a sound arts education benefits students academically and later in life. They also heard that parental and community pressure to incorporate arts courses in the public schools can result in successful outcomes. By consensus, group members decided to advocate for the creation of an ACE (Arts for a Complete Education) Coalition in Duval County. ACE of Florida is a grassroots organization with 32 coalitions in Florida, but none presently in Duval County. The purpose of ACE is to promote the arts by providing resources and technical assistance to local schools and interested groups. With assistance from the Cultural Council of Jacksonville, group members will identify key individuals and organizations to help establish the local Coalition.

Community Leaders and Resource Experts

Issue forum groups met with both community leaders and resource experts who provided valuable information for group discussions. We wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the Forward process.

Jane Condon, Principal, La Villa School for the Arts
Jennifer Coolidge, Director, ACE of Florida
Diane Dawood, Director, Theater Works
Jeff Dunn, Attorney At Law
Joyce Fitzrandolph, Teacher, Episcopal High School
Marcus Haile, Ed. Director, The Cultural Council
Anne Lasher, Art Teacher, Duval County Schools
Janet Linke, Art Teacher, Duval County Schools
Jack Matthews, Art Director, Duval County Schools

Issue-Forum Participants

Forum groups met biweekly for four months. They received information from knowledgeable resource people and additional written materials provided by Forward staff. Congratulations on your efforts and future civic involvement and advocacy.

Sara Roberts, Chair
John Zell, Vice Chair
Mike Barile
Brandi Cook
Jane Craven
Sarah Crooks
Olivier Flaire

Angela Gieras
Marcus Haile
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