

The Evolution of an Arts in Education Council

Concerned Scottsdale parents formed an Arts in Education Council in 1973. It shares basic strategies and looks at the evolution and success of this group as a model for parents in other districts who want to assure effective arts education programs for their children.

Strategies

Have a purpose.

Either respond to a crisis, a plateau or to progress, but be prepared for the future! Arts Education can be threatened at any time, particularly when new school board members and administrators are a fact of life in the public schools.

One is enough, but “more” is better.

Parents talking to each other and listening to teacher concerns start the process. A small nucleus of really interested people produces the needed impetus. Don't worry about “numbers” in the beginning. Developing representation from each school takes continuing work and contacts. If you can't find a volunteer, enlist the aid of the principal or a teacher until one turns up. You have to assume that forming a Council is a growth process and be prepared for the long haul.

Focus your efforts.

There may be a number of concerns, but at the beginning a Council needs a narrow focus that starts with a reachable goal or two.

Prioritize your interests and concerns and update them as you grow.

Decide on an organizational structure.

At the beginning a small group of people and a network of contacts may be enough, but as you grow a normal, efficient organization will be important.

Keep costs to a minimum.

Use inter-school mail, email, fax as you decide on a dues structure.

Work with the district administration.

A Council needs the backing of the top people in the district in order to get started. If there are problems, this requires the utmost diplomacy, coupled with sound facts and a positive approach. Once you've established a rapport with the Superintendent, start cultivating the governing board. Perhaps the process needs to be reversed if the Superintendent is not amenable to the arts, or perhaps you can do both at once.

Find (cultivate) a few really supportive principals.

Success at one school will be a factor in enlisting more participants.

Get to know your fine arts teachers.

Ask about their ideas, concerns and successes.

Make budget presentations.

Make it a point to be familiar with the district budget and get together with the arts teachers to understand their needs, concerns and priorities. Make presentations at budget time, thanking the board when the arts programs are progressing, pointing out problems when they are not. This is a great platform to stress the importance of arts education.

Make governing board presentations.

During the year, away from budget concerns, get arts education on the agenda. Use visuals, students, anything that will get people's attention to tell them what you are doing and what you plan to do.

Become a non-profit entity.

Get an interested parent to do this pro bono. This is necessary for grant applications, general fund raising.

Don't give up!

Structure and Programs of the Arts in Education Council for Scottsdale Schools

The Scottsdale Council was formed after an Assistant Superintendent, when asked about the future of arts education in the district, replied “what future?” It started with three people, shortly grew to five and over the years enlisted volunteers from all 32 schools.

The Council has officers (President, Treasurer, Secretary), Chairmen of each of the Council programs, School Representatives and Art Guides for MAP and Music Guides for Music Discovery. The President has several meetings a year with the Superintendent.

The Council's financial structure has evolved into dues of \$50 a year from each school parent group, \$30 a year for administration of the MAP program from participating schools and grant applications for programs. Dues originally were \$5, just enough to pay for any printing or postage (you could get a lot more for \$5 in 1973 than you can get now!). The last piece was a membership advocacy base from the community at large that funds the Council's Newsletter, participation in arts education advocacy events, plus Council programs.

The Council's district fine arts education advocacy efforts have resulted in some huge successes since 1973 and it is a record of persistence and hard work:

- A district philosophy that fine arts programs will be allowed to grow.
- A district Fine Arts Coordinator (we've lost it occasionally, but won it back)
- A full 4th-12th grade string program (to match the band program)
- Fine arts specialists in 1st-5th grades (again, we've lost them occasionally, but won them back)
- Dance programs in all five high schools.
- Growth in the district choral program
- A district music library
- An efficient district instrumental inventory and repair/new purchase system
- A district budget for matching grants to school that receive an Artist-in-Residence grant from the AZ commission on the Arts.
- The Council has several internal programs that have developed over the years:

Masterpieces of Art (MAP).

This was the first Council program and the first MAP program of its kind in the state of Arizona. It was developed by some Scottsdale parents, passionate about the need for visual arts appreciation tied into classroom work in other disciplines. It remains a classroom experience presented by Art Guide volunteers, trained by classes of the Phoenix Art Museum and Council volunteers. Participating schools pay \$30 yearly to cover the cost of maintaining the MAP

reproductions, located in a 9x30" space at a high school, and laminating and computer costs. The computer inventory and check-out procedures were developed by district technology people. Old file cabinets and tables were collected from various schools over the years.

Music Discovery Program.

Music Guides make classroom presentations about music appreciation, using either the Phoenix Symphony Guild's Music Memory or a Council developed Music Discovery. Training is done by Council volunteers. Cost is born by participating schools. Sometimes the elementary general music teachers work the program into their classes.

Fine Art Field Trips.

Each year, all district 1st-8th graders attend performances by professional artists in theater venues. For many years Council members chose, coordinated and ushered at these performances in district high schools. For the past four years, the Council has partnered with Scottsdale's Center for the Arts and the Cultural Council to present these programs. The Scottsdale Arts in Education Council applies for grants to pay for part of the ticket price. Schools pay the remainder of the price and for school bus transportation. Council School Reps ride herd on schools—permission slips, busing, money, and attend the performances. Educational material is supplied to the appropriate teachers beforehand. Theater etiquette is stressed. A big part is teacher evaluations that are used in the following year's grant applications and give valuable feedback regarding the programs themselves.

High School Master Classes.

The Council provides \$150 for master classes, chosen by the teacher,

to each fine arts department at each of the five high schools — band, orchestra, choral, dance, drama and visual arts. This money is funded through grants. Requirements are simple: who, what, when, where and why.

Artists-in-Residence.

Arts Council School Reps coordinate Artists-in-Residence at their schools, working with selecting and writing applications and monitoring the residency, itself. Funds come from AZ Commission on the Arts grants, matching grants from the Scottsdale school district, plus any additional funds needed that come from the school. The matching funds from the district have been the big factor in the great majority of schools having a residency each year.

Scholarships.

Funds send 4th-8th grade students from schools with 20% or more of their student body enrolled in free/reduced lunch programs to a band, orchestra and visual/multi-disciplinary summer camp each year. The awards are based on citizenship, participation and desire and are made by the teacher involved and the principal. The scholarships are funded through parent, school and community donations.

Arts Education Outreach.

AEC Advocacy Memberships from the community provide money for an AEC Newsletter every other month during the school year, a website www.artsined.org, state and local advocacy events, and a couple state arts education organization memberships. After these expenditures anything left over goes in the AEC general fund to finance any AEC programs that need them. The Newsletter features district, state and national arts education news. Membership levels are \$10, Sponsor; \$25, Patron and \$50, Benefactor. During the membership drive, space is also given for scholarship donations.