

THE COMMUNITY ARTS COUNCIL AS SCHOOL ARTS ADVOCATES

Education is a community concern. The provincial government has legislative authority for education, but it is *the local involvement of citizens in each community that gives public education its heart.*

"The members of the board of school trustees of each school district are elected by the residents to govern its public education in a progressive, farsighted, educationally sound and economically feasible manner," according to the B.C. School Trustee Association manual. Trustees

should be aware of the arts programs available in the schools and should act as advocates for the improvements of the arts individually and as a board.

Arts councils, being made up of individual volunteers with special interests in the arts for their community, are in an ideal position to encourage and assist those in the public schools who support the arts and to advocate greater involvement by all connected with your public school system.

HOW CAN YOU BE EFFECTIVE ARTS ADVOCATES?

You are already leaders in your community. You can show your leadership by personal and group support and attendance at events and arts programs being offered in the district. You can make yourself familiar with the policy established by your board on the arts in education, and if no policy exists, the board can be encouraged to establish one. An individual trustee can make such a proposal.

Trustees can be invited to become members of the Community Arts Council and may become board members. It is possible to establish arts programs that are jointly funded that will bring arts and cultural programs to the school and its community. The Arts Council can act as a liaison between various community groups, civic councils and the local schools. School arts groups often perform at a very high level and can contribute in a meaningful fashion to the quality of life in a community if given the chance and some real encouragement.

Members of the community can learn about the Ministry mandated instruction in the arts as required for grades 1-8 and offered as elective choices to secondary students. Both allocation of instructional time, and appropriate staff selection to make arts programs effective should be priorities in each district along with a fair share of equipment and supply budgets. There should be an assurance that reasonable evaluation programs are in place to ensure the ongoing quality of programs. The results of these evaluations should be available to the parents and public.

As organizations with special interests in the arts, Community Arts Councils can support and assist school arts programs by sharing media and publicity opportunities to emphasize the many wonderful learning opportunities and achievements arising from arts in-

struction and co-curricular activities. Your attendance at rehearsals and presentations will provide support and encouragement to the participants. Even a simple "Well done" is much appreciated and provides an extra encouragement to do better.

Your school board, administrators and teachers will be much encouraged to see people from the community attending board meetings and showing a real, and supportive interest in the arts programs of the schools. Any offer to assist in special programs or projects involving the community is much appreciated especially when your special resources and organizational skills are offered in a cooperative manner. Opportunities to help give children access to quality arts experiences are unlimited – any active involvement will help.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON CAN BE AN ARTS ADVOCATE?

You are already a volunteer and have a special interest in one or more of the arts. It is not necessary to be an artist yourself. Any person who is truly interested and committed can improve arts education in their community. Once a person accepts the value of aesthetic education as part of the necessary program on an equal basis with the humanities and the sciences, he or she just needs to be persistent. The goals and learning outcomes are defined, and program evaluation should be in place.

A person who, by attending and supporting arts events gains the confidence of the teachers and principals and shows that they are offering supportive, non-critical assistance; a person who will ask pertinent questions and persist if need be, until satisfactory answers are given; a person who values the development of creativity and non-linear thought; will be successful as an advocate.

AN ACTION PROGRAM FOR THE ARTS

Here are some suggestions for members of Community Arts Councils to take to support opportunities for young people to learn through the visual and performing arts. All of them will have an effect – doing some of them will have an effect. Even one will likely make the situation for arts education better than at present – *the key is action.*

ACTION IDEAS:

- Establish an Arts in Education committee in your council.
 - Enlist interested members to learn about your school arts programs.
 - Encourage a trustee, a principal and arts teachers to become active committee members to advocate the arts.
 - Evaluate the status of the arts programs being offered in your schools.
 - Try to establish what are the real problems facing the establishment of better programs.
 - Plan a strategy in cooperation with the schools to try and address some or all of the problems. Even a solution to a “minor” problem is a step forward.
- Investigate whether your school district has a policy which guarantees equal access to arts in education for all students. If no policy exists encourage your trustees to establish one. (Samples are available from B.C.S.T.A. or such districts as Victoria and Vancouver.)
- Request from your superintendent a statement about the status of arts education for each grade.
- Request information about evaluation programs and any recommendation and improvements that are planned as a result of these.
- Ask information about the number of elementary and secondary arts specialists on staff and the number of students they work with out of the total enrollment.
- Compare allocations for arts supplies with allocations in other curriculum areas. (The secretary treasurer should be able to supply such data.)
- Inquire regarding the extent to which arts education is part of gifted education programs in your district.
- Are the arts facilities and equipment in each school adequate and to what extent does this impact on the arts programs? (Principals and teachers can be a practical source.)
- Ask school personnel to make a presentation to your Arts Council about the arts programs offered in your district.
- Develop a relationship with the schools and municipality with a view to sharing resources and facilities or cooperating on programs. Be willing to give more than you receive.
- Ask your school board to have a specific administrator appointed as the person responsible for supervising and developing arts programs in your district. This should be a Fine Arts Supervisor who has special knowledge and training, but in some districts it may have to be another administrator (Contact B.C. Arts in Education Council for their Monograph on the Role of the Fine Arts Supervisor).
- Encourage your school board to allocate funds for the provision of quality professional arts experiences for students. This will add a dimension to the curriculum of schools that they cannot provide themselves. Arts councils can assist by providing additional funding and granting sources, as well as identifying potential artists and groups as suggestions.
- Encourage your members to attend arts events in your schools. Volunteer to help with advertising, welcoming guests, as well as acknowledging student and staff effort.
- Encourage all principals and teachers to become more aware of and involved in the arts activities of your district.
- Encourage professional development programs in the arts for teachers and people in the community.
- Encourage public awareness of arts programs.
- Get them involved. Art is for all – not the few.

Above all, the key is action. You can make a qualitative difference in arts education for children in your district. Opportunities to learn through the arts enrich the child and arts education is part of the educational right of each child. You can help to ensure that right.



Prepared by:

B.C. Arts in Education Council