

Arts Access Initiative

Houston's action plan for ensuring equitable arts access for every Houston public school student.



Young Audiences, Inc. of Houston, a 501(c)3 organization, is the backbone organization and fiscal agent for the Arts Access Initiative.

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OUR VISION

With all of us working together, Houston can become the arts-rich, education-focused city of our dreams.

Imagine a city where students burst out of bed every morning, rushing their bleary-eyed caregivers to the car or bus stop, because they are so excited to get to the classroom. Imagine a city where students notice their own progress in learning, making mental connections across math, science and reading and proudly expressing their curiosity throughout the day.

Imagine a city where students saunter into testing situations with conviction that they are prepared to solve any problem, new or practiced, that comes their way. Imagine a city where students feel protected, bright, valued and confident in all modes of learning and in every campus space.

Equity: We will work to understand and counter obstacles that prevent all students from having access to the arts.

Impact: We will ensure that the arts provide a meaningful and substantial element of an excellent education for students.

Sustainability: We will initiate a culture change to ensure ongoing breadth and depth of arts experiences and engagement for students.

We believe Houston can be this city.

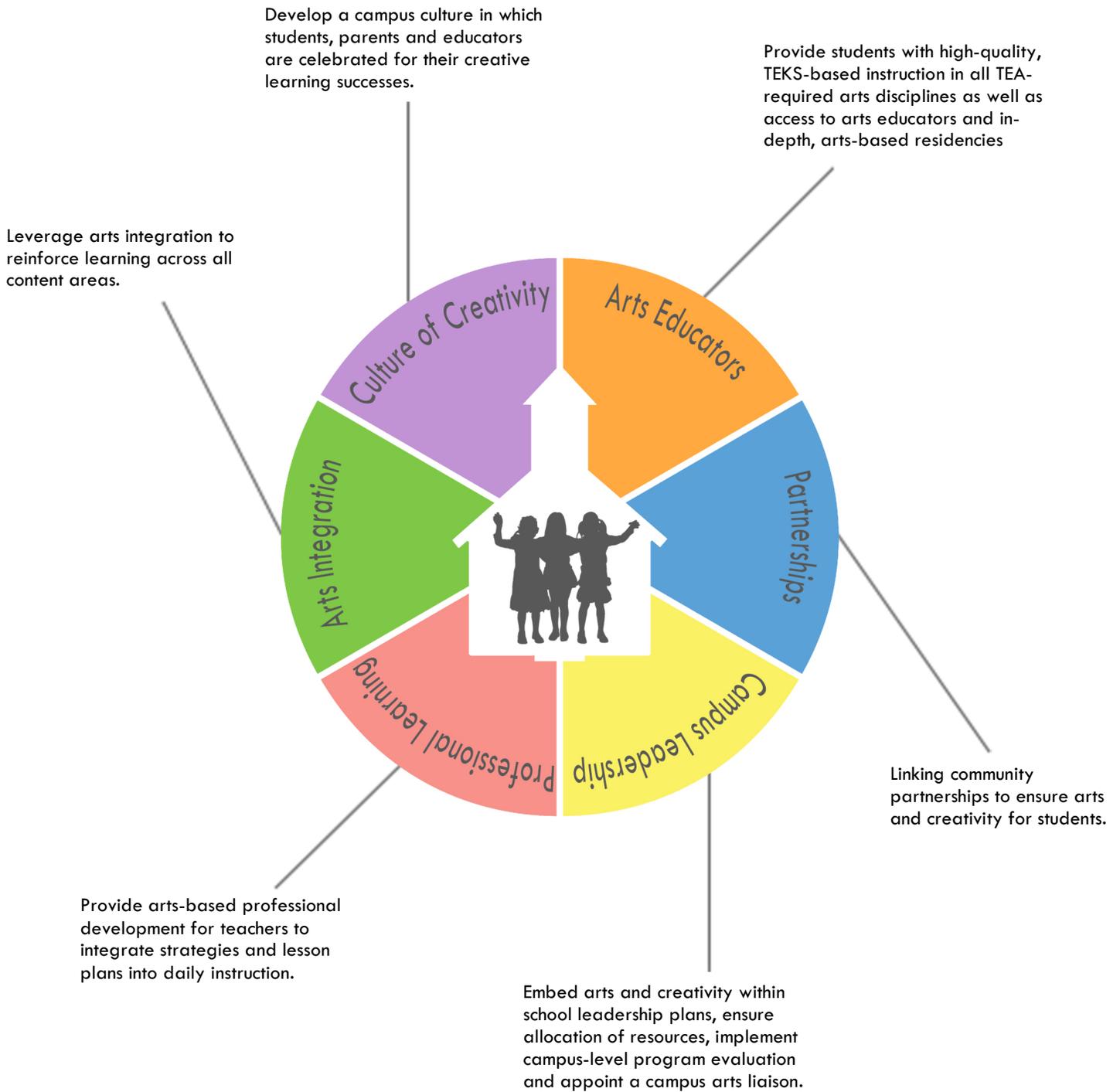
The **collective vision** of the Arts Access Initiative is that every student in Houston will have the opportunity to benefit cognitively, creatively, emotionally and academically through the arts.

Every student.

We can achieve this vision, but only if we work together towards three foundational goals: **equity, impact and sustainability** in access to arts learning experiences in and beyond the classroom. Within our collective, these terms have “living” definitions, evolving in response to the needs of the community.

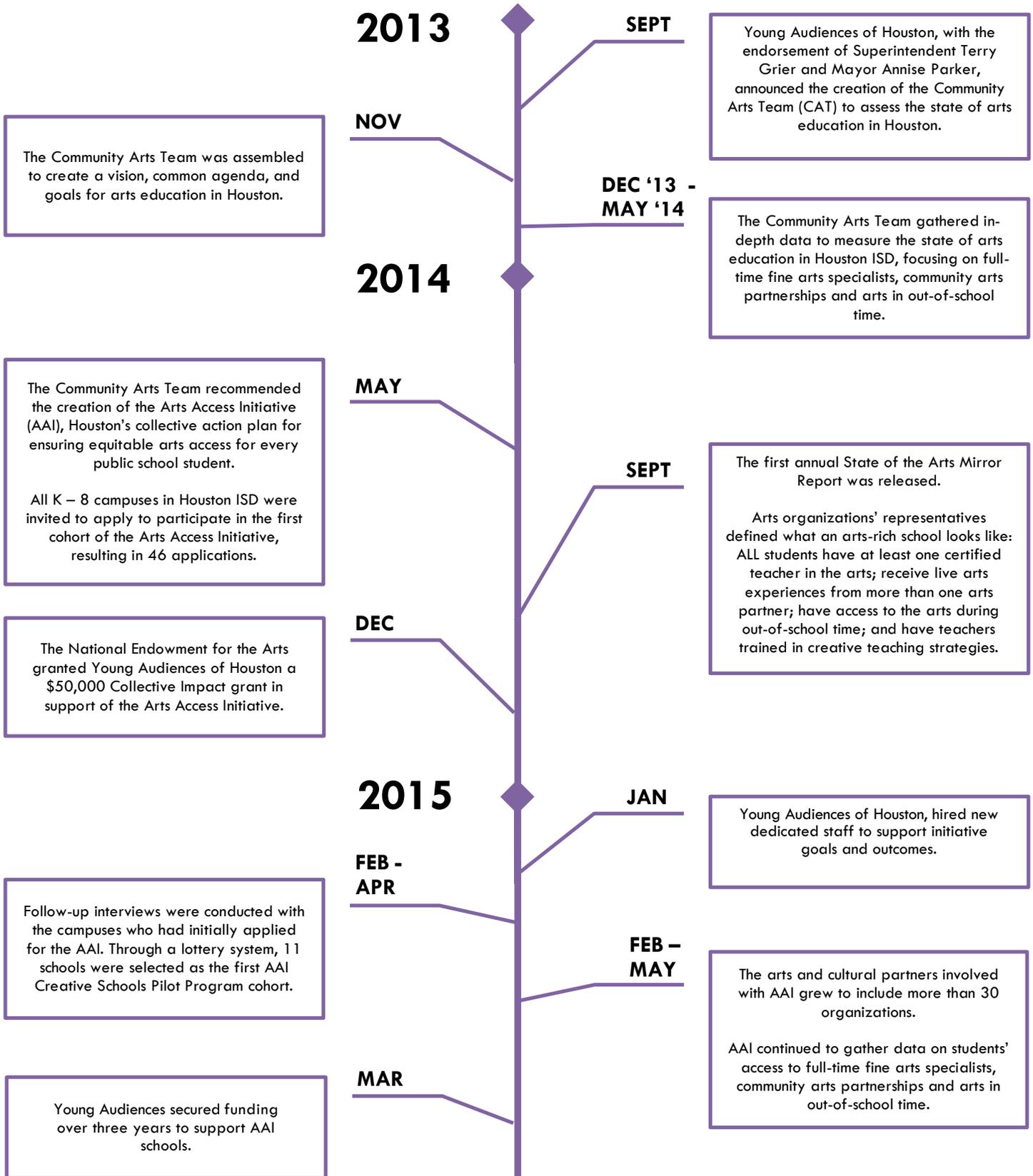
OUR APPROACH

The Arts Access Initiative recognizes that every component of arts education is fundamental to cultivating creative learners.



OUR PATH

Over 4 years, the AAI has progressed from a fundamental vision towards full-scale implementation.



The AAI produced an Arts Guide to connect principals with available residencies, workshops, performances, and after-school programs, as well as with information about their cross-curricular connections.

AAI hosted its first *Meet & Greet*, where arts organizations' representatives shared their diverse arts education offerings with school principals and arts liaisons.

AAI designed foundational professional development for all teachers in arts-based strategies.

The Kennedy Center selected Houston as an Any Given Child city and Barbara Shepherd, Director of National Partnerships at the Kennedy Center, visited Houston.

All K – 8 campuses in Houston ISD were invited to apply to participate in the second cohort. 14 were selected for a total of 25 Focus Creative Schools.

The AAI Arts Guide moved to an online format.

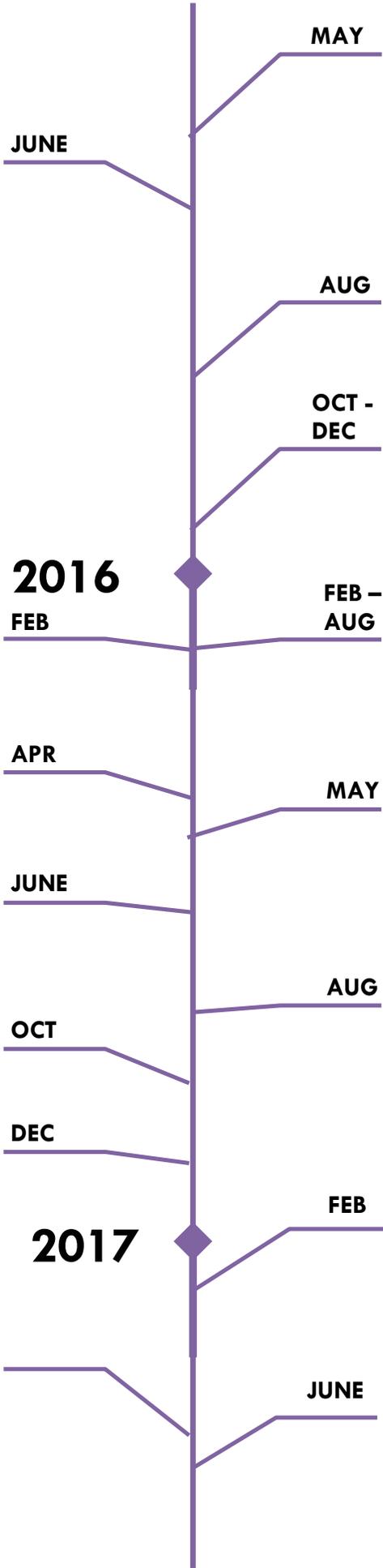
AAI hosted its second *Meet & Greet*.

The AAI offered Kennedy Center professional learning opportunities to teaching artists, principals and teachers.

The Communications Working Group is launched.

The National Endowment for the Arts awards Young Audiences of Houston a \$100,000 Collective Impact grant to support the Arts Access Initiative.

All K – 8 campuses in Houston ISD were invited to apply to participate in the third cohort. 25 were selected for a total of 44 Focus Creative Schools.



Houston ISD hosted a press conference to celebrate the launch of the Arts Access Initiative's pilot program in 11 schools across the district for the 2015-2016 school year.

Houston's Arts Access Initiative became the first city to be accepted as a Phase 2 site into the Kennedy Center's Any Given Child program.

The first cohort of Creative Schools began the two-year Pilot Program.

Launch of AAI's Steering Committee, School Engagement & Capacity Working Group and Community Partnerships Working Group.

AAI continued to gather data on students' access to full-time fine arts specialists, community arts partnerships and arts in out-of-school time.

AAI conducted feedback interviews with arts partner organizations and principal/teacher teams.

All arts organizations were invited to participate in Houston ISD's Arts-Infused Digital Institutes.

The Creative Schools Pilot Program begins its second year of implementation serving 25 schools.

Arts Partners Summit and Steering Committee Retreat to discuss AAI's vision plan.

Houston ISD and Superintendent Carranza make the arts a priority.

Wenden Sanders steps into the role of fine arts director for HISD and begins hiring a team of 8 to address fine arts and arts-integration curriculum.

CREATIVE SCHOOLS PILOT PROGRAM

To demonstrate what can be achieved with increasing arts access for students, in August 2015, the AAI embarked on a two-year pilot program in the Houston Independent School District.

Each of the **Creative Schools committed to the following 5 pillars:**

1. Principal Leadership and Commitment, including a campus funding allocation
2. Strategic Arts Planning to support campus goals
3. Arts Liaison to coordinate and champion the arts at the school
4. Arts-based professional development for all teachers
5. Arts Partnerships with arts and cultural institutions

With this commitment, **Creative Schools received:**

- Campus-based needs assessment and consultation
- Incentives to invest in sequential fine arts instruction for all students
- Advocacy on the school and district's behalf concerning arts education and access
- Matching funds to support their selected program choices, including the following, in order of priority:
 - In-depth arts experiences such as residencies during the school day
 - In-school, one-time events such as live arts experiences and/or workshops
 - If desired, after-school arts programs

In 2015 – 2016, the Arts Access Initiative worked with:

- 11 Schools
- 6,878 Students
- 418 Teachers

Collectively, in 2015-2016, AAI partners provided:

- 75,500+ student-hours of new arts experiences
- 18 hours of foundational professional development
- 138 partnerships including:
 - 37 Residencies
 - 62 In-school performances or workshops
 - 43 Field trips
 - 12 After-school programs
 - 2 Summer programs

In 2016 – 2017, the AAI worked with:

- 25 Schools
- 16,842 Students
- 1,005 Teachers

In 2017 – 2018, the AAI is working with:

- 44 Schools
- ~28,000 Students
- ~1,790 Teachers

OUR FINDINGS

We have drawn some initial insights through the implementation of the Creative Schools Pilot Program. In addition, the AAI has engaged an Independent Evaluator to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to assess the impact of the Initiative. This evaluation will be published in Spring 2018.

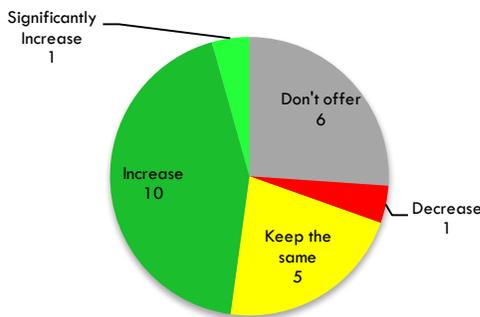
- Principals and district leaders flourish when given discussion of the benefits of the arts, clear guidance on how to embed arts and creativity at the school in a way that reflects their school priorities and information about how to make the necessary connections to move forward.
- Providing excellent arts programming is not sufficient to ensure the sustainability of arts-rich campuses. Teachers, principals, and district leaders generally believe in the value of the arts, but they must learn that it is possible for them to achieve a robust selection of arts opportunities on their campus. Therefore, other barriers, such as funding, lack of instructional time, and lack of knowledge about how to create arts partnerships must be addressed to guarantee sustainability.
- Matching grant funds bolster the schools' ability and commitment to provide arts access at the campus.
- The campus arts liaison is key in supporting the principal in coordinating arts opportunities and proposing new ideas, yet the principal needs to drive the overall arts vision for the campus. In the event of principal transition, a strong arts liaison ensures continuity of programs and relationships.
- Arts-based professional development for teachers is effective when paired with timely follow-ups. There is tremendous interest for more PD opportunities in the arts from teachers and principals alike.
- Arts and cultural organizations of all sizes have had opportunities to partner with pilot schools, and in some cases have adapted their programming based on schools' needs.
- Developing communication skills between the school leadership and arts organization was a high priority for arts organization partners. It is important to convey to the school leadership how personalized their arts experience is, and how teaching artists' time must be valued.
- Arts organizations and teaching artists benefited from having access to professional learning opportunities as well as sharing information and best practices.
- Comprehensive family and community engagement communication tools and pathways to champion arts education need to be developed and implemented at schools.
- Ongoing evaluation and dialogue is critical to understanding our gains and strategizing for continuous improvement.

OUR FINDINGS – Arts Organization Capacity

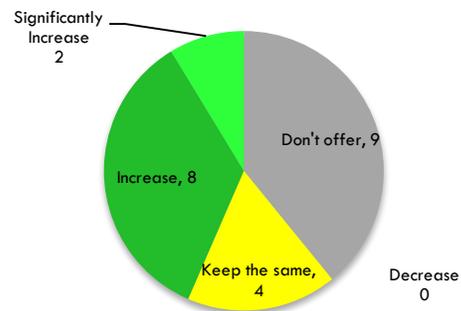
As we look ahead to making the systems established by the AAI available across the district, we undertook a survey of partners to determine whether the community had the capacity to add more schools to this initiative.

Q4. Compared to 2016 - 2017, do you think you could serve fewer, the same number, or more AAI schools in 2017 - 2018?

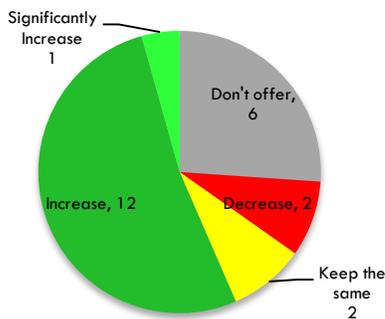
Residencies



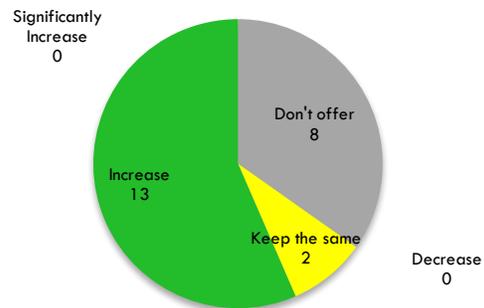
Field trips to your location



Performances or workshops at schools



After-school programs



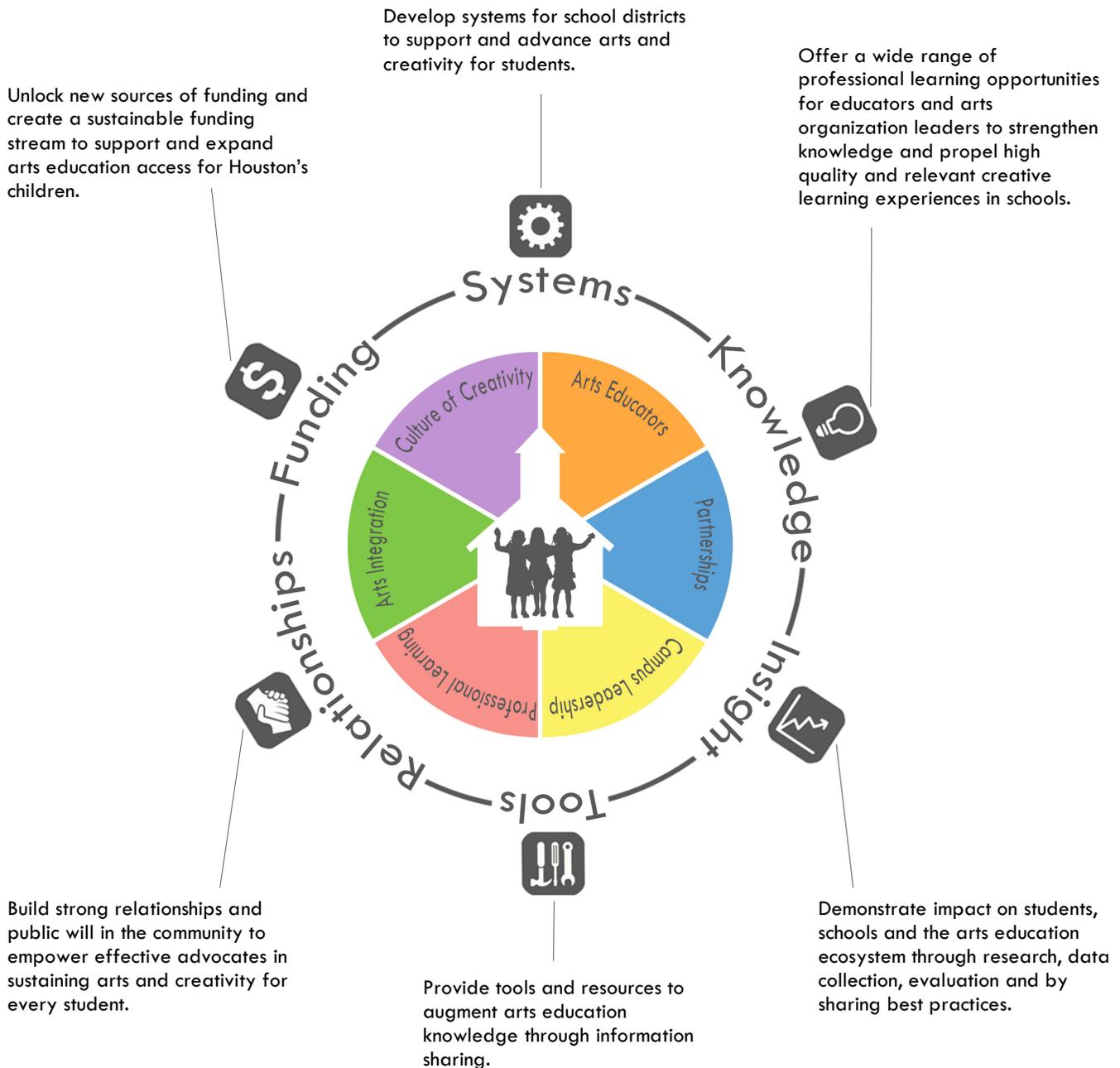
Of the organizations offering each type of program, more than half said they could either increase or significantly increase the number of schools they partner with in the coming academic year.

OUR PLAN

The AAI utilizes a systemic approach to cultivate a vibrant arts education ecosystem within Houston.

The Arts Access Initiative Plan has been developed with stakeholder input, including local and national partners, as well as with insight from the Creative Schools Pilot Program and the annual AAI State of the Arts Mirror Report.

To achieve our foundational goals of equity, impact and sustainability, **AAI will work in six areas:**



OUR PLAN – Areas of Work at a Glance



SYSTEMS

Expand arts access, teaching and learning at school districts through systems and frameworks.

- Implement the Creative School Designation
- Extend and expand the Creative Schools Pilot Program framework through the Focus Creative Schools Strategy



KNOWLEDGE

Develop through the Arts Horizon Institute, comprehensive professional learning opportunities for a vibrant arts education ecosystem, including:

- Robust workshops for principals and school support officers
- Greater/ more involved PD opportunities for classroom teachers
- Shared arts learning and PD opportunities for teaching artists and arts leaders



RELATIONSHIPS

Engage in meaningful relationships with community stakeholders through assemblies, events and fellowship.

- Develop and expand Meet & Greets for arts organizations and schools
- Establish community assemblies for arts organizations
- Grow relationships with local media outlets
- Engage families and school communities
- Establish “Arts Councils” at Creative Schools
- Engage local officials and community leaders

OUR PLAN – Areas of Work at a Glance



TOOLS

Develop and share diverse toolkits, websites and platforms to make arts education opportunities available to all.

- Broadcast the Arts Guide district-wide
- Establish pathways for Collective Impact internal communication
- Develop resources and toolkits for educators and arts leaders
- Create communications toolkits for arts organizations and schools as well as press kits for release via arts organizations marketing teams
- Develop platforms for resource-sharing among arts organizations
- Develop a pipeline for teaching artists



INSIGHT

Engage in research, data collection and best practice sharing for continuous improvement and to assess impact.

- Collect and analyze Campus Inventory/Creative Schools Designation data, including information from High Schools
- Continue to release the *State of the Arts Mirror Report*
- Establish pathway for feedback between arts organizations and campuses
- Identify barriers that exist beyond the school level that impact access to the arts
- Begin conversation with partners about shared values for arts education
- Finalize the pilot program evaluation and share outcomes broadly
- Develop a comprehensive Arts Atlas website



FUNDING

Unlock new sources of funding to establish Houston's PreK-12 Arts Education Fund.

- Explore long-term funding opportunities to develop a dedicated fund for sustainable and equitable arts access to arts education in Houston.

NEXT STEPS

In the next year, we will collectively move towards a more systems-focused model for sustaining meaningful arts access.

Through the pilot phase, we've established a grassroots model for campus-based arts programming that successfully addresses our first two foundational goals: equity and impact. Of course, we have not fully achieved these goals yet and will continue the efforts we've established while working hands-on with our Focus Creative School cohort. Looking forward, we must also develop tools and processes to further our final goal: sustainability.

To do this, we must pull back our focus to the bigger picture, thinking through the various systems needed to preserve arts access in Houston schools permanently.

With input from the collective, we've pinpointed a handful of major pathways to ensure permanent and universal access to arts programming at every campus. These, in turn, are separated into strategies that promote expansion of programming within schools and districts and those that promote expansion of programming capacity within arts organizations.

Over the 2017-2018 year, we will develop and implement these strategies with the guidance and support of our entire collective.

NEXT STEPS – Strategies for Schools & Districts

Drawing on the insights from the pilot program, we propose a dual strategy that will equalize access to arts education in HISD and facilitate a process for more schools to benefit from the arts.

1. EXTEND AND EXPAND THE FOCUS CREATIVE SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Through the Focus Creative Schools strategy (the comprehensive framework that was designed, tested and refined through the pilot program), the AAI will provide targeted facilitation and hands-on support to campuses with low levels of arts access.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the AAI selected 22 more HISD campuses with low or no arts access to join the cohort through a district-wide application process. Moving forward, we propose adding roughly 25 every year in order to reach 100 total Focus Creative Schools by 2020. Through ongoing data gathering and evaluation, the AAI will determine which campuses are in most need of receiving this targeted approach annually.

Excelling Focus Creative Schools that have received the facilitation for three years will “graduate” and continue to be supported through the district-wide Creative School Designation Strategy. With this specific strategic expansion, our goal is to eradicate all “arts desert” schools in HISD by 2020.

2. IMPLEMENT THE CREATIVE SCHOOLS DESIGNATION STRATEGY

In conjunction with HISD, the AAI will harness the power of the Creative Schools Designation to promote the expansion and scalability of arts education systems throughout the district.

The CSD will systemically encourage sustainable and meaningful arts access in four ways:

1. Identifying valuable components of arts access to ensure all students receive high-quality arts education
2. Honoring the ways campuses provide strong access to creative experiences that go beyond traditional state-accountability expectations
3. Providing a multi-dimensional, comprehensive portrait of arts experiences and resources and where possible inequities exist
4. Communicating the value of arts and creativity through the mobilized support of Collective Impact

To support schools district-wide and ensure available resources to grow campus designation, the AAI will establish district-wide systems tested and refined through the pilot program. These include online resources, meet-and-greet events with arts organizations and professional development opportunities.

Additionally, we will develop the Creative School Designation Fund, designed to support principals who have a plan to advance their school’s rating in the Creative Schools Designation. A committee of diverse AAI partners will evaluate proposals and successful applicant schools will receive funding through a grant. All campuses in HISD may apply (unless they are currently a Focus School). Funds will support all areas established as priorities through the CSD.

By 2020, through the implementation of the CSD Strategy, the AAI will have robust systems in place that advance each school in response to their own needs as well as begin to ensure the equity needed to grow a vibrant arts education ecosystem in Houston.

NEXT STEPS – Strategies for Arts Organizations

To achieve our collective goals, we must establish systems for arts education leaders and teaching artists to connect, share knowledge, innovate and flourish. To this end, we propose a three-pronged strategy to support and advance these organizations' educational goals.

1. ARTS HORIZON INSTITUTES

The Arts Horizon Institutes will be an annual series of diverse workshops, lectures and professional learning opportunities for art leaders and teaching artists. Topics will be determined by the Arts Horizon working group—comprised of arts leaders, teaching artists, educators and district leaders—on an annual basis, ensuring that the opportunities offered are aligned with the arts education community's current needs.

The goal of this series is to offer tools, resources and learning opportunities for arts partners, strengthen knowledge and relationships, and spur high-quality and relevant creative learning experiences in schools.

2. ARTS CAPACITY ADVANCEMENT FUND

The Arts Capacity Advancement Fund offers arts organizations the space to grow by providing funds to support the specific goals of education programs or departments.

Many organizations— due to lack of time, personnel or funding— have few opportunities to take risks, experiment or innovate. As demand for arts partnerships increases across the district, education departments of all sizes must be able to dedicate time and effort to plan responsibly *and responsively* to best serve the interests of students they encounter and their own organizational missions.

As a first step, the Insight working group—a committee of leaders from the nonprofit arts education community—will create guiding principles and a framework for the Advancement Fund. The Insight working group will host a series of discussions to outline our fundamental, overarching community values for student arts programming to create a community of practice.

Once these community values are established, the Arts Capacity Fund working group will assemble to design the application requirements for the Arts Capacity Advancement Fund with input from a group of diverse AAI partners, including Steering Committee members and arts partners.

3. TEACHING ARTIST PIPELINE

The AAI will establish an investigative Teaching Artists Pipeline task force to engage relevant partners determine the resources and opportunities available, and appraise the community's interest in pathways for arts educators and teaching artists.

Possible strategies include:

- Partnerships with high schools and higher education institutions
- Internships or practicums with arts organizations
- Certification or credentialing programs
- Scholarships for promising young arts educators
- Inclusion in teaching artist professional development