



The Role of California's County Offices of Education and Implications for Arts Education

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Executive Summary

For years, California’s county offices of education (COEs) have played a role in supporting districts by providing financial oversight, serving as a liaison to the California Department of Education (CDE), and addressing region-specific needs. Since the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013, the responsibilities of COEs have grown to include a central role in California’s Statewide System of Support: reviewing and approving Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and helping districts identified as needing “differentiated assistance” with root cause analysis (CDE, 2021a).

In early 2022, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commissioned SRI Education to conduct a study to investigate how county offices of education (COEs) are adapting to their new role in the Statewide System of Support under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and explore the implications for arts education. The goal is to inform county leaders and arts education stakeholders at all levels of the education system as they continue their efforts to expand access to arts education as envisioned in the California Arts Standards and called for in the California Education Code.

Specifically, the SRI study team sought to address the following research questions: How has the role of COEs changed over time? How does the state’s arts education infrastructure support COE arts activities? What local infrastructure supports COE arts activities? What COE arts activities help build district capacity for the arts? How many COEs participate in these? What other COE activities offer opportunities to improve arts education?

To address these questions, the study team conducted “expert interviews” to learn from individuals with deep knowledge of the COEs and their role in the California education system and arts education. We also gathered information at the state, regional, and local level. To provide a statewide snapshot, we gathered general information from all counties (via document review and a survey of all 58 COEs). For more nuanced information, we conducted interviews with the CCSESA regional arts leads. Finally, to understand the local experience, we conducted six county-level case studies. Below is a summary of key findings and recommendations.

Key findings

How has the role of COEs changed over time?

- The shift from categorical funding to local control, implemented through the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013, reframed the COE-district relationship to one of thought partner and technical assistance provider in addition to making sure districts meet new and old accountability requirements.
- COE administrators faced complex challenges, taking on more and more responsibilities (e.g., supporting districts in understanding and conducting continuous improvement, supporting English learners, navigating pandemic-related challenges, and social

emotional learning needs) and navigating a fine line between thought partner and compliance officer.

How does the state’s arts education infrastructure support COE arts activities?

- A majority of COEs turned to the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) and statewide advocacy organization, Create CA, to support arts education.
- Some COEs, especially larger COEs (i.e., student enrollment >100,000), received support from other state organizations such as the California Arts Project and the California Arts Council.

What local infrastructure supports COE arts activities?

- More than a quarter of COEs, mostly those serving large student populations, had a full-time arts lead.
- Dedicated arts leads brought substantial capacity to COEs.
- Fewer than half of COEs had a current strategic arts plan.
- Local arts infrastructure, in the form of both COE arts leads and strategic arts plans, was more robust in larger COEs (i.e., student enrollment >100,000).

What COE arts activities help build district capacity for the arts? How many COEs participate in these?

- Most COEs shared standards-aligned arts curricular resources, and nearly half of COEs indicated they provided professional learning specific to the new California arts standards and framework.
- Most COEs partnered with community-based arts organizations—and other COEs—to extend their capacity to support districts and schools.
- Countywide arts education coalitions facilitated COE partnerships between districts and community organizations.
- Just over two thirds of COEs offered arts-specific professional learning opportunities, most commonly on the subjects of arts and social and emotional learning, and arts integration.
- About a fifth of districts in COEs that offered strategic arts planning services had a current strategic arts plan.
- While more than half of COEs applied, or helped districts apply, for competitive grants to support arts education, other COEs did not have the capacity to track grant opportunities or develop grant proposals.

What other COE activities offer opportunities to improve arts education?

- Most COEs make use of arts education data, but fewer than half describe those data as “timely and accurate.”

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- Nearly half of county Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) mentioned the arts, but less than a third of COE arts leads played a role in developing the county LCAP and less than a fifth could affirm that the LCAP community survey included questions about the arts.
 - COE arts leads are rarely included in the development or review of district LCAPs, potentially limiting their ability to share information about how arts education can be used to improve student outcomes.
 - Of the 37 COEs that had a full- or part-time arts lead, nearly half participate in providing state-legislated “differentiated assistance,” but arts interventions were rarely considered as a district improvement strategy.
 - While a majority of COEs indicated they supported arts initiatives in court and community schools, interview data and previous research suggests arts education in these schools is limited.
 - COEs serving larger student populations were more likely to provide supports related to Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, Entertainment than those serving smaller student populations.

Recommendations

The study team developed recommendations for COEs and the statewide organizations that support them based on study findings. These recommendations are intended to support efforts to expand access to arts education as envisioned in the California Arts Standards and called for in the California Education Code.

For COEs:

- Leverage the CCSESA/COE network to promote the implementation of California’s new arts standards and framework.
- Continue to build relationships with district leaders to maximize influence.
- Model strategic planning and community engagement processes that foster support for arts education and contribute to sustainable arts programs.
- Tailor support for districts receiving differentiated assistance.
- Consider how new funds can be leveraged to implement arts programs that address social and emotional learning goals.
- Increase arts learning opportunities in court and community schools to reengage students, promote equity, and demonstrate the effectiveness of arts programs.

For COE partners:

- Promote an understanding of the arts as core academic content and part of a comprehensive core curriculum.

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- Continue to provide resources in support of the implementation of California's new arts standards and framework.
 - Advocate for improvements in the state's data system, especially regarding elementary arts education data, and consider how to supplement that data in the meantime.
 - Connect existing research to state priorities and support new research relating to the indicators measured by the California School Dashboard.
 - Tailor support for small COEs.

Glossary

Arts Education Partnership	Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education and administered by Education Commission of the States, Arts Education Partnership is a national network that seeks to advance arts education by building the capacity of arts and education leaders and serving as a hub for research and resources (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.).
Arts Now Communities	The Arts Now Communities program, supported by Create CA, provides leadership training, technical assistance, and stipends to local arts education advocates to pursue local advocacy objectives (Create CA, n.d.-b).
California Arts Council (CAC)	CAC is a state agency that seeks to advance the arts and culture statewide by administering grants and providing resources and services to support local arts infrastructure (CAC, n.d.).
California Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, and Entertainment industry sector (CTE-AME)	The California Department of Education (CDE) established AME as a CTE industry sector in 2005 as part of the CTE Model Curriculum Standards. The four AME pathways—Design, Visual, and Media Arts; Performing Arts; Production and Managerial Arts; and Game Design and Integration—build on foundational arts programs and include a career readiness component (CDE, 2021d).
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)	CCEE, a state agency established by statute in 2013, assists county offices of education and school districts, through a tiered support system, to achieve the goals identified in their Local Control Accountability Plans (CDE, 2021b).
California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)	CCSESA works with state policymakers, including the Governor, Legislature, State Board of Education, and California Department of Education, to ensure the statutory responsibilities of the County Superintendents of Schools are carried out in a consistent and equitable manner across the state. Through a regional structure, CCSESA supports all county superintendents in designing and implementing statewide programs that support school districts in student services, curriculum and instructional services, fiscal accountability and business services, personnel services, and technology and telecommunications (CCSESA, n.d.-a).
CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative	Supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and other funding sources, the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative leverages the CCSESA infrastructure to strengthen and expand arts learning in California public schools.
California Department of Education (CDE)	CDE is the state agency that oversees public education. The CDE provides resources and leadership, including access to standards, curriculum, and professional learning.
California Education Code	The California Education Code contains all state statutes related to California’s K–12 public schools. The Governor and Legislature create or change Education Code sections through legislation, and local school boards and county offices of education are responsible for compliance with the code. In Sections 51210 and 51220, the Education Code mandates that schools <i>provide</i> arts education in four disciplines—music, theater, dance, visual arts—in grades 1–6, and that schools <i>offer</i> each of these disciplines in grades 7–12.

California parent–teacher association (CAPTA)	CAPTA is statewide organization that supports local PTA leaders, promotes family engagement, and advocates on behalf of California children, youth, and families. Relating to the arts, the CAPTA helps to develop local advocates for a full curriculum that includes the arts (California State PTA, 2022).
California School Dashboard	The California School Dashboard was established with LCFF legislation and provides parents, educators, and the public with information on indicators aligned with the state’s eight priorities, including: Basic Services, Implementation of State Standards, Parent Involvement, Student Achievement, Student Engagement, School Climate, Course Access, and Student Outcomes (CDE, 2017).
Continuous improvement	Continuous improvement is “the act of integrating quality improvement into the daily work of individuals in [a] system” (Park et al., 2013, p. 5). In California, school districts are expected to engage in continuous improvement processes as part of their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process and school planning processes (CDE, 2021e).
County office of education (COE)	A COE is an intermediary agency that operates in the space between the CDE and school districts. COEs provide a range of services to the state’s school districts, including business, administrative, and curriculum services and financial oversight. COEs also provide direct educational services for students whose needs cannot be met by local districts (EdSource. (n.d.-b).
Create CA	Create CA is a coalition of state and local arts and government partners that advocate for “high-quality arts education ... by providing policy expertise and mobilizing a statewide network of advocates and allied partners” (Create CA, n.d.-a).
Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) Arts Subcommittee	CCSESA’s CISC is one of several steering committees that carry out the work of the association. CISC hosts subcommittees that focus on an array of content areas and special topics, including the arts. The Arts Subcommittee, like other content area subcommittees, “identifies statewide curriculum and staff development needs, provides a communication and implementation network for curriculum and professional development activities, and assists the CDE in adopting and implementing instructional materials and developing publications such as curriculum frameworks” (CCSESA, n.d.-c.).
Differentiated assistance	California’s accountability and continuous improvement system is based on a framework with three levels of support (CDE, 2021a). The second level is differentiated assistance, which one or more agencies is legislatively required to provide to local educational agencies or schools that meet certain eligibility criteria. COEs must offer differentiated assistance in the form of individually designed assistance to address identified performance issues on the state’s eight Local Control Funding Formula priority areas, including significant disparities in performance among student groups.
Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)	The LCAP is a 3-year plan, required of local education agencies by LCFF statute and updated annually, that “describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priorities” (CDE, 2022c).

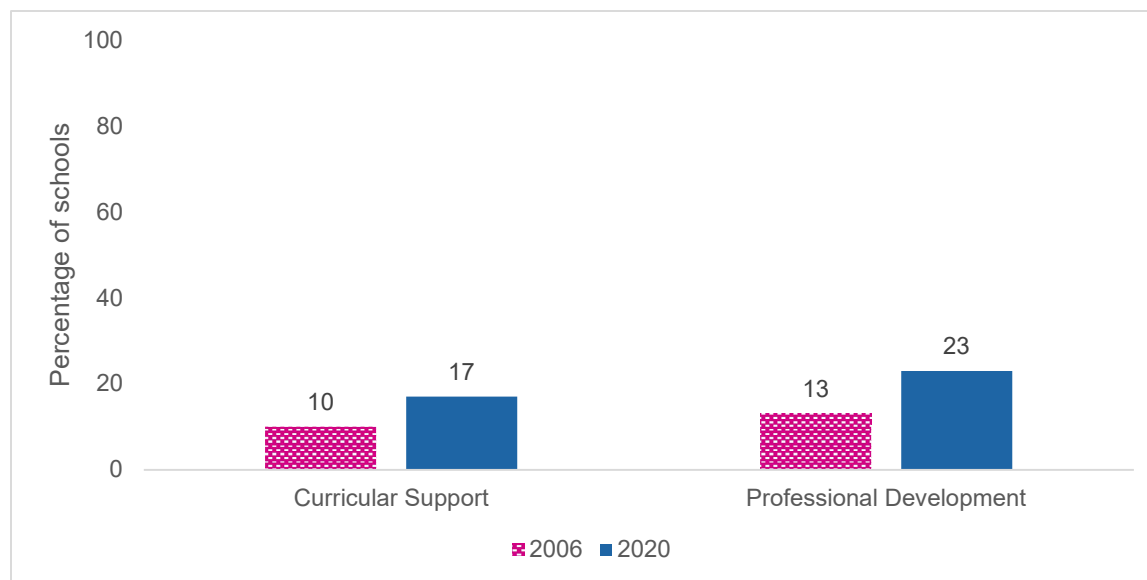
Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)	Enacted in 2013, the LCFF fundamentally changed how local education agencies are funded (CDE, 2021h). For school districts and charter schools, the LCFF “establishes uniform grade span grants in place of the myriad of previously existing K–12 funding streams, including revenue limits, general purpose block grants, and most state categorical programs.” For COEs, the LCFF “establishes funding for oversight activities and instructional programs.”
National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS)	NCCAS (2014) is an alliance of national arts and arts education organizations dedicated to ensuring quality standards-based arts opportunities for all students.
Statewide System of Support	California’s system of support, established by LCFF in 2013, is “one of the central components of California’s accountability and continuous improvement system” (CDE, 2022a). The goal is to “help [local educational agencies] and their schools meet the needs of each student they serve, with a focus on building local capacity to sustain improvement and effectively address disparities in opportunities and outcomes.”
Strategic arts plan	Strategic arts plans are a road map for schools, districts, and counties to assess, envision, and implement quality arts programs for their students. The strategic planning process often includes multiple stages such as assessing the current state of arts education in a district, establishing an arts education policy, generating a plan, developing a funding strategy, and implementing the plan (Burt & Aarn, 2016).
The California Arts Project (TCAP)	TCAP, one of the California Subject Matter Projects, established by state statute and administered by the University of California Office of the President, is a “collaborative, statewide network of teachers and university scholars” working to “[expand] student access to and [improve] student artistic literacy development” through providing “discipline-focused professional learning” (TCAP, n.d.).
U.S. Department of Education (ED)	ED is the federal agency that administers and coordinates most federal assistance to US public schools (ED, 2010). The Well-Rounded Education Programs Office in ED (n.d.) administers discretionary grant programs that support arts education.

Chapter 1. Introduction

For years, California’s county offices of education (COEs) have played a role in supporting districts by providing financial oversight, serving as a liaison to the California Department of Education (CDE), and addressing region-specific needs. Since the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013, the responsibilities of COEs have grown to include a central role in the Statewide System of Support: reviewing and approving Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and helping districts identified as needing “differentiated assistance” with root cause analysis (CDE, 2021a). However, research indicates that the COEs’ interpretations of their new responsibilities vary from county to county (Fensterwald, 2014; Humphrey & O’Day, 2019; Warren, 2016), and 59% of counties indicate they have or will make big changes in response to the Statewide System of Support (Plank et al., 2019). (See the Glossary for more information about the LCFF and associated Statewide System of Support.)

Concurrent with these state-level policy changes, the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA, n.d.-b) has led a statewide arts initiative and partnered with CDE, Create CA, the California Arts Project, and others to leverage resources to increase the access, quality, and equity of arts education throughout the state, including providing substantial support for COEs to provide resources to local districts and schools. These supports have included discipline and grade-specific arts curriculum and assessments, virtual professional learning modules, and subgrants to rural COEs. A recent SRI Education (SRI) survey of California school principals indicated an increase in the degree to which schools rely on COEs to support the delivery of arts instruction (Exhibit 1), suggesting these efforts are having an impact at the local level.

Exhibit 1. Schools receiving arts-related curricular support and professional learning in the arts from COEs: 2006 and 2020



Source. SRI survey of principals in California’s K–12 schools, as reported in Woodworth et al. (2022).

In late 2020, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commissioned SRI to conduct a study to investigate how COEs are adapting to their new role and explore the implications for arts education. The goal is to inform COEs, CCSESA, and arts education stakeholders at all levels of the education system—from state policymakers to arts education advocacy organizations (e.g., Create CA) and membership organizations (e.g., the California State PTA) to community-based nonprofits and funders—as they continue their efforts to expand access to arts education as envisioned in the California Arts Standards and called for in the California Education Code.

Study design

Before embarking on this study, the study team developed a theory of change to inform the study design, research questions, and data collection.

Theory of change

The theory of change (Exhibit 2) illustrates the numerous key contributors in California’s **arts education infrastructure** according to the level at which they operate (federal, state, regional, county, or district). While this study is predominately concerned with what is happening at the county level, it is important to note the context in which COEs operate. Arrows from the key contributors connect to one or more **arts activities**, representing how contributors leverage resources to improve arts education in California. Arts activities lead to **district outputs**, which in turn lead to the desired **school outcomes**: increased quality of, access to, participation in, and equity of arts education in California’s public schools.

The darker blue boxes and lines indicate the central focus of this study: COEs, including their leaders and arts leads, and the activities they might leverage to improve student outcomes in the arts. Note that COEs are one of only two key contributors¹ with arrows connecting to each of the six arts activities, indicating the centrality of their position in the arts education infrastructure.

The light blue boxes indicate key contributors with which the COE has direct relationships. While COEs have relationships with most of the key contributors, they work most closely with the California County Superintendents Education Services Association (CCSESA) and school districts. Therefore, understanding the relationship between COEs and these key contributors is an important component of this study.

Exhibit 3, which directly follows the theory of change, provides more detail about each key contributor, including their organizational level, whether they are publicly or privately funded, and which arts activities they participate in.

¹ The other key contributor connected to each arts activity is the school district.

Exhibit 2. Theory of change

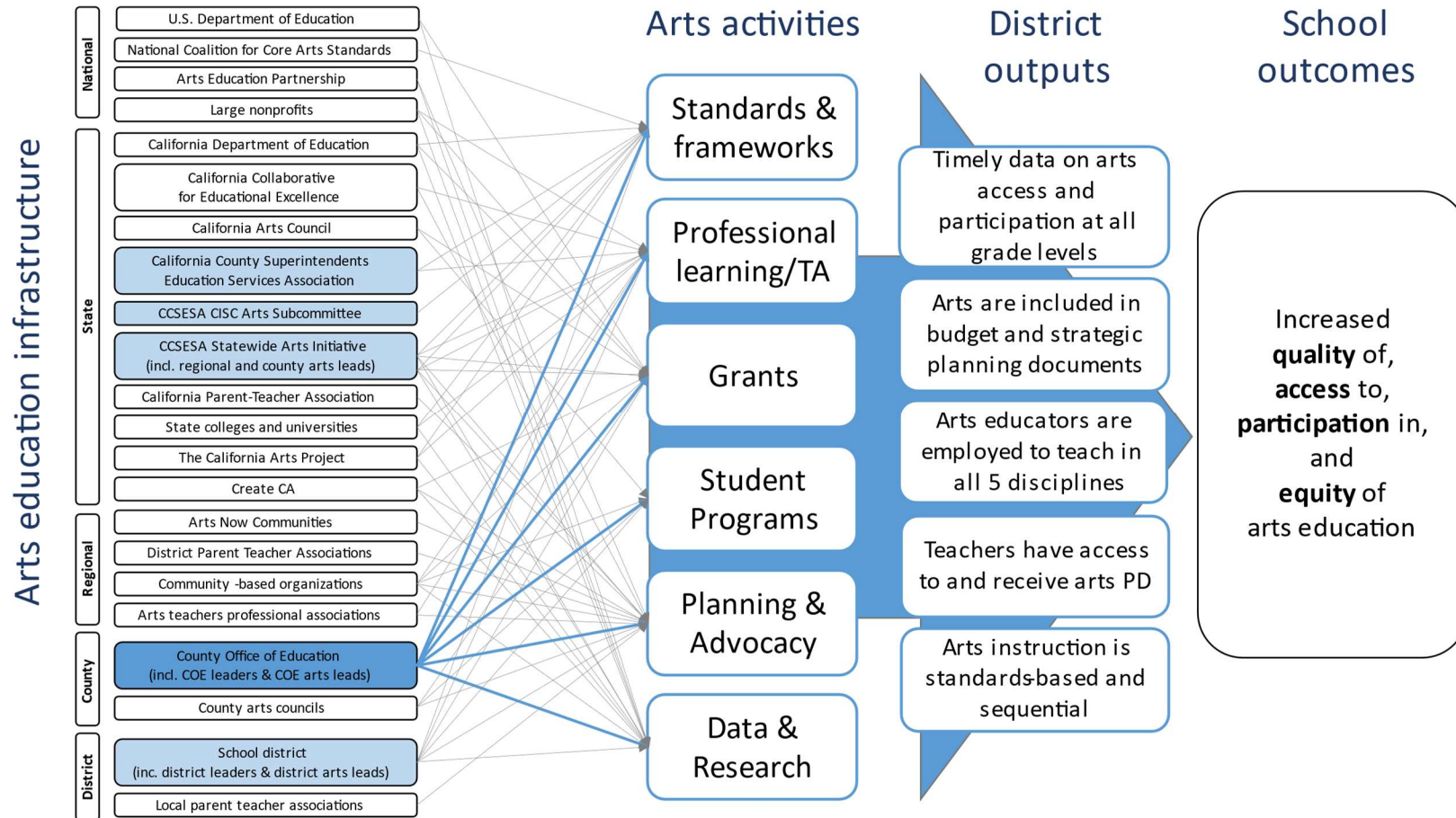


Exhibit 3. Key contributors within California’s arts education infrastructure

Key contributor	Org. level	Funds	Arts Activities					
			Standards & frameworks	Professional learning & TA	Grants	Student programs	Planning & advocacy	Data & research
U.S. Department of Education	National	Public			X			X
National Coalition for Core Arts Standards	National	Public	X					
Arts Education Partnership	National	Public/Private					X	X
Large nonprofits	National	Private		X	X			X
California Department of Education	State	Public	X		X			X
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence	State	Public		X			X	
California Arts Council	State	Public			X	X		
California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)	State	Public/Private	X	X				
Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee’s Arts Subcommittee	State	Public/Private	X	X				
CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative	State	Public/Private	X	X	X		X	X
CCSESA regional and county arts leads	State	Public/Private	X	X	X		X	X

Exhibit 3. Key contributors within California’s arts education infrastructure (continued)

Key contributor	Org. level	Funds	Arts Activities					
			Standards & frameworks	Professional learning & TA	Grants	Student programs	Planning & advocacy	Data & research
California Parent-Teacher Association	State	Private					X	
Parent-teacher associations	County District School	Private			X		X	
State colleges and universities	State Regional	Public/Private	X	X				X
The California Arts Project	State Regional	Public/Private	X	X				X
Create CA	State	Private			X		X	X
Arts Now Communities	Regional	Private					X	
Community-based organizations	Regional	Public/Private		X	X	X	X	X
Arts teachers’ professional associations	Regional	Private	X	X			X	
County office of education (COE)	County	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X
COE leaders (i.e., superintendents and county school boards)	County	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X
COE arts leads	County	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X

Exhibit 3. Key contributors within California’s arts education infrastructure (concluded)

Key contributor	Org. level	Funds	Arts Activities					
			Standards & frameworks	Professional learning & TA	Grants	Student programs	Planning & advocacy	Data & research
County arts councils	County	Public/Private			X	X	X	
School district	District	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X
District leaders (i.e., superintendents and school boards)	District	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X
District arts leads	District	Public	X	X	X	X	X	X

Research questions

To examine the relationships depicted in the theory of change, the study team developed the following research questions:

- How has the role of COEs changed over time?
- How does the state’s arts education infrastructure support COE arts activities?
- What local infrastructure supports COE arts activities?
- What COE arts activities help build district capacity for the arts? How many COEs participate in these?
- What other COE activities offer opportunities to improve arts education?

In addition to these questions, the study team sought to identify and understand “promising practices” that COEs use to promote arts education, missed opportunities that could be leveraged in the future, and how districts experience COE supports. We did not include research questions about school outcomes.

Data collection

To address these questions, the study team conducted “expert interviews” to learn from individuals with deep knowledge of the COEs and their role in the California education system and arts education. We also gathered information at the state, regional, and local level. To provide a statewide snapshot, we gathered general information from all counties (via a county LCAP review and a survey of all 58 COEs). For more nuanced information, we conducted interviews with the CCSESA regional arts leads. Finally, to understand the local experience, we conducted six county-level case studies.

Before beginning original data collection, we conducted a literature review. The goal of the literature review was to better understand how the role of the county office has shifted since the LCFF was implemented in 2013. The review helped us understand the role of COEs in the Statewide System of Support, the ways in which COEs interact with the wider state education infrastructure, and the avenues through which the LCFF could be leveraged to support arts education. We used this information to develop the data collection instruments—the interview protocols, the county LCAP review protocol, and the CCSESA county arts lead survey (described in the following sections).

Expert interviews

To learn about the role of COEs in California and changes to that role in light of new state policies, the study team identified individuals with relevant knowledge and experience. We selected individuals who had a long history with COEs and who therefore could provide their perspectives on the role of COEs and changes over time. Interviewees included the following individuals:

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- Sarah Anderberg, director of the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative
 - Peter Birdsall, former executive director of CCSESA
 - Peggy Burt, arts education consultant specializing in strategic arts planning
 - Susan Connolly, executive director of the CCSESA Student Programs and Services Steering Committee; assistant superintendent of student services, Placer County Office of Education
 - Steven Venz, director of school performance and student outcomes, Santa Barbara Unified School District
 - Gary Waddell, chair of the CISC Arts Subcommittee; associate superintendent in the Equity and Educational Progress Division, Santa Clara COE

We developed an interview protocol to address the research questions. The interview questions were further informed by the literature and document review and tailored for each individual.

County LCAP review

For the Status of Arts Education in California Study, Woodworth et al. (2022) analyzed every 2019/20 county LCAP action for references to supporting arts education. Our study team built on this existing knowledge by reviewing these arts-oriented actions and looking for 1) whether the actions target county schools and programs or districts within the county, and 2) with which of the ten LCFF priority areas each action aligns.

CCSESA regional arts lead interviews

To learn about the role of the COEs and variations in that role across the state, the study team invited the 11 CCSESA regional arts leads to participate in interviews. Each region comprises three to nine counties, except for Region 10 which includes only Los Angeles County. The regional arts leads attend CCSESA Arts Initiative meetings and organize regional meetings. We developed a protocol that asked about their role and responsibilities, their use of statewide supports, and their efforts to build capacity. The protocol was tailored to each region based on that region's context and document review (e.g., county strategic arts plans). In the end, we conducted interviews with 9 of the 11 regional arts leads.

CCSESA county arts lead survey

The study team surveyed CCSESA county arts leads (typically the COE arts lead, if a COE arts lead existed) in all 58 counties to gather information about the role of COEs in influencing arts programming decisions in counties and districts. We developed an initial draft of the survey that was informed by our research questions and literature review. We then refined the survey based on preliminary findings from the expert and CCSESA regional arts lead interviews. The survey asked CCSESA county arts leads about capacity-building, arts in county-run schools and programs, LCAPs and strategic arts plans, data availability, and supports and barriers. The survey also included open-ended questions so that respondents could provide more detail or

alternative answers. Before administering the survey, we sent it to the director of the Statewide Arts Initiative for review and piloted it with two CCSESA county arts leads. We administered the survey over 3 weeks, and 54 out of 58 of counties (93%) responded. Most of this report is based on aggregated response data, but we also report on variation in responses by COE size when applicable.

Case studies

Through case studies, the study team gathered nuanced information about the ways in which COEs support districts and how districts experience this support. To select our sample, we took into consideration key characteristics of counties: CCSESA region, geographic region (e.g., north/south, coastal/inland), rurality, CCSESA regional lead status (i.e., whether the COE arts lead also serves as the CCSESA regional lead), size (e.g., the number of school districts and total student enrollment), and student composition (e.g., racial demographics and percentage of “unduplicated students”). During the expert and CCSESA regional arts lead interviews, we also obtained recommendations for COEs that had been active in the arts. In the end, our case study sample included the following COEs:

- Inyo County Office of Education
- Sacramento County Office of Education
- San Diego County Office of Education
- Santa Cruz County Office of Education
- Sonoma County Office of Education
- Tulare County Office of Education

Descriptions and characteristics of each county are in Appendix A. Within each county, we requested interviews with individuals responsible for coordination and strategic planning for the arts, district LCAP review and differentiated assistance, curriculum and instruction or professional learning activities, and equity initiatives. We also asked the CCSESA county arts leads to identify two districts that worked closely with the COE, served students identified as “socioeconomically disadvantaged,” and captured some of the diversity of the districts with which each COE works (e.g., one small district and one large district). Within each district, we requested interviews with staff engaged in district efforts in arts education, community engagement, LCAPs, and strategic planning for the arts. In total, we completed 30 interviews in 6 COEs and 23 interviews in 12 districts.

Analysis

The study team analyzed the data according to the research questions. For example, we coded segments from the expert and CCSESA regional arts lead interviews to relevant research questions. Similarly, we coded each CCSESA county arts lead survey item to a research question. We then considered data from all three sources for each research question to derive

preliminary findings. Next, we developed and amended the preliminary findings based on new findings from the case studies.

Report overview

The authors begin this report by describing **the changing role of COEs**. We then describe the **arts education infrastructure** in which COEs operate. Next, we share key findings related to **COE arts education activities** and **other COE activities**. We conclude with **recommendations** for COEs, and the organizations that support them, to consider when seeking to support progress toward equitable access to a high-quality arts education. Throughout the report, text boxes highlight secondary findings related to **promising practices** and **contextual considerations**.

Chapter 2. The Changing Role of County Offices of Education

The role of county offices of education (COEs) in California has undergone dramatic shifts, mostly due to the overhaul of the state’s school finance system in 2013. Understanding the impact of this policy change on COEs provides important context for appreciating how COEs interact with districts and manage their own programs. Before exploring the COE role in arts education in more detail, we describe how and why COE responsibilities have changed in the last decade.

Local Control Funding Formula responsibilities

Since their inception, COEs have served as an intermediary between the California Department of Education (CDE) and the 1,000 districts operating throughout the state. Before the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was implemented in 2013, COEs administered the state’s numerous categorical funding programs and the compliance mechanisms that accompanied them. However, the new age of “local control”, begun in 2013, is founded on the assumption that local communities are best positioned to decide how to allocate resources to improve student outcomes. Consequently, the COEs role has shifted from one predominately concerned with fiscal oversight to assisting districts in addressing the eight state priority areas through the Statewide System of Support (see Exhibit 13). In this section, we describe what we learned about how COEs have adapted under the LCFF.

The shift from categorical funding to local control has led some COE staffs to work collaboratively across departments and more closely align their services to district needs.

As part of that three-level statewide system, COEs support districts to improve student performance—specifically on the measures covered by the California School Dashboard (Level 1 support), reviewing districts’ Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), and providing differentiated assistance (Level 2 support) to districts that have not made progress on specific goals or have achievement gaps for specific student groups (CDE, 2021a).

Although the LCFF was implemented in 2013, COE administrators are still adapting to their new role. One expert interviewee described the Statewide System of Support as being in its “infancy” and believed defining and refining the role of COEs will be a critical task for education administrators and policymakers in the next few years. Previous research indicated that COE interpretations of their new responsibilities varied from county to county (Fensterwald, 2014; Humphrey & O’Day, 2019; Warren, 2016), and one study found that 59% of county superintendents had made or planned to make significant changes in response to the Statewide System of Support (Plank et al., 2019).

Our case study data shed some light on these changes as COE administrators reimagine their internal structures and external relationships with districts. One COE administrator described how “walls [between COE departments] have come down,” leading to more collaboration across departments. Such increased collaboration, especially between finance and education services teams, could lead to more efficient use of funds in promoting effective services for school districts working to improve student outcomes. Another COE administrator explained:

The biggest thing that changed the game for all of us was local control. ... Categorical programs by and large went away ... so we couldn't keep living in our silos. Now ... we have to play together. We really need to understand what's going on across the hall or across the street.

Two other interviewees described how COEs “[laid] off a lot of categorical program managers” and shifted to more “generalists or people who work on multiple tasks.”

In some instances, COEs’ external relationships have also shifted. Four interviewees from two COEs described reorienting COE offerings to address specific district needs. One interviewee described this reorientation as “shifting to a more market-driven service model.” In one county, reorientation took the form of “Customer Service Agreements” that required the COE to target its services better to what a particular school or district requested. In another county, the COE’s professional learning activities shifted from a “revolving door” of one-off events to an emphasis on “continuous improvement” and the “whole child.” In the same county, interviewees in two case study districts commented on this shift. A teacher in a very small, rural district remarked, “I’ve been here 26 years, and I think we’re using [the COE’s] expertise at the county level and their connections a lot more over the last 5 years.” The superintendent at a slightly larger district described the COE’s offerings as more “targeted” and “strategic,” and the COE arts lead in this district attributed this shift directly to the LCFF.

However, these systemic shifts were not evident for COEs in other case studies. For example, some COE administrators spoke of a need to stay in their lane or described limited opportunities to collaborate with others outside of their department. Similarly, outside the two districts described in the previous paragraph, very few district administrators noticed a shift in COE strategy in response to the LCFF—in part because pandemic-related issues have dominated the last 2 years.

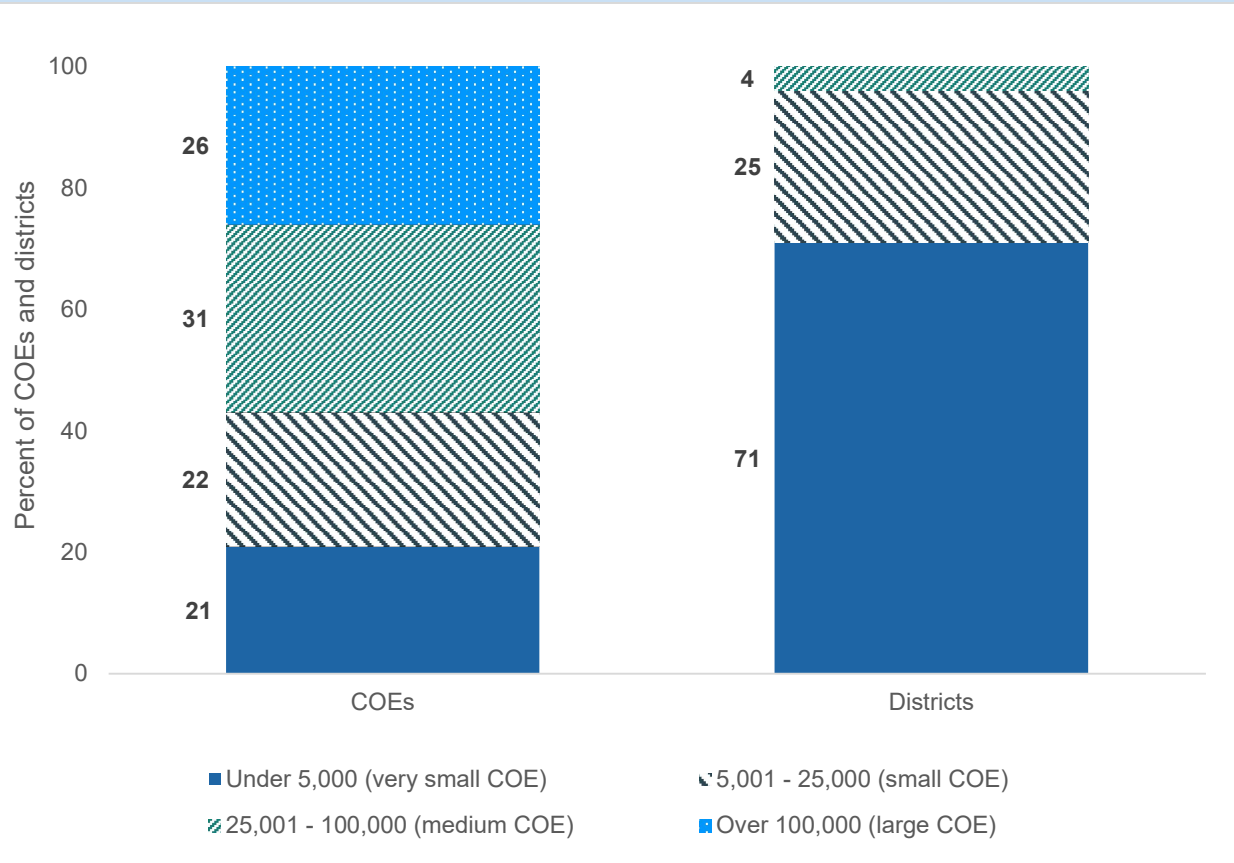
Collectively, these findings suggest that the shift to more collaboration and tailored services is not uniform across the state (see contextual considerations). COEs will need more resources and capacity-building support to meet their new obligations, a hypothesis in keeping with previous research (Manansala & Cottingham, 2019; Plank et al., 2019; Warren, 2016).

Contextual considerations: COEs and districts vary greatly in total student enrollment

When thinking about COEs and districts, it is tempting to assume that most COEs must be significantly larger than most districts because nearly all COEs contain multiple districts. However, given the variation in population density across the state, student enrollment in some districts is comparable to the total student enrollment in some COEs—and vice versa.

For example, total student enrollment (i.e., number of students enrolled in all county and district schools) in COEs ranges between 61 and 1,300,000, with average of 101,000. Total student enrollment in districts also varies widely, ranging from fewer than 10 to 550,000 with an average of 6,000. Two districts, San Diego Unified and Los Angeles Unified, have a larger number of students enrolled than the average COE, and 15 COEs have fewer students enrolled than the average district. Exhibit 4 displays the percentages of COEs and districts within a range of sizes by student enrollment.

Exhibit 4. Distribution of COEs and districts, by total student enrollment 2021



Note. COEs = county offices of education. For COEs, n = 58; for districts, n = 852. There are two districts with more than 100,000 students that are not shown on this graph due to rounding. They are Los Angeles Unified and San Diego Unified. Source. CDE (2022b).

Other responsibilities

In addition to the new responsibilities under the LCFF, COEs continue to administer federal grant programs, provide direct services to districts, disseminate information about new curricular standards and frameworks, oversee fiscal stability in districts, and provide instruction for expelled students and incarcerated youth. Some of these roles (e.g., oversight of fiscal stability) require a compliance orientation, while others (e.g., information about new curricular standards and frameworks) rely on friendly relations between district and county offices. Here we describe how COE administrators attempt to fulfill these sometimes-contradictory roles.

COE administrators faced complex challenges, taking on more and more responsibilities and navigating a fine line between helpful thought partner and compliance officer.

“Over time, COEs have become responsible for more and more,” one COE administrator stated. For example, to implement the Statewide System of Support, county leads received training in improvement science so that they could support districts in differentiated assistance by building continuous improvement systems. In addition, COE staff are being asked to develop new expertise in of-the-moment topics such as virtual and hybrid learning (due to pandemic-related school closures), social and emotional learning, diversity and equity initiatives, and English language development – all while maintaining former responsibilities.

COE staffs varied in their responses to the increase in responsibilities. Some staffs maintained a compliance orientation, while others shifted toward working with districts as a thought partner. One COE administrator explained that “unfortunately, it’s ... meeting accountability requirements” that drives their work with districts and, given how overwhelmed staff are with pandemic-related stresses, there is very little time to “focus on what matters” after accountability requirements have been addressed. An administrator at another COE went one step further, suggesting that the LCFF had led their COE to become more compliance-driven:

On the Education Services side of things, more of the compliance types of responsibilities have ... become a part of our work. ... Those have always existed on the fiscal side ... [but the] LCFF and Local Control [and] Accountability Plans definitely brought the Ed Services side together with the fiscal side to be much more involved in reviewing and approving plans and that kind of thing. That’s been a very new role for me in the time that I’ve been there.

In contrast, an associate superintendent in another county described why and how their COE has shifted away from compliance and toward continuous improvement:

School and district improvement is a much more nuanced process than ticking some boxes ... in the places I’ve been, we really have embraced an ethic of coming alongside the district or the school and saying ... we want to honor what you’re doing and the path that you’re on ... but we want to help you look more deeply at the data, we want to help you ask deeper questions and reflect more

thoughtfully. ... It takes a little longer than just going, analyzing, and doing a report.

The varied interpretations of the COE role could be a result of state policy that asks COEs to provide a wide range of support and oversight duties without providing them with clear mechanisms for accountability (also, see contextual considerations). One COE administrator explained this lack of clarity leaves COEs with positional authority but no actual power: “As a county, we can’t mandate anything. Our existence is to help financial solvency of schools. We can make strong suggestions.”

Contextual considerations: COE–district relationships vary greatly according to district size

District size varies across California (see Exhibit 4). Interviewees emphasized that the size of a district determines much of the COE–district relationship. For very small districts, COEs provide critical business services that administrators in larger districts would typically complete. One interviewee who simultaneously served as district superintendent and school principal in a one-school district explained, “I cannot quite entirely put into words how much the county office is vital ... it would not be feasible to be able to do both the daily principal job and the daily superintendent tasks [without COE support].”

On the other hand, large districts often have more staff and more resources than their COEs, so turning to the COE for support is not always a district administrator’s first instinct. A CCSESA regional arts lead explained, “We’ve got bigger districts that didn’t work with us for a long time because they thought they could do it in house. ... In their mind they’re having to pay for support, they may think they could use those funds other places.”

Chapter 3. The Arts Education Infrastructure

The arts education infrastructure that supports county offices of education (COEs) provides important context for understanding how the shifting role of COEs may impact arts education. Exhibits 2 and 3 describe the key contributors to California’s arts education ecosystem by organizational level, by funding type (public or private), and by the arts activities they support (standards and frameworks, professional learning and technical assistance, grants, student programs, planning and advocacy, and data and research). See the Glossary for additional information about key contributors.

At the state level, COEs benefit from a network of statewide organizations that support arts education. Locally, COEs rely on local resources, including designated COE arts leads or strategic arts plans, to organize their work with state and local partners to increase or improve arts opportunities in their counties. In this chapter, the authors describe both the state and local infrastructure that build COE capacity to promote arts education.

State infrastructure

Multiple statewide organizations and state agencies establish an infrastructure of support for COEs (see Exhibits 2 and 3). On the CCSESA county arts lead survey and in the regional arts lead interviews, the study team asked which of these entities the arts leads relied on for support and what kinds of support those entities provided. In this section, we describe the responses from interview and survey data, including how responses varied by COE size where applicable.²

A majority of COEs turned to the CCSESA and Create CA to support arts education.

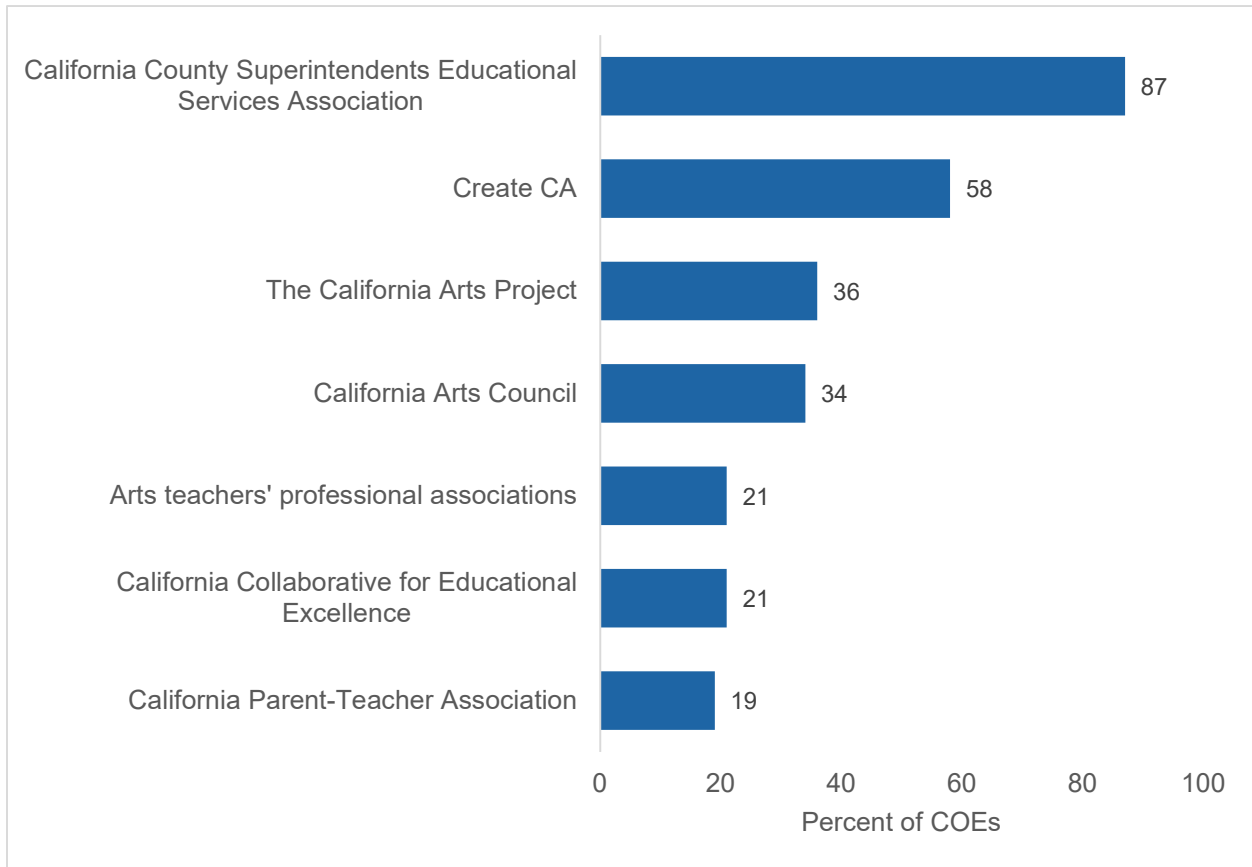
Eighty-seven percent (87%) of COEs reported working with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) to support arts education (Exhibit 5). CCSESA (n.d.-a) is a membership organization that serves as “the organizational mechanism for the 58 County Superintendents of Schools to design and implement statewide programs to identify and promote quality cost-effective educational practices and services.” Two distinct entities within CCSESA focus on arts education: the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative and the Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee’s (CISC) Arts Subcommittee.

Predominately composed of assistant superintendents, CISC hosts subcommittees that focus on an array of content areas and special topics related to educational services and curriculum/instruction. The committee “identifies statewide curriculum and staff development needs, provides a communication and implementation network for curriculum and professional learning activities, and assists the California Department of Education (CDE) in adopting and implementing instructional materials and developing publications such as curriculum

² In instances where COE size is not mentioned, survey findings did not indicate a relationship between COE size and survey responses.

frameworks” (CCSESA, n.d.-c). The CISC Arts Subcommittee is comprised of regional arts leads from across California and takes the lead on curriculum, instruction, and strategic projects related to arts education.

Exhibit 5. Percent of COEs reporting support from state organizations



Note. n = 54.

Since 2006, the CISC Arts Subcommittee’s work has been amplified and expanded by the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative. This initiative leverages a regional structure of regional and county arts leads to build the capacity of all 58 COEs to support schools and districts in their efforts to provide arts education to California students. The CCSESA regional arts leads work with the county arts leads in their regions to pursue the Arts Initiative goals.

The CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative leadership and members works directly with the CISC Arts Subcommittee to convene regional and county arts leads along with representatives from CDE, The California Arts Project (TCAP), and Create CA. Together, they collaborate on the development of resources and professional learning opportunities such as implementation of the *California Arts Education Framework for Public Schools, Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Arts Framework)* and the *California Arts Standards for Public Schools, Prekindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Arts Standards)* adopted by the State Board of

Education. The Committee serves all schools districts in California through supporting their local county offices of education. The variety and expansiveness of the CCSESA arts network may explain why so many survey respondents indicated CCSESA as a source of support for arts education.

In interviews, CCSESA regional arts leads spoke of the value of participating in the Statewide Arts Initiative. They appreciated the opportunity to engage with peers, share information, and forge relationships. Two CCSESA regional arts leads shared their appreciation:

I love CCSESA meetings. ... That's the only place we [regional and county arts leads] can find our peers. I always take something away.

We [COE arts leads] tend to be siloed, and we tend to face similar challenges and advocate for similar issues. We need a system of support.

Another interviewee explained that the Statewide Arts Initiative “meets an essential need of keeping the arts on the radar of all the COE superintendents.”

CCSESA regional arts leads reported learning about a variety of topics and sharing resources through the Statewide Arts Initiative. For example, recent conversations had focused on the rollout of California’s new arts standards and framework and on equitable access to arts education.

Importantly, the Statewide Arts Initiative also provides a community and structure for new CCSESA regional arts leads to learn about their role. One new regional arts lead described starting in the role over the summer and finding Statewide Arts Initiative leaders to be “outstanding” in terms of onboarding. This regional arts lead also appreciated jumping right in to work with the CISC Arts Subcommittee.

Through the CCSESA Arts Initiative, COE arts leads also connected with Create CA. Formerly the California Alliance for Arts Education, Create CA is a statewide organization that advocates for arts education. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of CCSESA county arts leads reported benefitting from the support of Create CA (Exhibit 5). One county arts lead described how they connected with Create CA at a CCSESA meeting. Create CA provided resources that they, in turn, made available to schools and districts. For example, they had heard the former executive director of Create CA present to COE arts leads on using Title I funds to support the arts and had then invited them to present to the district superintendents in their county. They noted that arts education programs were being cut at the time, and “it was important to bring people to the table to help administrators understand how to access funds for the arts.”

Contextual considerations: The CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative connects with nearly every key contributor in the state’s arts education infrastructure, making it uniquely positioned to influence state and local decisions around arts education.

Exhibit 2 illustrates how CCSESA, like COEs, are one of just a few key contributors to the arts education infrastructure connected to all six of the arts activities described in the logic model. While not depicted in Exhibit 2, it is also true that CCSESA works in partnership with most of the other key contributors in this exhibit, positioning it as an organization with strong ties to state-level policymakers and deep understanding of local district needs. The CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative leverages this unique position through programs like Creativity at the Core, which provides professional learning modules, and the Rural Arts Initiative, which assists rural counties in developing strategic arts plans and providing professional learning opportunities in the arts.

Some COEs, especially larger COEs, received support from other state organizations.

Thirty-five percent (35%) of COEs reported receiving support from The California Arts Project (TCAP), although this may underestimate the influence of TCAP since this organization is also a key partner in CCSESA’s statewide arts initiative (meaning COEs may benefit from TCAP support through CCSESA and not attribute it to TCAP). TCAP is one of nine California Subject Matter Projects affiliated with the University of California Office of the President. TCAP is a statewide network that includes five regional sites and provides direct service in counties without a TCAP site. In interviews in case study counties, COE leaders reported coordinating with their regional TCAP site to support area districts. For example, in San Diego County, if the COE arts lead is aware that the Southern Counties California Arts Project (SouthCAP), which serves Imperial, Orange, and San Diego Counties, is offering specific teacher or leader professional learning supports and a district is seeking similar support, the COE arts lead will connect the district with SouthCAP leadership. As the COE arts lead noted, “there’s no need for me to duplicate things that are already going on.”

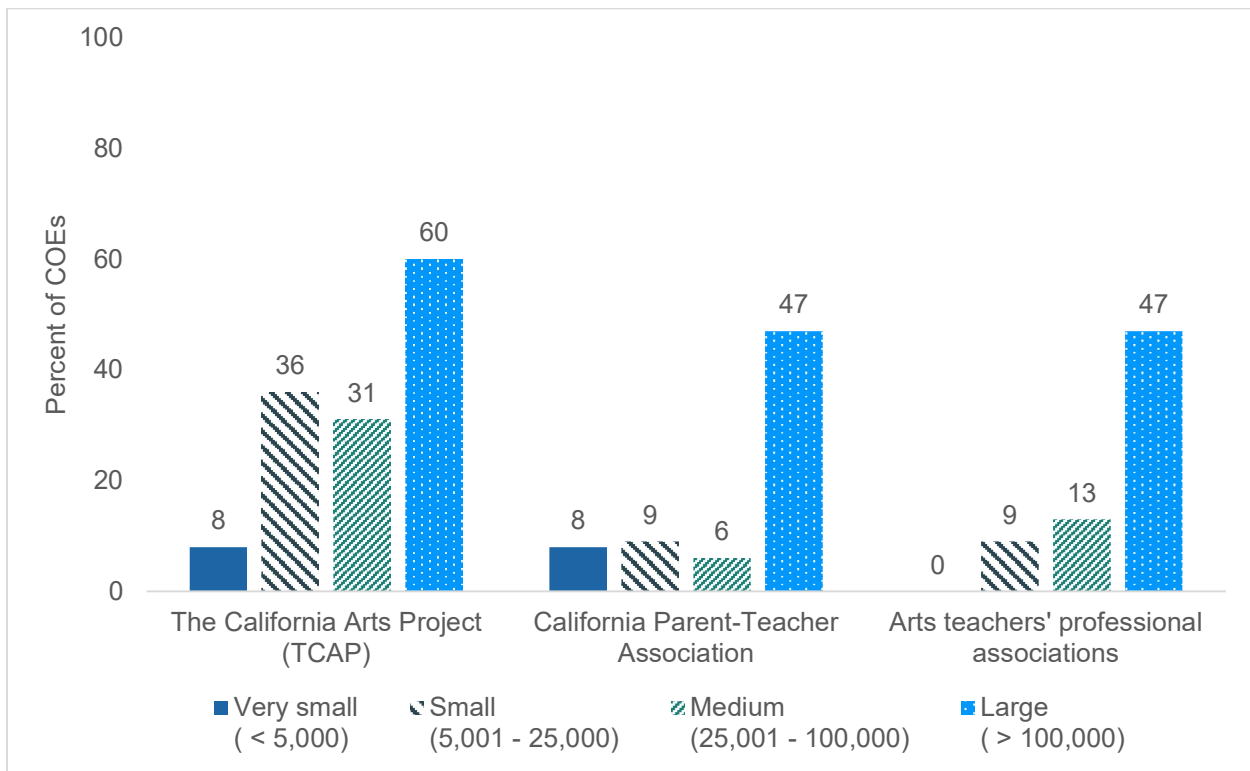
Also, 35% of COEs reported receiving support from the California Arts Council (CAC). In case study counties, this support involved partnering with local arts councils and CAC-funded, community-based arts organizations. See the Partnerships section of Chapter 4 for more information about these partnerships.

Notably, only 20% of COE arts leads reported benefitting from the support of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE; see Exhibit 5). Established in 2013, CCEE is a relatively new state agency charged with supporting COEs to implement the Statewide System of Support.

In examining the characteristics of counties accessing the various state-level sources of support, the study team found that fewer smaller counties (those with lower student enrollment)

reported receiving supports from TCAP, the California State PTA, and professional associations for arts teachers (see Exhibit 6). That few small COEs connected with the statewide sources of support likely reflects their limited capacity. Smaller COEs typically do not have staff dedicated to arts education.

Exhibit 6. Percent of COEs reporting support from some state organizations, by total student enrollment



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education.

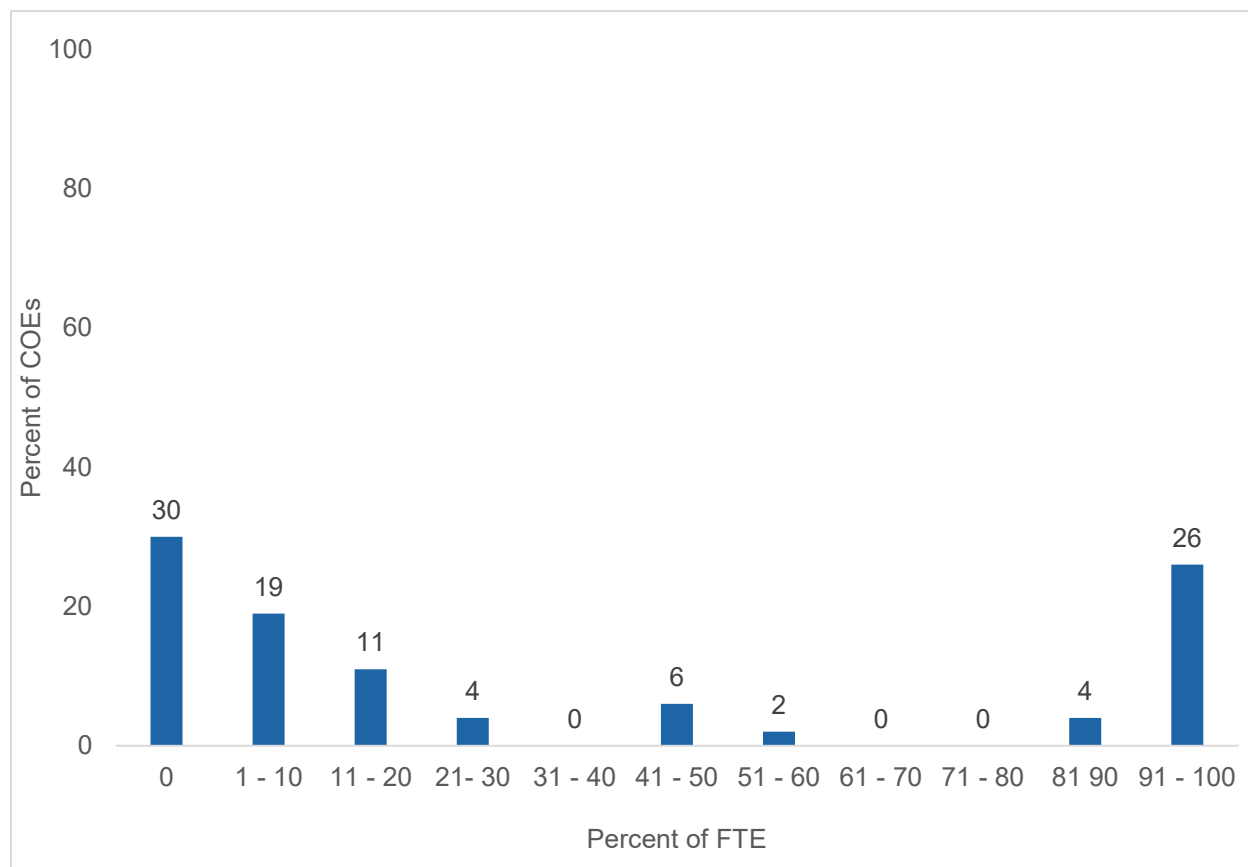
Local infrastructure

For this study, the team defined *local infrastructure* in terms of a COE arts lead and the presence of a strategic arts plan. See the Partnerships section of Chapter 4 for more on COE partnerships with local organizations described as part of the arts education infrastructure (Exhibits 2 and 3).

More than a quarter of COEs, mostly those serving large student populations, had a full-time arts lead.

Thirty percent (30%) of COEs did not have a COE arts lead, 42% had a part-time arts lead (1%–89% full-time equivalency [FTE]), and 28% had a full-time arts lead (90%–100% FTE; Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Percent of FTE dedicated to a COE’s arts lead position



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education.

COEs serving large student populations were much more likely than COEs serving small and very small populations to employ a full-time arts lead. For example, although 67% of COEs with large total student enrollments had a full-time arts lead, only 31% with medium enrollments, 9% with small enrollments, and 0% with very small enrollments had full-time arts leads.³

Dedicated arts leads brought substantial capacity to COEs.

Staff from COEs and districts with a full-time COE arts lead reported having access to a person with a connection to the state-level organizations (e.g., CCSESA and CDE) and capacity to support professional learning, write grant proposals, and form partnerships. The superintendent of a small district explained, “If I have an arts question, I’ll pick up the phone and call [the CCSESA county arts lead]. She’ll connect me to resources, send me in the right direction. I also contract with the county for [the COE arts lead’s time to help] write the strategic arts plan.”

When COE arts leads do not work full time, they may face challenges due to competing demands and lack of expertise. Often, part-time arts leads have other primary responsibilities

³ Full-time = 90%–100% FTE. Large total student enrollment = > 100,000; medium = 25,001–100,000; small = 5,001–25,000; and very small = < 5,000.

(such that their combined responsibilities add up to a full-time position), and arts is seen as either a “pet project or the after-everything-else-is-done project, and it isn’t the focus.” Several arts leads, especially those who dedicate only part of their time to the arts, reported that having a full-time arts lead would help COEs take advantage of existing arts-related resources and provide more arts-related supports to districts (see promising practice). One COE arts lead from a small rural county described their circumstances and the implications for supporting the arts:

In our COE, I am the director for math, science, computer science, do work with CCR [college and career readiness] and PL [professional learning] development for all districts and the arts. To support arts more, we would need a person with more time.

In other counties with part-time arts leads, responsibility for the arts is shared among leaders throughout the COE—from the superintendent to the deputy superintendent to directors—who view the arts as central to their mission. One superintendent explained how supporting arts education was part of fulfilling the COE mission:

Having champions for the arts and education is really important ... part of my role as a county superintendent is to ensure that we are protecting those opportunities and increasing those opportunities for students to express themselves, to bring their talents, to find new ways to be inspired and be connected. ... I see it as part of our commitment to having schools being a place for wellness and for embracing students, everything they represent, their strengths, their challenges, their identities ... part of that is ensuring that there is opportunity for students to be able to express themselves artistically.

When a COE does not have a dedicated arts lead, it may also not have a staff member with the expertise necessary to advance arts education. One COE arts lead described the breadth of expertise needed to support educators and noted the training that would benefit COE staff:

Our office would be very interested in access to training specific to ... developing professional development workshops for teaching artists and general ed teachers, arts integration, STEAM programming, and developing curriculum based on arts standards/arts ed framework.

One case study COE had previously had up to two full-time arts leads (one for music and one for visual arts), but did not currently have even part-time support. Additionally, leaders at partner organizations noted the absence of COE support for the arts. As one partner remarked, “I think it would move forward exponentially if we had someone at [the] COE.”

In some instances, the CCSESA regional arts leads infrastructure supplements county capacity. All but 2 of the 13 CCSESA regional arts leads were full time, and some supported counties in their regions that did not have a full-time arts lead through informal conversations and resource-sharing. An expert interviewee explained how COEs with full-time arts leads were leading the way:

What we’re seeing is the larger counties ... are really leading the charge and trying to exert their influence over the other counties. Look at what happens in a county, look

what happens in the districts, when you have a full-time dedicated arts coordinator, all of these things can happen: more money comes into the county and you can do more for your students.

The variation in FTE devoted to the COE arts lead position is due at least in part to a lack of dedicated funding. The 28% of COEs that reported having full-time arts leads relied on a wide variety of funding mechanisms for those positions, with many of them cobbling together multiple revenue sources. The most cited funding sources were general funds and LCFF base grants. COEs also relied on federal grants, foundation grants, city taxes, and revenue from contracted services with districts. An expert interviewee explained that, once a full-time arts lead position is funded, that person must be active in securing additional funding to support their work: “As an arts administrator, you have to be very proactive ... and you have to learn the county system ... typically, there’s no funding that goes to directly support arts education.”

Promising practice: A shared belief in “arts as core content” means arts is a priority even during a crisis

The San Diego COE arts lead is active in working across departments to keep arts front of mind for COE staff. For example, when the San Diego COE won a grant from CCEE to develop online learning modules to support instruction during the pandemic, there was no question about whether arts content would be included. While other grant recipients concentrated the CCEE dollars on the tested subjects of math and English language arts, the San Diego COE developed standards-based modules for all core content areas—including all four arts disciplines. Interviewees pointed to this as evidence of a culture that values arts on par with tested subjects and that ensures arts doesn’t get left out of conversations about pots of new money or new initiatives.

Fewer than half of COEs had current strategic arts plans.

Strategic arts plans outline goals, priorities, and benchmarks related to providing greater student access to arts education. Developing a strategic arts plan can lead to new funding opportunities, aid in decision-making, and serve as a model or resource for district arts planning (see promising practice). Overall, 45% of COEs had strategic arts plans.

The Santa Cruz COE recently developed a strategic arts plan, and both the county superintendent and the COE arts lead explained how they expected the plan would guide decision-making. The county superintendent contrasted the traditional way of planning with the current strategic model that creates a structure for establishing and tracking priorities:

In a more old-school approach, we would be running a school district and somebody would show up and say, "I have an idea. I would like to come and present at one of your assemblies at your high school," and you're like, "That's great, I love the arts. Come on in." The person comes in and does a great presentation, and the kids love it. The person leaves. ... That's that haphazard, inconsistent approach. So, having a deliberate, thoughtful approach, you're looking at the research, you're looking at the

need, and you're looking at the strengths that your community brings, and then you're creating these different opportunities. ... I believe that this is one way that we can make sure that we are holding ourselves accountable. ... We need to do things because we know that they are having the desired impacts and desired outcomes.

County strategic arts plans can also provide a model or framework for districts to develop plans. The Santa Cruz COE developed its plan with this in mind. As the COE arts lead explained:

I think that having the COE have an arts plan and say, 'This is important. We have an arts plan, and that's because it's important' ... I think maybe it'll help influence some of the districts that have been hesitant to create an arts plan. In doing so, we can set the guidelines for theirs, too. I know that the COE can't direct anyone to, but it can be the model.

Promising practice: Hiring a full-time arts lead to develop and roll out a strategic arts plan can lead to increased funding for arts education

In 2014, the Tulare COE shifted from a part-time to a full-time model for the arts lead, with rippling benefits. Able to devote 100% of their time to arts education, the new full-time arts lead worked with the community to develop a strategic arts plan, which became a vital part of the COE's application for a large federal grant. In 2021, the Tulare COE won an Assistance for Arts Education Development and Dissemination grant from the U.S. Department of Education (see the Grants section of Chapter 4 for more detail). With these funds, the COE will be able to pay teachers and counselors to attend arts integration professional learning offerings for single and multi-subject teachers with an additional focus on arts integration and social and emotional learning.

Similarly, Creative Sonoma, a county agency of the Sonoma County Economic Development Board focused on advancing the creative economy, partnered with the COE to develop an Arts Education Framework that sets forth a vision for arts education in the county and includes strategies to support implementation. As the county superintendent notes in the introduction, "The Framework offers a menu of choices to Sonoma County Public schools and districts to increase and improve access and equity in arts education" (Sonoma County Arts Education Alliance, 2019, p. 3). A leader at Creative Sonoma explained that the framework is helping districts develop their own strategic arts plans: "I think having some resources in place already made a difference. There was something there to build on."

Importantly, when a CCSESA county arts lead indicated on the survey that it did not have a current strategic arts plan, it did not necessarily mean COE staff had not been involved in a strategic planning process. Several counties, including Sonoma, are members of a countywide arts coalition with a strategic arts plan. In Sacramento, the city and county worked together with other local partners to develop an arts education plan, called Creative Edge (Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, 2018). In San Diego, the collective impact initiative that supports

countywide arts education, known as Arts Empower, came about through a strategic planning process. The COE arts lead explained:

Ten years ago, a group of people from diverse perspectives—teaching artists, educators, principals, people in district roles, the PTA was involved, some university people—were brought together to talk about what our county needed to support arts education. There were several meetings where there was a lot of brainstorming and trying to come up with goals and planning. And then, in November of that year, there was an actual launch event, and the collective impact actually got off the ground.

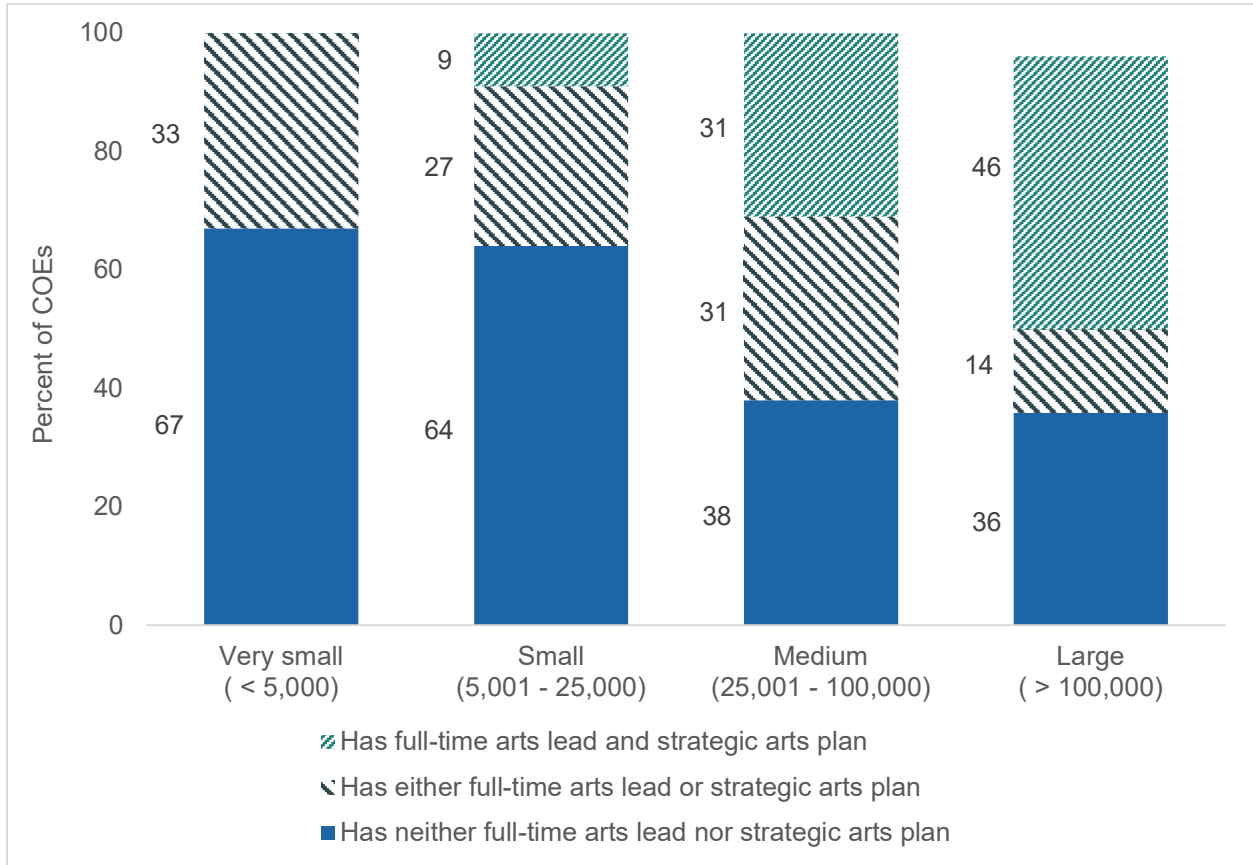
The ongoing work of the collective impact initiative is inspired by this strategic arts plan.

One of the case study counties had not had an opportunity to develop a strategic arts plan because the COE has a small staff and limited capacity. The COE arts lead applied for (but did not receive) funding to hire a consultant to help them create a plan. The arts lead explained that they would like the COE to develop a plan to establish a vision for the county and to use the plan as a “stepping stone” to apply for additional funding (e.g., for high school CTE courses or for community-based grants).

Local arts infrastructure, in the form of both COE arts leads and strategic arts plans, was more robust in larger COEs.

In examining local arts infrastructure, a clear pattern emerged. Larger COEs (i.e., those with higher student enrollment) were more likely than smaller COEs to have both a full-time arts lead and a strategic arts plan (Exhibit 8). Student enrollment varies greatly from county to county (see Exhibit 4), and because a portion of a COE’s revenue is determined by student enrollment, COEs with large student enrollments tend to have more resources and, in turn, more staff capacity than COEs with small student enrollments. Thus, counties with smaller enrollments face the challenge of dedicating staff exclusively to the arts. Compounding this challenge is the reality that developing a strategic arts plan requires leadership and resources that can be hard to marshal in the absence of a COE arts lead.

Exhibit 8. Percent of COEs with a full-time arts lead and strategic arts plan, by total student enrollment

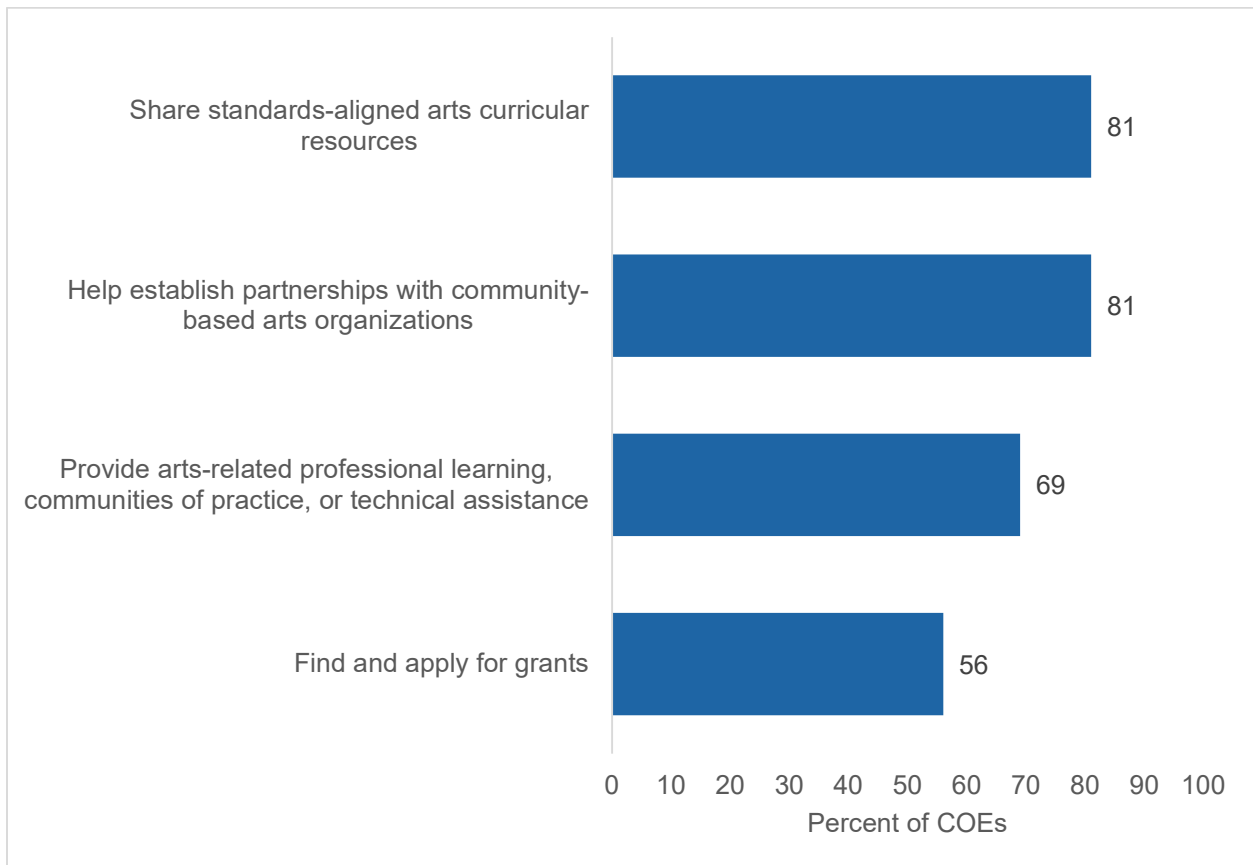


Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education.

Chapter 4. County Office of Education Arts Activities

With or without a full-time art lead and strategic arts plan, county offices of education (COEs) can increase arts education opportunities through a variety of activities such as sharing standards-aligned arts curricular resources, building and maintaining partnerships with community-based arts organizations, providing opportunities for professional learning and technical assistance, and applying for and helping districts to apply for grant funds. The majority of survey respondents indicated their COEs used each of these activities to support arts education (Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9. Percent of COEs that carried out activities to support arts education



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education.

Chapter 3 shows the relationship between COE student enrollment and having a full-time COE arts lead and strategic arts plan (see Exhibit 8). The study team also explored the degree to which strategic arts plans were associated with the number of arts activities a COE carried out, controlling for county size (total student enrollment) and the existence of a full-time arts lead (see Appendix B for the full statistical analyses). Our analysis showed that COEs with strategic

arts plan typically provided one additional activity (of the four activities included on the survey), regardless of COE student enrollment or the existence of a full-time arts lead. In the remainder of this chapter, the authors describe what these COE arts activities entail, based on survey responses and interview data.

Standards-aligned resources

Although the creation of curriculum standards and frameworks is legislatively required, no law establishes a budget or process for the introduction and implementation of new standards and frameworks. As a result, COEs often serve as an extension of the California Department of Education (CDE) and take responsibility for disseminating information about newly adopted standards and frameworks. However, given a lack of state funding for this task, the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) and the COEs often turn to private philanthropy or charge districts for standards-related professional learning opportunities.

To roll out the new California arts standards and framework, CDE collaborated with CCSESA and The California Arts Project (TCAP), who in turn developed plans for an in-person rollout in 2020. After cancelling the plan due to the pandemic, the partners (the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative, CCSESA’s Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee [CISC] Arts Subcommittee, TCAP, and CDE) reconceptualized a virtual rollout, including a Resources for Implementation online hub that went live in January 2022 and a virtual launch on March 1, 2022.⁴

Most COEs shared standards-aligned arts curricular resources, and nearly half of COEs indicated they provided professional learning specific to the new California arts standards and framework.

COEs most commonly (81%) supported arts education by sharing standards-aligned arts curricular resources (along with helping to establish partnerships, discussed in the Partnerships section later in this chapter). This activity has been especially critical since the adoption of new California Arts Standards in 2019 and the accompanying California Arts Education Framework in 2020. One COE arts lead described themselves as a “resource connector”: When she sees a resource that would be useful for districts, she makes sure they have access to it.

Study participants described a variety of ways in which they distribute resources to districts. CCSESA regional arts leads described using newsletters to disseminate relevant materials to counties and districts. Respondents in case study districts described a range of resources such as sample lessons and “the county website that [the COE arts lead] put together,” which has “everything ... we need ... all the standards are there. Anything we need to know.”

⁴ The study team conducted interviews with the CCSESA regional arts leads in February 2022, and we administered our survey to COE arts leads in the last week of February (following up with nonrespondents into the first 2 weeks of March). As a result, our data collection was too early to gather systematic information about the virtual launch.

An expert interviewee described COEs as practiced and efficient at providing resources and support for the implementation of standards:

The easiest part is the compulsories. The state adopts instructional materials in the arts or adopts a new arts framework. The counties are reasonably efficient at identifying a handful of counties that are the best at presenting that ... producing PowerPoints ... (creating) professional development opportunities, bringing speakers to conferences. They're good at that dissemination.

The interviewee went on to explain that the COEs' new responsibilities under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) make them even better suited for this work because they are more regularly interfacing with districts. However, the interviewee warned that, without dedicated funding, COEs may not be able to leverage new opportunities afforded by the LCFF.

Study respondents reported that, in addition to providing resources, COEs offered more intensive supports for implementing the California arts standards and framework. Nearly half of survey respondents indicated they provided professional learning or technical assistance specific to the new standards and framework. In case study districts, respondents described the value of professional learning for helping educators understand the new standards, which are very different from the previous standards. However, in some cases, professional learning was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the shift to virtual sessions and the reduced time educators had to participate. Additionally, case study participants described the technical assistance COEs provided—helping districts select standards-aligned arts curricula, supporting efforts to rewrite district curricula, and providing specific supports to educators. For example, one CCSESA regional arts lead described developing resources for instructional leaders—who tended to be less experienced in arts education—to use when observing arts classrooms, including questions to ask teachers before and after observations.

CCSESA regional arts leads described maintaining memberships in numerous national and statewide arts organizations to support their work in disseminating standards-aligned resources. The CCSESA (n.d.-b) Statewide Arts Initiative website also publishes arts lessons, curricular tools and guides, an assessment guide, and professional learning modules that connect the arts to the Common Core standards. One COE leader noted the importance of CCSESA's role in compiling and disseminating shared resources: "CCSESA Arts Initiative[s] ... arts learning modules have been that kind of tool that no county really had the bandwidth to create ... on their own."

In addition, one COE arts lead described relying on the professional network of COE arts leads to learn about what other districts are doing and what strategies they have found to be successful.

One district interviewee described an opportunity for COEs to support noncredentialed instructors in implementing standards. Districts use a variety of noncredentialed instructors, such as art docents, teaching artists, and volunteers, to deliver arts lessons (Woodworth et al.,

2022). COEs could support these teachers in aligning their lessons with standards by expanding the pool of educators they target for professional learning opportunities.

Partnerships

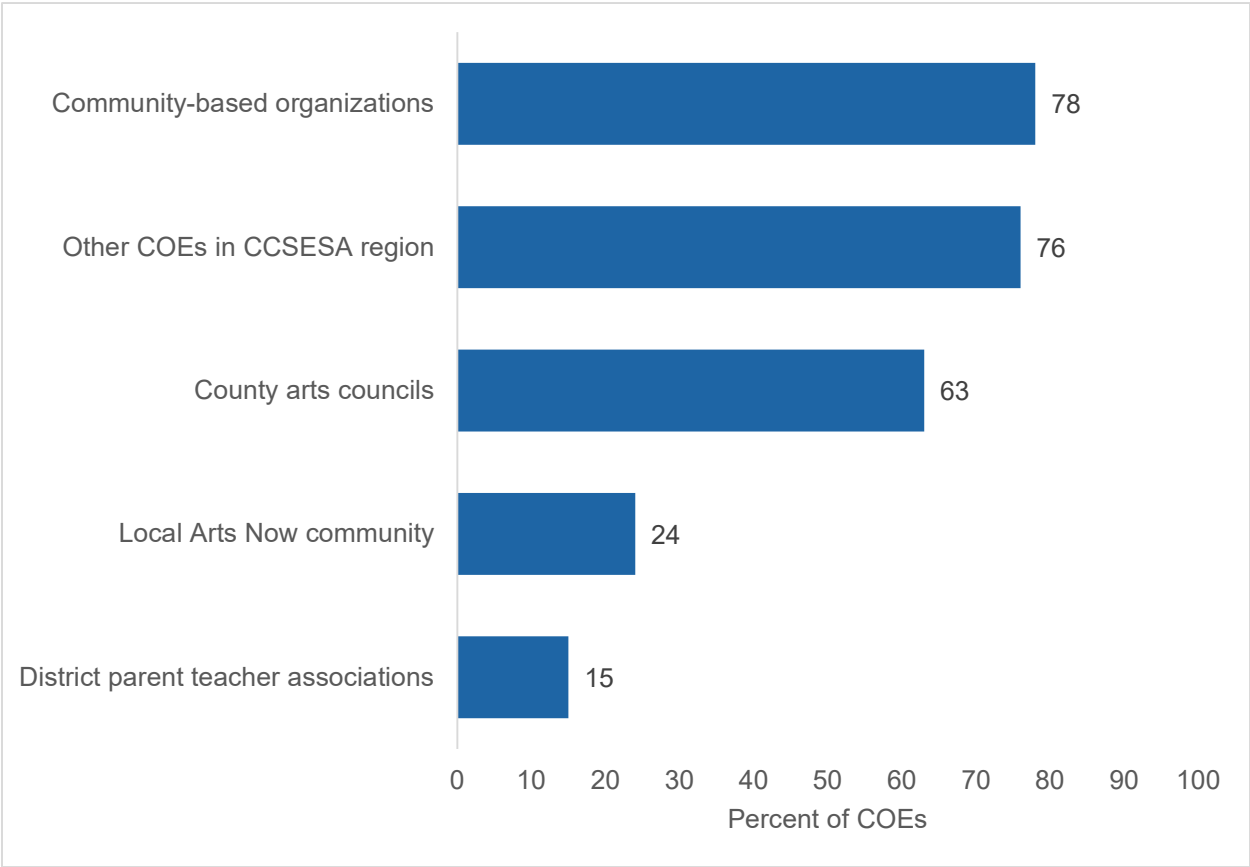
In addition to relying on state-level resources, 81% of survey respondents indicated their COE helped establish partnerships with community-based organizations to support the arts (Exhibit 9). COE arts leads described working closely with local partners, sometimes in countywide arts coalitions, to expand their capacity to support districts.

Most COEs partnered with community-based arts organizations—and other COEs—to extend their capacity to support districts and schools.

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of survey respondents reported that their COEs partner with community-based arts organizations to support arts education (Exhibit 10). Multiple COE arts leads described partnering with museums, local symphony orchestras, theater companies, and more to create opportunities for students. For example, one COE arts lead described working with local playhouses to arrange for free student tickets to shows and with local museums to exhibit student artwork. In other cases, COEs partnered with the same types of community-based arts organizations to offer professional learning for teachers or to engage with teaching artists.

Many COE arts leads (76%) also reported working with other COEs within their CCSESA regions to support arts education (see Exhibit 10). In interviews, CCSESA regional arts leads varied in their descriptions of the community formed among the COEs within their regions. At one end of the continuum, a CCSESA regional arts lead stated that the region was “like a family” and that collectively they could accomplish what would be impossible for them to do individually. Sometimes, COE staff engaged more in arts education when there was healthy competition among counties in the same region. For example, COE leaders were motivated to improve arts programming in their counties after comparing arts participation data available through the California Arts Education Data Project and visiting neighboring counties to observe arts programming in action. On the other end of the continuum, two CCSESA regional arts leads reported their regional efforts were mostly unsuccessful because other COEs in their region either did not have a COE arts lead or had a COE arts lead without the capacity to engage with the CCSESA regional arts lead.

Exhibit 10. Percent of COEs partnering with local sources of support



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education; CCSESA = California County Superintendents Educational Services Association; PTA = parent-teacher association.

Many COEs (63%) also partnered with their county arts councils to support arts education (see Exhibit 10). Respondents from two case study counties described close relationships with their councils. For example, the Santa Cruz COE arts lead shared, “I work more closely with [the arts council representative] than many members of my own organization” (see promising practice). Similarly, the Inyo COE arts lead regularly meets with the Inyo Council for the Arts to talk about needs in the county and strategies to reach more students. The Inyo Council for the Arts also works directly with local districts to offer student programs, including an arts day and a docent program that brings volunteers into the classroom.

Promising practice: Partnerships with county arts councils can lead to more options for professional learning and advocacy

The Santa Cruz COE has a strong partnership with the Arts Council Santa Cruz County. The director of the arts council and the COE arts lead meet weekly to collaborate, and the director attended the planning advisory meetings for the Santa Cruz COE strategic arts plan. The arts council hires teaching artists, engages in advocacy work on behalf of arts education in the county, and directly supports districts through professional learning opportunities. For example, in one district, the arts council provides training for high school students, teaching artists, and classroom teachers to coteach arts integration lessons. Additionally, before the pandemic, the arts council and COE collaborated to gather data on elementary school student access to arts education. Together, these efforts have led to increased support for the arts in area districts and, in some cases, have extended to support for the arts in district Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

Less frequently, survey respondents reported partnering with a local Arts Now community (24%) or the local district parent–teacher association (15%) to support arts education. Respondents also mentioned partnering with other organizations to support arts education: local businesses, municipal governments, local colleges and universities, and other county-run organizations such as libraries and workforce investment boards. Although partners varied across the case study counties, all COE arts leads emphasized the importance of partnerships. One COE arts lead who connected a district with a local community college to create a music program described how relying on partners quickly leads to more arts opportunities: “I feel like [partnerships are] one of the biggest levers. ... Anytime we can bring those [diverse partners] together for a common cause, I think that is going to move things along faster.”

Countywide arts education coalitions facilitated COE partnerships between districts and community organizations.

Several COE arts leads in case study counties pointed to a countywide arts education coalition—sometimes called a collective impact organization or community of practice—that amplified COE capacity and connected the COE and its districts to the broader arts community, government agencies, or business community.

- In Tulare, the COE arts lead helped to build the Tulare County Arts Network, which intentionally included representatives from area businesses, county health and human services, local governments, and postsecondary institutions. This group worked together to develop the county strategic arts plan, in addition to other collaborations (see promising practice).
- Creative Sonoma, a division of the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, serves as the organizational hub for the Sonoma County Arts Education Alliance, which

brings together community-based arts organizations, the COE, and other arts leaders to support arts education across Sonoma County.

- San Diego county leans on Arts Empower—a collective impact organization consisting of the COE, the Southern Counties California Arts Project, and various community partners—to assist districts in coalition-building and strategic planning for the arts.
- The Sacramento COE leads a community of practice to facilitate connections between district arts leads and community arts organizations. The group comes together monthly to learn about new statewide and countywide initiatives, such as the new arts standards, and collaborate to meet district and school needs in arts education.

Promising practice: COEs can partner with other government agencies to increase arts opportunities for students

COEs in two case study counties partnered with other government agencies to pursue arts education as a mutually beneficial strategic priority. The Tulare COE partners with Tulare County Health and Human Services with the common goal of messaging health-related topics to the broader community and offering students opportunities to engage more deeply in the arts. Leaders of both organizations have formalized the focus on health and wellness in the COE’s strategic arts plan, agreeing to regularly meet to identify opportunities for the integration of health and arts education. This partnership has created opportunities for students to engage in authentic and relevant arts experiences in which art is a vehicle for broad community messaging and impact. These opportunities include student-created public service announcements about COVID-19 vaccinations on the radio, on billboards, in buses, and in movie theaters.

Similarly, the Sacramento COE works closely with the City of Sacramento to ensure arts education is supported and funded. This partnership has led to the mayor’s endorsement, a \$10 million pledge, and the naming of arts education as the top priority in the city’s broader arts and culture plan. In addition, the COE and city work together to carry out the Kennedy Center’s Any Given Child Initiative, providing access to arts experiences and arts integration training for teachers and teaching artists. The partnership allows the city to financially support, hire, and train teaching artists while the COE leads the broader work of developing arts integration capacity across the county.

These types of countywide arts education coalitions connect community organizations to districts and districts to community organizations. For example, a Tulare County official who was a part of the Tulare County Arts Network explained how the arts coalition helped their government office be more efficient in its outreach. They noted it would be impossible for him to work individually with all districts in the county, especially when formal financial agreements need to be established:

When we can consolidate [outreach] through the [COE] and they become our olive branch to the districts, life is easy, and things can be accomplished.

When a district in San Diego county wants to develop a strategic arts plan, Arts Empower can reach out to the Arts Education Resource Organization (a group of teaching artists and arts organizations from across the county) to determine who the district is already working with and make sure they are included in the planning process. The San Diego COE arts lead explains that, even if a district has an arts lead, it may not be able to keep track of what is happening at all of the schools in the district. Therefore, involving those organizations in the arts coalition gives district arts leads a reliable place to go to learn what kind of arts partners they already have and which they may need to find.

Professional learning and technical assistance

COEs provide professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators in their counties to increase district capacity as well as technical support for strategic planning. Professional learning in the arts often involves workshops, conferences, and support for communities of practice.

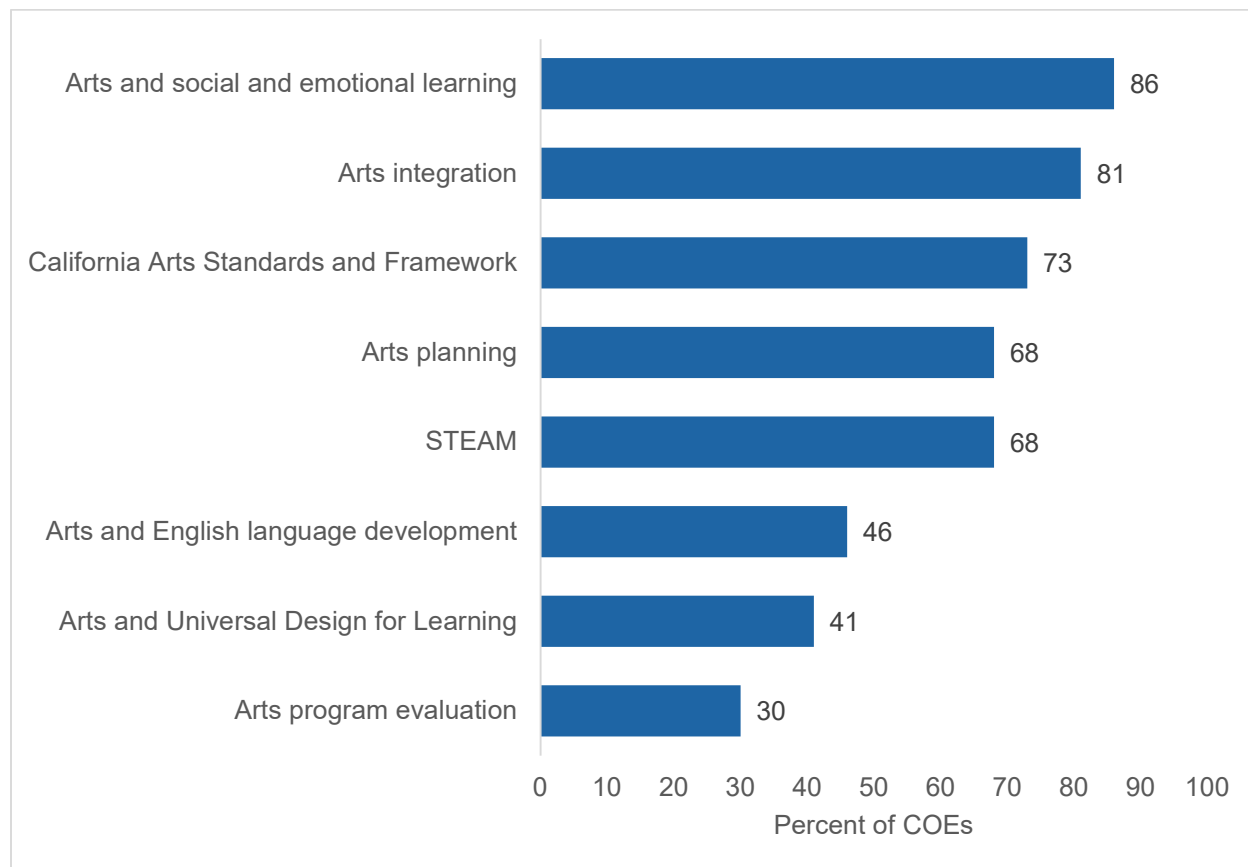
Just over two thirds of COEs offered arts-specific professional learning opportunities, most commonly on the subjects of arts and social and emotional learning, and arts integration.

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of COE arts leads reported providing arts-related professional development, communities of practice, or technical assistance (Exhibit 9). Larger COEs (87%) were more likely to offer arts-related professional learning opportunities than very small COEs (50%).⁵ Of the COEs that provided arts-related professional learning opportunities, more than 80% offered professional learning in the arts related to social and emotional learning and arts integration (Exhibit 11). Professional learning on arts integration was almost exclusively for elementary teachers. Of the 37 COEs that provided arts-related professional learning opportunities, 86% reported they provided supports specifically for elementary teachers.⁶ Three COE arts leads described providing professional learning on arts integration through multiday summer arts integration institutes. One smaller COE collaborated with a neighboring county for its institute.

⁵ Thirty-seven out of fifty-four survey respondents indicated their COEs provide professional learning or technical assistance in the arts. When disaggregated by COE size, respondents from 87% of large (>100,000 students, n=15), 69% of medium (25,001 – 100,000 students, n=16), 64% of small (5,001 – 25,000, n=11), and 50% of very small (<5,000 students, n=12) COEs indicated their COEs provide professional learning or technical assistance in the arts.

⁶ Thirty-seven out of fifty-four survey respondents indicated their COEs provide professional learning or technical assistance in the arts. The following percentages of these 37 COEs indicated they targeted professional learning opportunities at specific groups: 38% at the Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, and Entertainment industry sector (see Glossary for definition); 51% at dance teachers; 65% at music teachers; 65% at theater teachers; 68% at visual arts teachers; 68% at media arts teachers; 68% at district administrators responsible for the arts; and 86% at elementary multiple-subject teachers.

Exhibit 11. Among COEs providing arts-related professional learning, percentage of COEs that provided professional learning on specific topics



Note. *n* = 37. COEs = county offices of education; STEAM = science, technology, engineering, arts, and math.

More than half of the COEs that provided professional learning opportunities covered other topics such as the California arts standards and framework and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math). In one case study county, the COE distributed a survey to learn about the types of professional learning that educators were interested in. In another case study county, a district arts lead suggested it would be beneficial if the COE conducted more “needs sensing” before choosing topics for professional learning.

In addition to providing formal professional learning, some COEs convened regular meetings (e.g., every month or every other week) to offer opportunities for collaborating and networking. Interviewees in three case study counties described such meetings for arts teachers or district arts leaders. One district arts lead reported encouraging their staff to take part because they wanted staff members to get to know teachers from other districts in the county (see promising practice).

Promising practice: COEs can pool organizational resources to host an annual arts “mega” conference

In the past, San Diego’s arts teachers might have been invited to a conference based on their membership in a professional association. But those conferences were organized by arts discipline, and many teachers, artists, and organizations were left out. Arts Empower, San Diego County’s arts education coalition, worked with member organizations—including the COE, California Music Educators Association Southern Border Section, California Art Education Association San Diego, San Diego Theatre Educators Alliance, Arts Education Resource Organization, a group of dance educators, and various colleges and universities—to consolidate efforts and produce the Arts Empower Mega Conference. This annual conference gives arts teachers of all kinds the opportunity to learn from and network with colleagues across districts and disciplines.

Some COEs collaborate across counties on professional learning opportunities. For example, the study team learned of a regionwide arts integration institute scheduled for June 2022 that COE arts leads were co-planning and would be co-facilitating along with community-based arts organizations and teaching artists. Collaboration across counties may be particularly helpful for small COEs with limited arts capacity. One case study respondent described partnering with a neighboring county to provide training for teachers. In this county, the switch to virtual workshops due to the COVID-19 pandemic was a boon; teachers previously needed to spend a whole day traveling long distances to attend workshops. In another case study county, an educator mentioned that the COE arts lead had connected her with a training opportunity in a neighboring county.

However, COE arts leads also pointed to barriers to increasing professional learning opportunities in counties. Respondents identified specific barriers related to funding, lack of substitute teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic, and buy-in.

Funding. Open-response survey items indicated that a lack of funding hampers a COE’s ability to provide consistent professional learning opportunities. One COE arts lead said it was critical to provide elementary school teachers with arts integration training, but the COE was not able to consistently do so due to a lack of dedicated resources. Another respondent listed the many expenses professional learning requires: a budget to pay substitute teachers so that teachers can attend trainings, coaches and materials to facilitate the implementation of new programs, and follow-up data collection to track progress on program goals.

Contextual considerations: The pandemic has made social and emotional learning and addressing gaps in learning a top priority for state and district policymakers.

Educators across the country are thinking about how to recover from interrupted learning resulting from the pandemic. In California, these concerns have resulted in unprecedented investments, using both federal and state dollars, in the K–12 system. One of these investments has come in the form of the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program—a state grant that provides funding for afterschool and summer school programs for elementary students (CDE, 2021f).

State-level policymakers, such as the President of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, have also stressed the importance of addressing social and emotional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Accordingly, last year’s state budget included a \$4 billion plan to improve mental health services for youth and \$3 billion to support a 7-year community school initiative (Fensterwald 2022; Fensterwald et al., 2021).

Given the state’s investment in expanded and social and emotional learning, this could be a particularly opportune time to share evidence that the arts are effective at engaging students in learning and building social and emotional competencies (Bowen & Kisida, 2019; Catterall, 2012).

Lack of substitute teachers. Interviewees in case study counties also pointed out that finding substitute teachers can be very challenging, in addition to paying them. During the 2021–22 school year, staffing shortages were so severe that some administrative staff had to step away from their jobs to fill in as substitute teachers (Lambert, 2021). As one district interviewee put it, “We wanted to do longer and more training, but unfortunately with sub issues and the problems we’ve had with pulling teachers out of classrooms this year, we weren’t able to.”

Pandemic-related challenges. Case study respondents noted several pandemic-related challenges to professional learning. One respondent noted the heightened emphasis on core academic subjects and classroom management as students returned to in-person instruction in 2021–22. Additionally, respondents in two districts mentioned they were less aware of COE professional learning opportunities in the last few years. Finally, one respondent suspected that teachers may be less interested in attending summer trainings due to burnout.

District and teacher buy-in. COE arts leads reported it could be a “struggle” to get teachers to show up for professional learning opportunities and they needed district partners to encourage teachers to participate in the COE offerings. Some arts leads noted many school and district administrators were unfamiliar with comprehensive arts programs and most districts did not have an arts coordinator, which may mean that arts professional learning was not viewed as a priority. In larger districts with robust arts departments, the COE offerings may be viewed as redundant or inferior because the district provides its own professional learning opportunities. One interviewee from a large district also mentioned it was more cost effective to provide

professional learning at the district level due to the expense of COE offerings. For creative strategies on how to increase district and teacher buy-in, see promising practice.

Promising practice: COEs find creative ways to engage district staff in professional learning opportunities

In the Sonoma COE, the college and career readiness leads (who support Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, and Entertainment teachers, among others) prefer to raise funds for professional learning opportunities instead of asking districts to foot the bill. The leads provide stipends to teachers who attend these opportunities, and they have a “fellowship fund” so that districts or teams of teachers can apply for additional resources to implement what they learn in the classroom.

A former county administrator used a different tactic to get more district administrators to an LCAP-related professional development event. This interviewee described working with a local industry partner that had a large workforce in the community. The industry partner indicated that creativity was the most critical characteristic they looked for in new employees. The interviewee saw an opportunity to connect the LCAP work and the arts by giving this industry partner an audience with district administrators. To entice district administrators, he moved the location of the next meeting to the prestigious offices of this industry partner and noticed an increase in attendance and engagement.

About a fifth of districts in COEs that offered strategic arts planning services had a current strategic arts plan.

Like a COE, a district may develop a strategic arts plan to document the goals, priorities, and benchmarks for arts education in the district. Working with districts to develop strategic arts plans allows COE arts leads to build relationships with the superintendents, principals, and teachers in those districts. Sixty-eight percent (or 37 of 54) of COE arts leads reported providing arts-related professional development, communities of practice, or technical assistance (Exhibit 9). Of those COEs, 68% (or 25 of 37 COEs) indicated their COE offered strategic arts planning services (Exhibit 11). Those 25 COEs support 521 districts, 115 (22%) of which have a current strategic arts plan. One COE arts lead reported first developing a county strategic arts plan and then using that plan as a resource to support districts with their plans (see promising practice).

However, several COE arts leads noted they lacked the capacity to support districts to develop strategic arts plans. Some COEs (or other county partners) have hired consultants (in at least some instances, with grant funds) to support local districts with arts strategic planning. Depending on the scope of work and the consultant, this type of strategic planning consulting may cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000. A COE arts lead from a rural county explained that the COE’s inability to pay a consultant to help districts with strategic planning was a barrier, especially because the COE also had limited capacity to write a grant proposal to cover the costs of a consultant. In response to a survey question about what additional support would be

helpful, another COE arts lead also indicated they needed funding to help districts develop strategic arts plans:

We have schools that want to do this, but we do not have the funding necessary to facilitate it. Also, having funding available for such opportunities would increase interest in such an opportunity. When districts make strategic plans, it increases their capacity and accountability for arts education.

Finally, a COE arts lead mentioned their COE staff would like training on helping districts write strategic arts plans. Among COEs with the capacity to provide support for strategic arts planning, they may offer this assistance to interested districts on a fee-for-service basis (again, see promising practice).

In contrast, in one rural county with a strategic arts plan, the COE arts lead offered supports for districts to develop their own strategic arts plans, but districts did not follow up on this opportunity:

I presented [our plan] to our [district] school boards ... to encourage them to take it and use it. They thought it was great, but then nothing happened with it. We have many very small schools—it's hard to get people together to do strategic plans.

Promising practice: Strong COE processes for strategic arts planning lead to the creation and ownership of district strategic arts plan

After creating a county strategic arts plan, the Tulare COE arts lead was hired by a small district to help their administrators create a strategic arts plan. She guided the district through the same process the COE had just completed, including assessing the current state of arts education in the district, identifying gaps, and outlining a budget and timeline for filling the gaps. District staff reported that COE support has been very helpful so far. A district administrator shared, “There is no way [small districts] could develop a strategic arts plan without support from the COE.”

Notably, in guiding the district through the process, the COE arts lead did not influence the content of the plan, apart from connecting the district to resources or encouraging them to “think bigger.” The arts lead stressed it was especially important in small districts to develop the district’s sense of ownership over the plan, in places where there may not be an arts lead to keep the district on track.

Grants

COEs can leverage external funding, often in the form of one-time grants for a specific purpose, to support arts initiatives. COE arts leads reported relying on grants to support county-run arts initiatives or innovations, sometimes in collaboration with districts or other COEs. They also reported informing districts about opportunities for arts-related grants.

While more than half of COEs applied, or helped districts apply, for competitive grants to support arts education, other COEs did not have the capacity to track grant opportunities or develop grant proposals.

Fifty-six percent (56%) of survey respondents reported finding and applying for grants to support arts education activities (Exhibit 9), with large COEs (73%) much more likely to find and apply for grants than very small COEs (25%).⁷ One COE arts lead in a medium-sized COE (25,001–100,000 students) explained that a portion of their salary was grant funded, as were some activities supporting school districts: “Most funding for arts education is reliant on external grants. [Grants] pay for 50% of my time. I am covered through the next fiscal year, but after that there is no commitment.”

Some COE arts leads reported success in applying for large federal grants such as the Title IV Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program. One CCSESA regional lead described applying for an SSAE grant in partnership with other COEs in their region. The COEs used grant funds to support professional learning on arts integration, which engaged hundreds of teachers across eight counties, and to cover the costs of needed arts materials and equipment. Another COE used its SSAE grant to fund teaching artists in all of its alternative education classrooms. Yet another COE had recently won an SSAE grant that it planned to use to fund arts-focused professional learning opportunities in the county. The COE arts lead described how receiving a federal grant provided much-needed relief from the pressure to generate revenue to fund her position, allowing her more time to provide support to districts.

Another COE arts lead reported receiving a competitive Assistance for Arts Education Development and Dissemination grant⁸ from the U.S. Department of Education and using the funds to implement their arts plan:

We were very fortunate to be awarded a 5-year ... Assistance for Arts Education grant in the fall. This funding will enable us to broaden and expand our arts programming in ways that we only dreamed possible. We will be able to make our Arts Master Plan a reality and provide training and support to our school districts.

Applying for these grants requires existing capacity, often in the form of an in-the-know arts lead, a strategic arts plan, and in some cases a grants department that looks out for opportunities. As an expert interviewee noted:

⁷ Thirty out of fifty-four survey respondents indicated their COEs provide professional learning or technical assistance in the arts. When disaggregated by COE size, respondents from 73% of large (>100,000 students, n=15), 63% of medium (25,001 – 100,000 students, n=16), 36% of small (5,001 – 25,000, n=11), and 25% of very small (<5,000 students, n=12) COEs indicated their COEs provide professional learning or technical assistance in the arts.

⁸ The Assistance for Arts Education Development and Dissemination program supports the “development and dissemination of accessible instructional materials and arts-based educational programming, including online resources, in multiple arts disciplines” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Some county offices don't have the skills to write grants or the resources to hire a grant writer. Some grants require a strategic plan—or a designated arts coordinator to administer the funds.

COEs also share information about funding opportunities with districts and support them in writing grants. A proactive COE arts lead described regularly networking with other COE arts leads to identify funding sources and bringing grant information to area districts. This COE arts lead described how this process unfolded with the Title IV grant opportunity:

As soon as Title IV came out, we analyzed it and figured out we could use it for the arts. So, at the COE, our Director of State and Federal Programs—she brings in all the superintendents and they talk about how they can use these funds—and she invited me to talk about Title IV, because I knew about it—and I happened to be the arts guy.

Simply notifying districts of opportunities may not be enough, though, particularly for smaller districts. Some districts do not have the capacity to write grant proposals. In three case study counties, interviewees described how COEs support districts in writing grant proposals. In one county, the COE arts lead noted that this often means writing the grant proposal for a district. In another county, the COE arts lead described how the county acts as the lead agency for small districts:

Even if [small districts] were eligible [for grants], to have the bandwidth to apply and manage grants and do the reporting and that kind of thing ... if we can bring them in under the umbrella at the county office and still provide access to those kinds of grants, it's a great role for us to play.

While capacity is necessary to identify and win grants, some COE arts leads also pointed to the role of geography in attracting funding. A COE arts lead expressed some frustration: “Nearly every ... arts grant is limited to the Bay Area, Los Angeles, or other large cities ... how do we compel foundations to support our work and invest in our county [and the other underserved counties in the state]?” Another interviewee agreed: “Our students deserve the same support as those in the Bay Area and Southern California.”

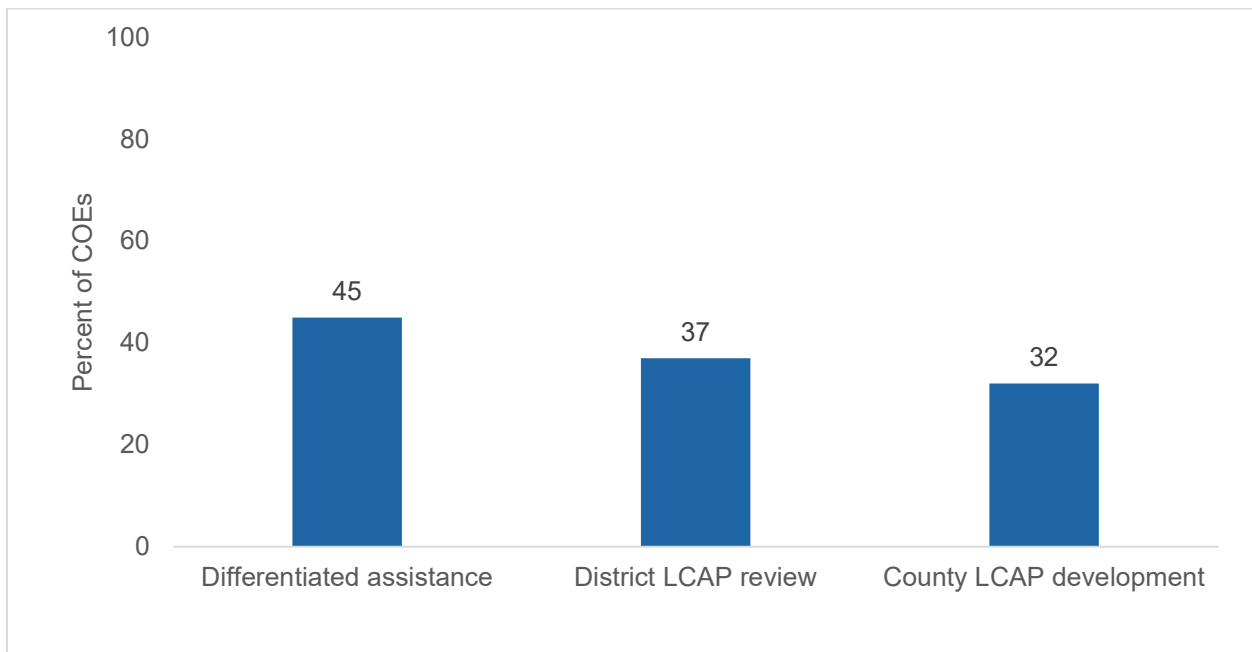
Respondents in four case study counties also expressed concern that grant funding was often time-limited. As a result, they were reluctant to use grant funding for personnel. Instead of funding staff or new programs, they had used grant money, as well as COVID-19 relief funding, to buy supplies such as musical instruments or band uniforms. An educator in a small district mentioned a need for more stable funding sources to support arts education: “We want to make sure [arts education is] something that is permanent and that we're not just dependent on one sort of funding and then in 2 or 3 years that dries up and goes away.” The Status of Arts Education in California Study (Woodworth et al., 2022) provides more information on how arts education is funded in California.

Chapter 5. Other County Office of Education Activities

In addition to supporting districts with arts education, county offices of education (COEs) play a central role in implementing the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation passed in 2013. COEs' responsibilities for the LCFF include gathering district and county data, drafting annual county Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), reviewing and approving district LCAPs, and providing differentiated assistance to districts that are not making progress on state priority areas. Additionally, COEs continue to operate schools (e.g., juvenile court and community schools) and programs (e.g., career technical education programs). COE arts leads are not typically involved in this work. For example, COE arts leads are involved in LCFF activities in fewer than half of the COEs that have a designated full- or part-time arts lead (Exhibit 12).

In this chapter, the authors describe key findings related to COE activities that are not explicitly arts-focused but may afford opportunities to provide or promote arts education. We focus on two types of activities—LCFF activities and county-run schools and programs.

Exhibit 12. Among COEs that had a designated arts lead, percent of COEs in which arts leads were involved in LCFF activities



Note. n = 38. COEs = county offices of education; LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula; LCAP = Local Control and Accountability Plan.

Local Control Funding Formula activities

California’s move away from categorical funding and toward “local control” (legislated as the LCFF) has cast COEs in a new role (see Chapter 2). As a central component of the Statewide System of Support, COE responsibilities have expanded beyond fiscal oversight to include oversight on student outcomes aligned with the eight LCFF state priority areas (Exhibit 13). COEs are tasked with collecting data on each of the “indicators” associated with each of the state priority areas and assisting districts in analyzing the data and developing strategic plans to address gaps by student group. COEs also use data to review and improve their own services to students enrolled in county-run schools. Both districts and COEs annually record how they will leverage the state’s LCFF dollars to make progress on locally determined goals aligned with the state priority areas in separate LCAPs. COEs review and approve their districts’ LCAPs, and the California Department of Education (CDE) reviews and approves the COEs’ LCAPs. Districts or COEs that fail to make progress within the eight priority areas, for students as a whole or for specific student groups, become eligible for Level 2 supports, or differentiated assistance. COEs provide differentiated assistance to districts by supporting “root cause analysis” and providing or connecting a district to technical assistance to address root causes. CDE provides differentiated assistance to COEs.

Exhibit 13. State and local indicators for each LCFF priority area

Priority area	State indicator	Local indicator
Priority Area 1: Basic Services and Conditions at Schools	N/A	Textbooks availability, adequate facilities, and correctly assigned teachers
Priority Area 2: Implementation of State Academic Standards	N/A	Annually report on progress in implementing the standards for all content areas
Priority Area 3: Parental Involvement and Family Engagement	N/A	Annually report progress toward (1) seeking input from parents/guardians in decision making; and (2) promoting parental participation in programs
Priority Area 4: Student Achievement	Academic Performance (Grades 3–8 and Grade 11) English Learner Progress	N/A
Priority Area 5: Student Engagement	Graduation Rate Chronic Absenteeism	N/A
Priority Area 6: School Climate	Suspension Rate	Administer a Local Climate Survey every other year
Priority Area 7: Access to a Broad Course of Study	N/A	Annually report progress on the extent students have access to, and are enrolled in, a broad course of study
Priority Area 8: Outcomes in a Broad Course of Study	College/Career Readiness	N/A

Note. Adapted from CDE (2022a). LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula; N/A = not applicable.

In this chapter, the authors describe when and how these LCFF activities connect with arts education by considering how COE staff used arts education data, participated in the LCAP process, and approached differentiated assistance.

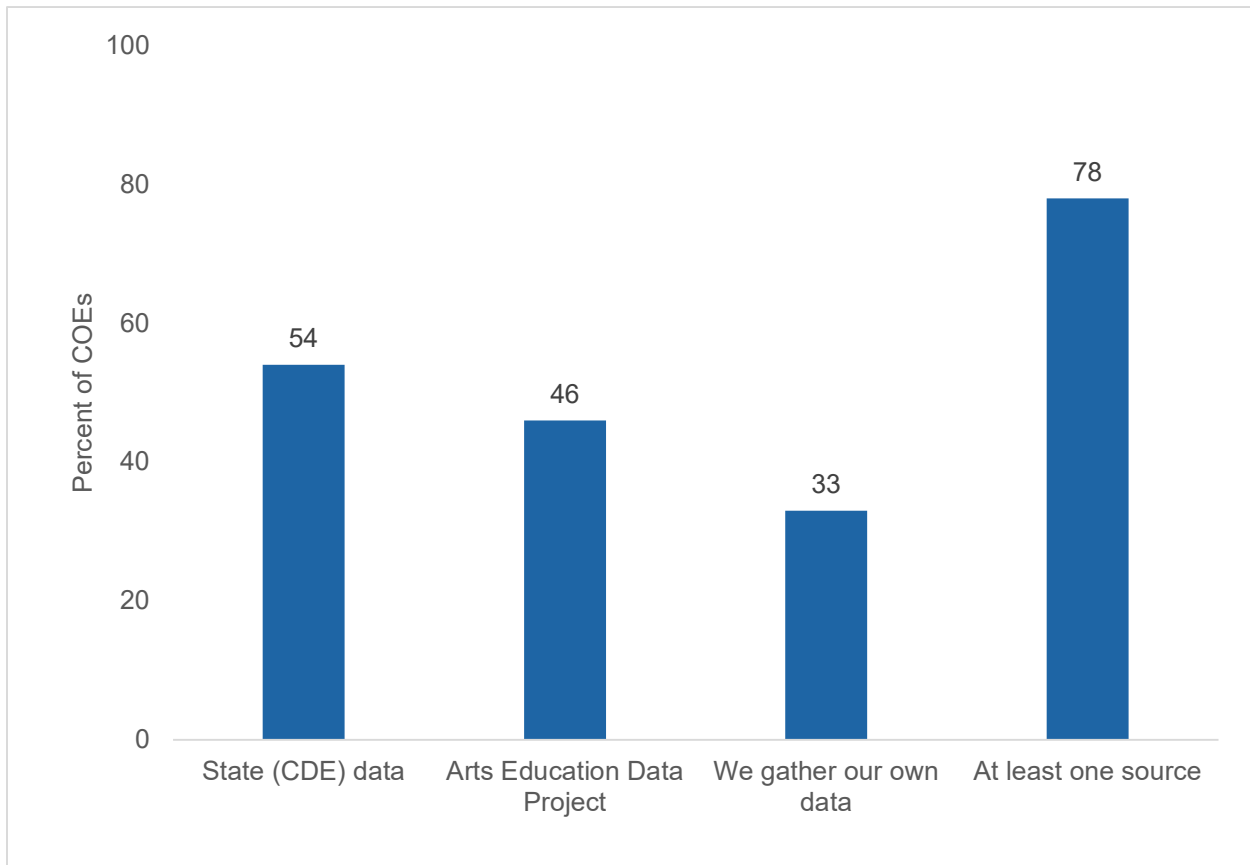
Most COEs make use of arts education data, but fewer than half describe those data as “timely and accurate.”

CDE collects secondary student enrollment data, including enrollment in arts courses, from all secondary schools in the state via the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). These data, along with data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Common Core of Data file, is fed into the California Arts Education Data Project’s interactive dashboard, which allows users to “view arts participation for secondary level by school-level, district, county and statewide” (Create CA, n.d.-c). In theory, these data would equip COE and district arts leads with information about which districts and schools have robust arts programs and which do not. However, in practice, only 55% of survey respondents indicated they used CDE arts education data, and only 46% indicated they used the Arts Education Data Project dashboard (Exhibit 14).

Case study data point to several reasons the state’s arts education data collection efforts are not sufficient to meet COE arts leads’ needs. First, interviewees reported that the CDE and Arts Education Data Project data are not timely or accurate. For example, as of June 2022, CDE’s secondary course enrollment data had not been updated since 2018–19 (CDE, 2022d). The data are typically updated and published on an annual basis, and the delay dramatically restricts COE administrators’ ability to advocate for the arts:

We can’t improve that which we’re not measuring. ... Right now, the [CDE] data [are] from 18/19, so we have no idea what the pandemic actually did. Anecdotally, we know ... that the arts took a major drop during the pandemic. It’s starting to come back, and people are starting to recreate those performance and visual arts opportunities, but we don’t have the data.

Exhibit 14. Percent of COEs that use arts education data sources



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education; CDE = California Department of Education. "At least one source" indicates the percent of COEs that selected at least one of the three potential data sources.

However, even if CDE were to publish data in a timelier manner, that may not be sufficient for engaging COE and district arts leads. Interviewees described the data gathered by the CDE as unreliable at capturing all arts courses. For example, interviewees in multiple counties mentioned that dance and theater courses were coded as physical education or English language arts credits instead of arts credits, which caused their arts participation rates to appear lower than they were in practice.

Data are even more limited at the elementary level because CDE does not collect elementary arts education data. A district arts lead expressed frustration with the limitations of elementary data:

We don't know how many of our [elementary] classrooms actually teach the arts because there's no structure for that reporting. ... We know which arts teachers are [teaching during classroom teacher] prep time, but [the hours of arts instruction each class receives] doesn't get tracked. I also wish we were getting credit because when someone looks at the elementary data on the surface, it doesn't look like we're doing anything. Our [elementary arts education initiative] isn't captured. If CDE was looking at data, they'd have no idea how much we are doing.

Considering these limitations, it is not surprising that fewer than half of survey respondents reported having access to timely and accurate data on arts education. Specifically, 48% of survey respondents indicated they had access to timely and accurate data for secondary students, compared to 31% for elementary students. A lack of timely, accurate, and comprehensive data makes it hard to include arts education in strategic plans. For example, one COE had a comprehensive equity plan rooted in data, but it did not explicitly include the arts because it did not have the necessary data to measure equity or progress.

Thirty-three percent (33%) of survey respondents indicated their COEs collected additional arts education data to supplement the CDE collection (Exhibit 14; also, see promising practice). The COEs gathered these data through small efforts, such as informal conversations with district staff, as well as through more robust data collections such as the LA County Arts Ed Collective’s (n.d.) Arts Education Profile, which surveyed “all 2,277 public schools in LA County to learn about the quantity, quality, and equity of arts education.” In interviews, several COE administrators described partnering with local organizations to collect their own additional arts education data. Other COEs likely do not have the capacity to collect their own data and either rely on CDE data to understand arts education access and participation or do not analyze arts education data at all. (Overall, 78% of COEs reported accessing arts education data from at least one source, see Exhibit 14.)

Promising practice: A COE-sponsored arts education database will connect districts in need of arts support with community-based arts organizations

The Sacramento COE facilitates a community of practice that brings together district art leads and arts organizations to connect and learn. With financial support from the Kennedy Center, the COE is partnering with the City of Sacramento to build an online database that captures the collaborative spirit of the community of practice and addresses gaps in arts education. “Art Look” will be a database with a dual purpose: capturing district arts education data (e.g., arts teachers, course offerings, and budgets) and capturing arts organization data (e.g., field trip and program offerings). The database will provide a centralized place for districts to identify gaps in arts education and address them through partnerships with arts organizations.

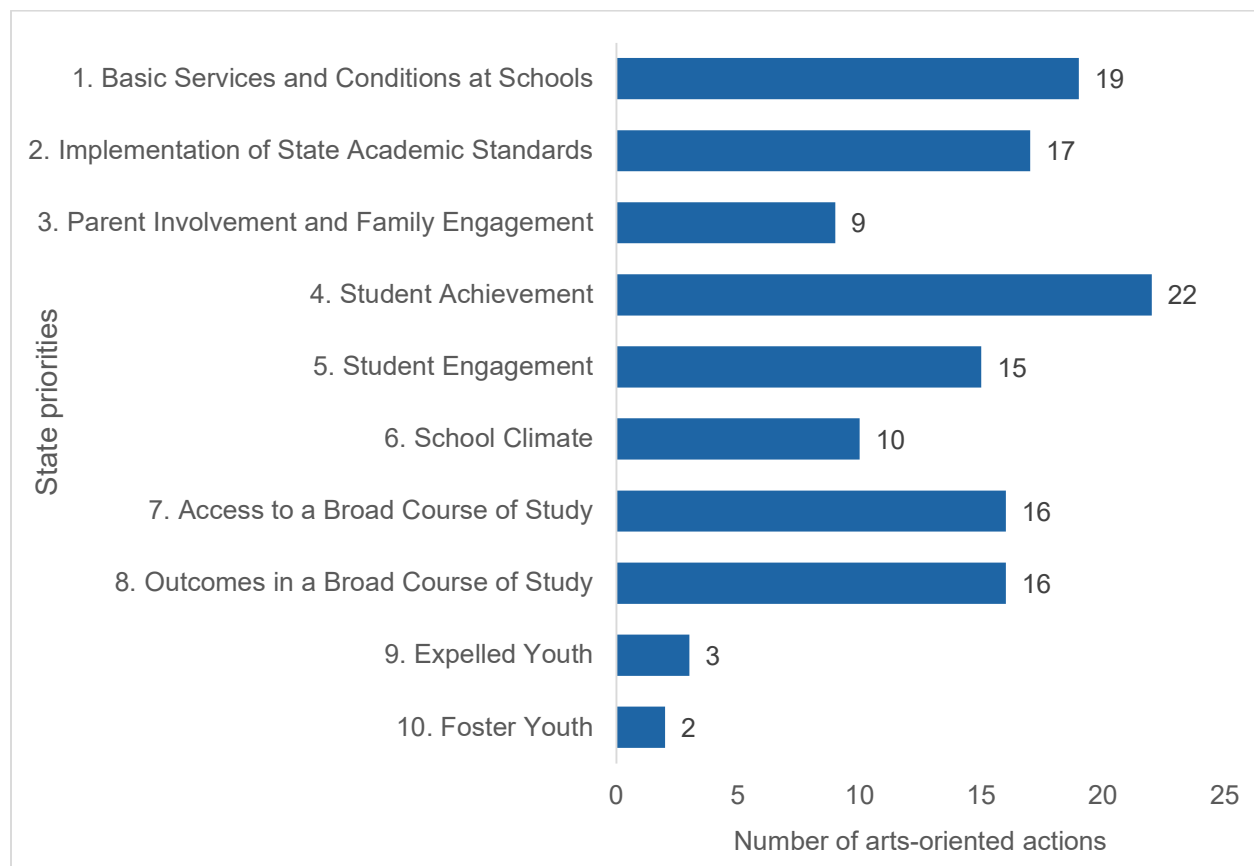
Nearly half of county LCAPs mentioned the arts, but less than a third of COE arts leads played a role in developing the county LCAP and less than a fifth could affirm that the LCAP community survey included questions about the arts.

COEs use data, in part, to inform their annual LCAPs, which document how they will leverage LCFF dollars to improve outcomes for the 114,466 students served by county-run schools (CDE, 2022b). The study team’s review showed that 45% of county LCAPs included goals with arts-oriented actions (33 total arts-oriented actions across 26 counties). Most of these mentions were incidental, such as offering courses to meet all A-G requirements, which includes the arts,

at court and community schools. Other mentions were more specific, such as contracting with community partners to supplement instructional programs with the arts for 3 weeks a year.

Each LCAP goal must be aligned with at least 1 of 10 state priority areas⁹ and then describe what actions the COE will take to achieve that goal. Goals with arts-oriented actions were most commonly aligned with Priority 4, Student Achievement (22); Priority 1, Basic Services and Conditions at Schools (19); and Priority 2, Implementation of State Academic Standards (17). These goals were least likely to be aligned with Priority 10, Foster Youth (2); Priority 9, Expelled Students (3); Priority 3, Parent Involvement and Family Engagement (9); and Priority 6, School Climate (10)—suggesting either that the arts are not leveraged in pursuit of these priorities or that, if they are leveraged, this purpose is not recorded in the LCAP (Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 15. Number of arts-oriented actions in county LCAPs, by state priority 2019/20



Note. n = 54. LCAPs = Local Control and Accountability Plans.

Source: SRI study team review of 54 county LCAPs from 2019/20 identified 33 total arts-oriented actions across 26 counties. The other four county LCAPs were not found. Many art-oriented actions were associated with goals aligned to multiple state priorities, which is why the total count exceeds 33.

⁹ COEs have two additional priority areas: 9, Expelled Students; and 10, Foster Youth.

The mandatory LCAP community engagement process could provide an opportunity for community members to advocate for more robust arts opportunities in court and community schools. A common way of collecting community input is through an annual LCAP survey distributed to students, parents, and staff; but only 15% of COE arts leads could confirm that their LCAP community surveys included questions about the arts. Nearly half of COE arts lead survey respondents indicated they did not know whether their LCAP community survey asked about the arts. This finding demonstrates that many COE arts leads are disconnected from the community engagement or LCAP process, although a few interviewees said their LCAP community surveys had numerous open-response items that allowed respondents to voice support for more arts. If COE arts leads become more involved with the county LCAP process, they can better ensure that county LCAPs reflect community interest in arts education (see promising practice).

Promising practice: San Diego’s court and community schools arts lead encourages partners and parents to engage in the county LCAP process

The court and community schools (CCS) arts lead in the San Diego COE counts on the community-based arts organizations that partner with CCS as well as the parents of students to advocate for arts through the county LCAP process. When asked what advice she had for staff in other COEs that hoped to increase arts opportunities through the LCAP process, she replied:

I would reach out to the community partners, because that stakeholder voice is part of the LCAP and they do take part in the surveys, as well ... and then also have the [community arts partners] have open houses [that provide] an opportunity to meet with parents, because once parents begin to see [the impact of arts programs] themselves, [you don't have to ask them to advocate for more arts]. So, it's three-fold. [First,] it's the level of communication within the county office leadership staff... making sure that I'm in touch with every curriculum lead. ... [Second,] it's working directly with the arts partners so they know that it's happening. ... [Third] would be having parents have the opportunity to see their students' work showcase to see how talented their kiddos are.

However, case study data suggests that most COE staff members who did not directly work with CCS, including COE arts leads, tended to be either unaware of the county LCAP or considered it a formality. An interviewee explained the LCAP was really designed for district strategic planning and did not translate well to the COE context, and one COE superintendent described the county LCAP as “almost meaningless.” This COE superintendent went on to describe the county LCAP as “a hoop we jump through. It doesn’t impact that much of what we do because our numbers are so small. There’s not a lot of reporting we can provide.” The CCS administrator who oversees the drafting of the county LCAP in this COE felt differently about the importance of this document:

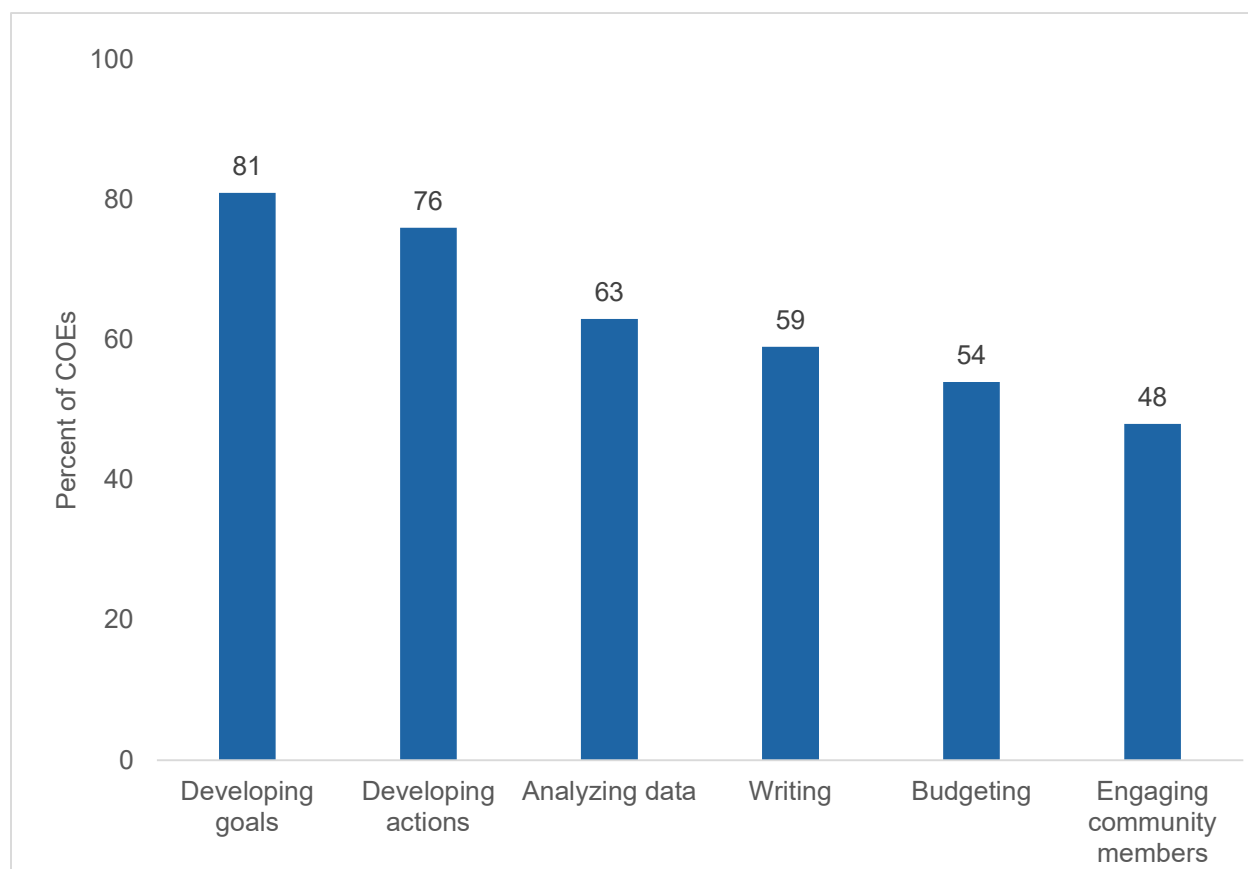
[The county LCAP is] definitely not [just] a compliance document. If you look at it, it explicitly describes the goals, [like] developing a CTE program and creating an environment where students can be engaged. You can look all over California, and I don't think you'll find one community school the size of ours that has listed a goal like that on their LCAP. [It's important] because of the lack of engagement, the chronic absenteeism, and the challenges our students have to see the relevancy of school [to their lives].

County LCAPs could be leveraged in a similar way to support increased arts opportunities for CCS students, especially in light of research indicating that arts programs increase student engagement and other priority outcomes (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).

COE arts leads are rarely included in the development or review of district LCAPs, potentially limiting their ability to share information about how arts education can be used to improve student outcomes.

In addition to drafting and submitting county LCAPs to the CDE each year, COEs support their districts' LCAP development process and, eventually, review district LCAPs to determine if they meet state requirements. There are many ways in which a COE might assist districts through the LCAP process. The most common support is helping districts develop their goals (81%), which must be aligned to at least one of the eight state priority areas, and their actions (76%), which should detail how districts will use state resources to make progress toward a goal (Exhibit 16).

Exhibit 16. Percent of COEs that support various district LCAP activities



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education; LCAP = Local Control and Accountability Plan.

Regarding the review and approval of district LCAPs, COE administrators describe their primary role as one of compliance. One COE administrator said that COEs can only intervene when policies have not been followed, like failing to engage the community or misusing funds.¹⁰ Because the arts is not an indicator on which LCAPs must be evaluated and there is no state mandate to check compliance with the California Education Code (see contextual considerations below), COE administrators have little latitude to comment on whether or not an LCAP includes arts-related actions.

¹⁰ LCFF, the state's weighted student funding formula, provides extra money to districts based on the number of foster youth, English learners, and students eligible for free or reduce-priced lunch that are enrolled in each district. These grants, which are a percentage of the base grant, are called supplemental and concentration grants.

Contextual considerations: The current iteration of “local control” tracks some priorities more rigorously than others, leaving little to no accountability or differentiated assistance related to arts education

Progress on the eight state priority areas is measured with a particular “indicator” and reported on the California School Dashboard (see Exhibit 13). However, not all indicators are considered equally when it comes to evaluating a district’s status. Priority Areas 4, 5, 6, and 8 all have state indicators, meaning there are specific measures for each of these categories that are used by all districts in the state. Priority 5 (Student Engagement), for instance, is evaluated based on graduation rates and chronic absenteeism, as defined by the state.

The other four priority areas (1, 2, 3, and 7) have local indicators, meaning a district defines its own metric for progress on these priority areas. In theory, arts education would be measured by a local indicator associated with Priority 7, which should describe “the extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in, a broad course of study” that includes the courses of study specified in the California Education Code (CDE, 2022a). In practice, districts may or may not include arts education in their Priority 7 indicator, leaving COEs unable to include arts education in their review of a district’s progress on state priority areas.

State and local indicators also differ in how they inform the Statewide System of Support. If districts do not show sufficient progress on state indicators—for the district as a whole or for particular student groups—they are identified for differentiated assistance. These districts receive technical assistance from their COEs to identify the “root cause” of inequities on a qualifying indicator and come up with a plan for addressing those inequities. The COEs receive additional funds for each district in differentiated assistance to support this work.

On the other hand, local indicators do not trigger differentiated assistance. As a result, even if a district chooses to include arts education among its Priority 7 indicators and consistently reports inequitable access to arts education for all or some student groups, the COE is neither required nor incentivized to address those inequities with the district. Ultimately, this means that while California Education Code requires arts education, there is no statewide infrastructure to monitor progress on or assist districts in meeting the requirements.

Moreover, COE arts leads are often left out of the formal LCAP review process (Exhibit 12). A former COE administrator suggested this barrier to participation in the district LCAP review was specific to the arts: “Some of these subject areas don’t have to fight to get in the door. In my position, I had to.” A COE administrator stated that there was no arts lead “at the table” for the LCAP review, and another mentioned that their COE arts lead did not have the time to participate in the LCAP review. Yet another COE arts lead noted it would be “inappropriate for [arts leadership] to try to influence LCAP plans from our level.”

To work with districts beyond legal compliance, some COEs tried to use the LCAP development phase rather than the review phase to inspire districts to think strategically about what to include in the LCAP. As one COE administrator explained:

We like to be as much a part of the [LCAP] development as possible and ask reflective questions and help people think through the plan as much as possible before it's ever submitted for a formal review ... When we review them ... we can't tell you that it's not approvable if it does meet the letter of the law, right? But we also might want to recommend that there are some other things you might consider.

Another COE arts lead mentioned sharing with all district arts leads in the county a CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative resource that connects the arts to each of the eight state priority areas that must be addressed in the LCAP. A third COE arts lead suggested that sharing concrete examples from other district LCAPs could be useful:

CCSESA had a program a while ago that had us looking at models of great arts education and what it looks like. On top of that, they actually went through and [showed] how your LCAP can be written to have that model in place... [Districts] need more of that kind of guidance.

Several interviewees suggested there would be more opportunities to integrate arts into the LCAP process if they had access to an evidence base that links arts interventions to each of the state priority areas. Finally, the study team found that very few of the case study district arts leads were involved in the creation of the districts' LCAPs, suggesting that those who are most aware of the promise of arts education to improve student outcomes are less likely to be a part of LCAP conversations.

Of the 37 COEs that had a full- or part-time arts lead, nearly half participate in providing differentiated assistance, but arts interventions were rarely considered as a district improvement strategy.

Because nearly half (45%) of COE arts leads were also involved in differentiated assistance, there may be an opportunity to leverage arts programs to address the goals of differentiated assistance (see Exhibit 12). There are resource banks, such as the Arts Education Partnership's ArtsEdSearch, that compile research summaries that connect arts education with improved educational outcomes. Despite this, interview data suggests COE arts leads and other COE staff involved in differentiated assistance did not often consider arts interventions to support district improvement. For COEs without arts leads or with arts leads not involved in differentiated assistance, this lack of consideration could be because there is no one with the knowledge of arts education research to advocate for its inclusion. In COEs with arts leads involved in differentiated assistance, arts leads may feel it is inappropriate to advocate for their content area while supporting a district in differentiated assistance. Alternatively, COE arts leads may have trouble aligning the evidence provided by ArtsEdSearch with the state's priority areas.

For example, metaanalysis on arts education studies looking at the relationship between arts experiences and math and English language arts scores typically show only moderate effect sizes (Hetland & Winner, 2001). If a district is focused on improving math and English language art scores, a COE arts lead may not feel it is appropriate to recommend an arts intervention when other non–arts interventions have a stronger evidence base.

Several interviewees expressed a desire for more research connecting arts education to the outcomes described on the California School Dashboard (Exhibit 13). An expert interviewee explained that “there have been so many efforts to [create] a resource bank [of] evidence-based research” for arts interventions but described these efforts as “a bunch of failed attempts ... because they’re just not well thought out and not well executed.” This interviewee went on to explain the opportunities that could occur if COEs engaged more with these resources:

The state is still ... struggling with how do you identify [evidence-based interventions]? ... But if we solve that ... If counties started to know [arts interventions do] resonate with parents ... your district attendance comes up, and your attendance at schools comes up, and kids like it and they’re engaged in school more ... that’s ... the ideal.

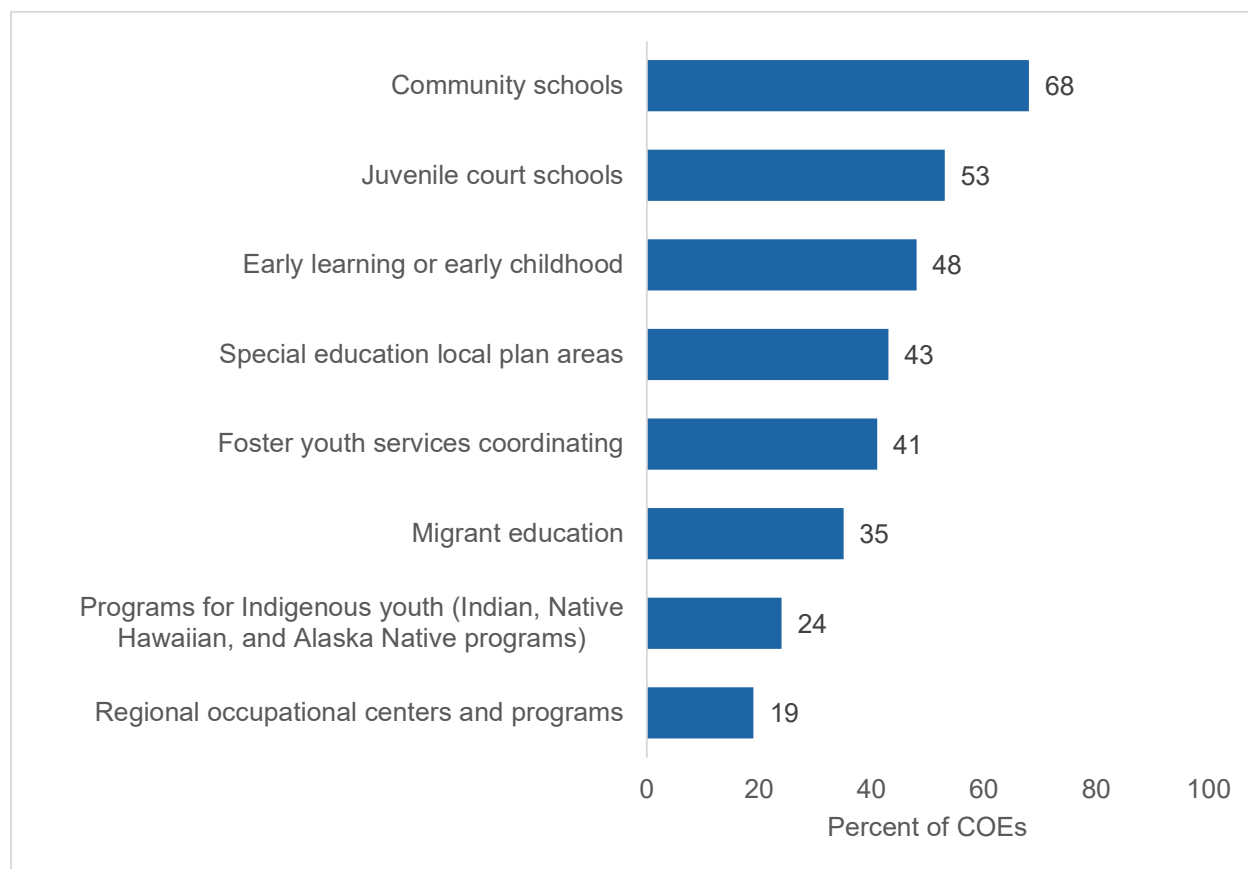
Contextual considerations: Many districts and COEs qualify for differential assistance based on pupil engagement and school climate indicators.

The differentiated assistance status for districts and COEs has not been updated since 2019, but the 2019 data reveal patterns in where districts struggle to meet the state’s priority areas. For example, of the 333 districts and COEs identified for differentiated assistance in 2019, 273 (82%) qualified due to at least one student group showing as red on the graduation rate or chronic absence indicator used to measure pupil engagement (CDE, 2021h). Similarly, 246 (74%) qualified due to at least one student group showing as red on the suspension rate or a locally defined indicator used to measure school climate. Ensuring that research connecting the arts programs to pupil engagement and school climate gets into the hands of COE staff providing differentiated assistance to districts could be an effective strategy for increasing arts education opportunities for the state’s historically marginalized student groups (see for example, Bowen & Kisida, 2019, and Lazzari et al., 2005).

County-run schools and programs

In addition to supporting districts, COEs run a variety of schools and programs that provide direct services to students, such as juvenile court schools or career technical education programs (Exhibit 17). These schools and programs present a unique opportunity for COEs to have an immediate impact on the availability of arts offerings for their counties’ students.

Exhibit 17. Percent of COEs supporting arts initiatives through other county-run schools or programs



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education.

While a majority of COEs indicated they supported arts initiatives in court and community schools, interview data and previous research suggests arts education in these schools is limited.

Most COE arts leads reported that their COE supported arts initiatives in juvenile court and community schools (53% and 68%, respectively; see Exhibit 17). However, previous research suggests that court and community school arts offerings are most often limited to a single discipline and rarely meet state standards for college and career readiness (Benge et al., 2022). The lack of arts opportunities in these settings is particularly concerning because the students enrolled in these schools are often from historically marginalized groups: Indigenous students, Black students, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, foster youth, and English learners are all overrepresented in the court and community school population. Still, compared to district-run community day schools (which serve a similar student population), county-run court and community schools are leading the way with 73% of juvenile court schools and 78% of county community schools offering credited arts programming, compared to just 44% of district community day schools (Benge et al., 2022).

Interviews with COE arts leads revealed idiosyncratic support for court and community schools, suggesting they are more focused on serving districts in the county than county-run programs (see promising practice). One CCSESA regional arts lead explained that students in court and community schools were typically perceived as transient, even if they were enrolled in county schools for a significant amount of time. A 2020 survey of court and community schools indicated that students stayed in county community schools for an average of 22 months and in juvenile court schools for an average of 13 months (Benge et al., 2022). In interviews, COE administrators said the transitory nature brought pedagogical challenges because arts lessons needed to “include the student that’s been there for 8 months and the student that just got there.”

COE arts leads also pointed to the challenge of bringing the arts into court and community schools, given the extremely small staffs and lack of arts expertise. The 2020 survey indicated court and community schools had an average of 5.5 teachers and 15% had a certified arts teacher (Benge et al., 2022). Due to limited teaching capacity, several interviewees noted that community partnerships were a more consistent way to introduce arts education than was hiring credentialed arts teachers. A CCS administrator discussed another approach of working with The California Arts Project (TCAP) to integrate arts into other content areas:

Two years ago, we started [bringing TCAP in for training] for our community school teachers. One of the things about the community school program is you don't necessarily have all single subject teachers. You may have multiple subject teachers, so getting their literacy in ... art forms up has been focus for us. How do I help [them] feel comfortable with their group of kids doing watercolor or getting up and dancing?

One expert interviewee suggested that support for court and community schools may depend on the experience and priorities of county superintendents and that in general there is little accountability when it comes to addressing the needs of court and community school students: “The counties do not pay enough attention to [CCS] students, and things like career tech and arts would do a much better job of engaging those students.” Members of the CCSESA Statewide Arts Initiative agree that arts opportunities can often reengage disenfranchised students and have formed an arts education equity working group that considers how to increase access to CTE-AME pathways in CCS settings.

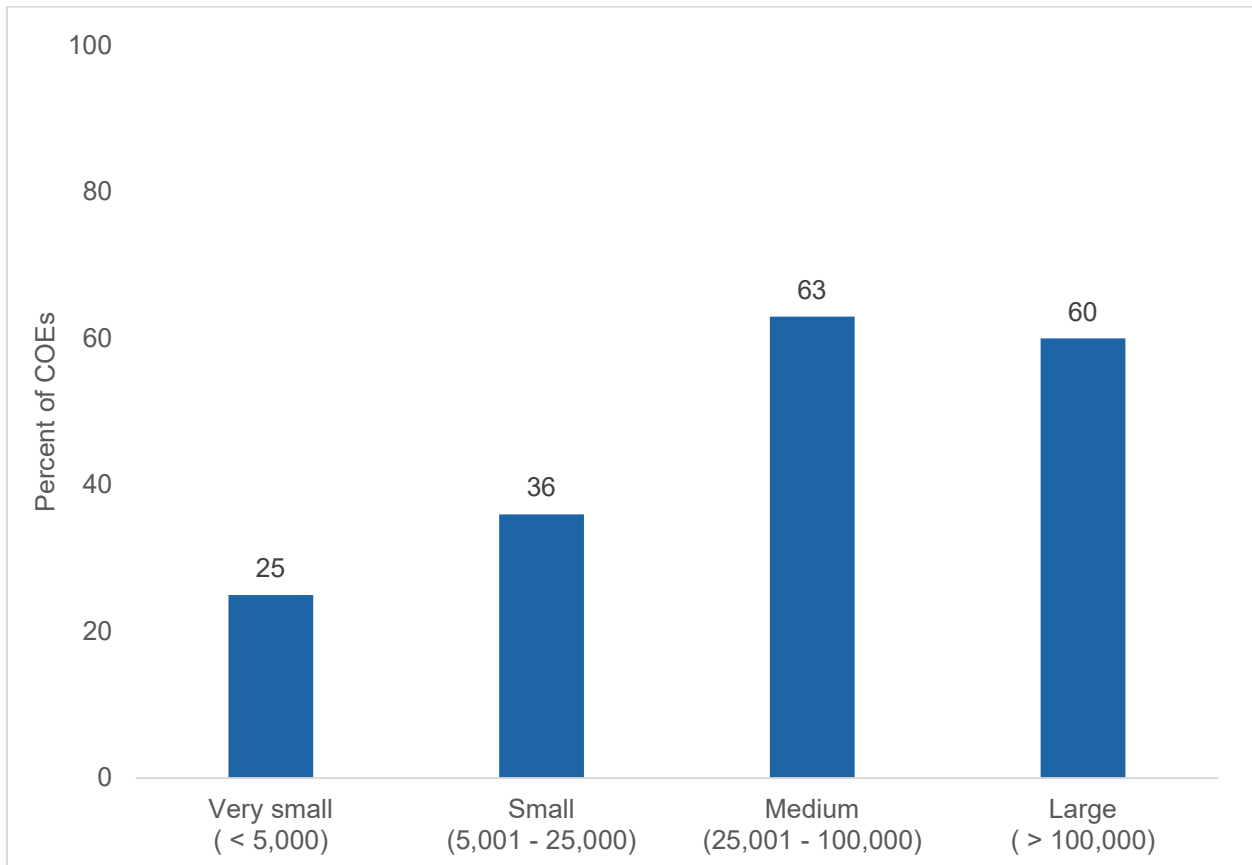
Promising practice: An arts lead fully dedicated to CCS programs supports increased funding and arts opportunities for students in county programs

In the San Diego COE, a full-time arts lead for CCS is dedicated to bringing arts opportunities to students in the county’s programs. Well connected to the broader arts community, the arts lead supports arts organizations in applying for grants to fund work specifically in CCS. Securing these grants has led to increased arts opportunities in county programs. Some of these arts organizations develop relationships with students that last beyond their enrollment in a county school and aids students as they reintegrate back into their communities.

COEs serving larger student populations were more likely to provide supports related to Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, Entertainment than those serving smaller student populations.

Career technical education (CTE) has undergone significant changes in California in the last decade. Until 2015, COEs often administered CTE programs, and some COEs also administered Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROCPs) to provide career and workforce preparation for high school students and adults. While ROCPs still operate, these programs are now more frequently funded by districts, as the LCFF and state grants have shifted to promote district-level CTE development. Alongside this shift has been an emphasis on improving, enhancing, and expanding CTE pathways—300-hour programs of study for secondary students in one of 15 industry sectors (including arts, media, and entertainment; CDE, 2021d). This shift has been aided by significant state investments in CTE grant programs (e.g., K12 Strong Workforce Program, CTE Incentive Grants) along with continuing federal investments (e.g., Perkins Grants).

Exhibit 18. Percent of COEs providing supports related to CTE-AME pathways, by total student enrollment



Note. n = 54. COEs = county offices of education; CTE-AME = Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, and Entertainment industry sector.

Some COEs, especially larger ones (Exhibit 18), continue to provide CTE programs to supplement district offerings. As one COE superintendent explained:

We used to provide all the CTE courses. We used to be the ROP [Regional Occupational Program] for the county, but when the model changed, the districts took it on. ... So, we will come in. We'll look to see if there is anything that we could offer that could complement what the districts are doing, and then we'll develop those programs to support them.

The superintendent went on to explain that the COE's CTE offerings take one of two forms: "magnet programs" in which districts send students to participate in a class and pay per student, or grant-funded programs in which the COE applies for CTE funds to support a specific CTE offering countywide.

Promising practice: COEs can step in to increase CTE-AME opportunities for under-resourced districts and students with limited access

While CTE grants provide an opportunity for districts to increase revenue, they often require matching funds, finding qualified teachers, establishing community partners, and overcoming a variety of bureaucratic hurdles. These requirements can be burdensome for small districts and schools, but two COEs provide examples of how COE staff can supplement local capacity to create more CTE-AME opportunities for under resourced districts and students in rural or alternative settings.

In Inyo County, a rural school district attempted to set up a hybrid AME/Manufacturing and Product Design pathway focused on graphic design. The idea was for students to learn how to design and produce branded products (e.g., T-shirts, car decals, posters) and then run an authentic business selling their services to their district and, eventually, districts throughout the county through an e-commerce site. The launching of this pathway was delayed by the pandemic and limited district capacity and was in danger of being canceled until the COE stepped in to help. Inyo COE now provides 50% of the funds needed to pay for the CTE-certified instructor, whom the COE also helped find. And the COE helped with course development and making sure that courses aligned to A-G requirements—courses that are required for eligibility in the state college and university system.

Next year, the Sacramento COE will launch virtual CTE-AME courses focused on media arts and targeted for CCS students and students in rural settings who do not currently have access to many CTE opportunities. This program has come about thanks to the work of an experienced AME educator who has "backwards-mapped some coursework" based on "labor partners" seeking "specific skill sets in media production." While the program will be virtual, students will be able to check out equipment from the COE or district to gain practical experience with the tools of the trade.

Even COEs that no longer directly serve CTE students may indirectly influence CTE offerings by supporting districts in developing CTE programs. This support can take the form of financial assistance or help applying for grants, professional learning opportunities, or assistance in forming partnerships with local colleges or businesses (a requirement of many CTE grant programs). For example, the Sacramento COE provides CTE-related technical assistance to both districts and other COEs in its regional network. The COE has a staff member funded by a K12 Strong Workforce Program grant who provides support to grant recipients in the region by connecting them to local colleges or business partners or helping them meet the programmatic requirements of their grants. The Inyo COE helped provide programmatic support and half the funds for a hybrid Arts, Media, and Entertainment (AME)/Manufacturing and Product Design pathway when a district struggled to set up and implement the program (see promising practice on previous page).

Recommendations

The study findings have implications for county offices of education (COEs)—and the organizations that help build their capacity (COE partners). In support of their collective efforts to expand access to arts education as envisioned in the California Arts Standards and called for in the California Education Code, the study team developed recommendations for COEs and the statewide organizations that support them based on study findings.

For COEs:

- **Leverage the CCSESA/COE network to promote the implementation of California’s new arts standards and framework.** Given the limited reach of the California Department of Education (CDE) in supporting the rollout of the new California arts standards and framework, COEs are critical to supporting local educators to align instructional programs with the new standards and framework. To execute this important work, COEs will need to take advantage of available resources and partnerships to extend their capacity.
- **Continue to build relationships with district leaders to maximize influence.** In the absence of a clear accountability mechanism for arts education, COE staff rely on “soft power”—namely, building relationships and connecting districts to resources. While the California Education Code requires schools to offer instruction in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts to all students, there is no accountability mechanism that provides recourse if schools fail to meet these requirements. Instead, COE staff must continue to leverage their understanding of districts’ needs and serve as a hub for connecting various partners to one another. The district Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) development process and COE-led differentiated assistance provide opportunities for COE staff to build and strengthen the requisite relationships with districts.
- **Model strategic planning and community engagement processes that foster support for arts education and contribute to sustainable arts programs.** Organizing COE efforts around a strategic arts plan builds internal capacity for increasing arts opportunities and may also provide a model for districts to learn from and follow. Similarly, A COE can use the mandatory LCAP community engagement process to provide an opportunity for community members to advocate for more robust arts opportunities in COE-run schools. For example, adding arts-specific items to the annual LCAP community survey or encouraging arts nonprofits to attend LCAP meetings may support increased investments in arts programs. LCAP community survey items measuring the support for arts programs could also be shared with districts to inform their LCAP.
- **Tailor support for districts receiving differentiated assistance.** Each year the CDE publishes a list of districts that have qualified for differentiated assistance along with the

student groups and outcomes under which they qualify. COEs are charged with assisting districts in improving outcomes, specifically for the student groups that qualified the district for differentiated assistance. COEs can leverage this role and the resources that accompany it to promote arts interventions that have been shown to improve a particular student outcome.

- **Consider how new funds can be leveraged to implement arts programs that address social and emotional learning goals.** California has prioritized social and emotional learning as students have returned to school and provided new resources (e.g., Expanded Learning Opportunities Grant) to address pandemic-related learning loss. As new funds are made available to districts, COEs can provide districts with resources, including professional learning, regarding standards-based arts and SEL programs as well as models for arts programs that may be offered as part of after-school or summer programs.
- **Increase arts learning opportunities in court and community schools to reengage students, promote equity, and demonstrate the effectiveness of arts programs.** Court and community schools (CCS) and other county-run programs provide an opportunity for COEs to lead by example and deliver arts education to the state’s most historically marginalized students. By breaking down silos between COE arts staff and other COE departments and prioritizing the delivery of arts education to the students served by county-run CCS, COEs can simultaneously reengage students who have not succeeded in other school settings, increase the equity of access to the arts in their county, and demonstrate to districts how the arts can be leveraged to improve student outcomes.

For COE partners:

- **Promote an understanding of the arts as core academic content and part of a comprehensive core curriculum.** While the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the California Education Code include the arts as a core content area, many education practitioners continue to think of the arts as elective. It is critical that COE and district staff who oversee curriculum and instruction view and communicate about the arts as a core subject. CCSESA’s Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) holds promise as a means of supporting this perspective among COE curriculum and instruction leaders. As COEs increase their focus on curriculum and instruction because of their role in the Statewide System of Support, CISC can support COE curriculum and instruction leaders to consider the arts among the solutions to challenges that schools’ face with student engagement. As one expert interviewee explained, “There’s real opportunity there. That’s where you start—where more and more districts are dealing with student engagement issues. That’s the most agile mechanism to build in arts as a solution.” Likewise, Create CA’s Arts Now Communities

should continue to educate community leaders and arts education advocates regarding arts education as required core curriculum.

- **Continue to support the implementation of California’s new Arts Standards and Framework.** Statewide organizations CCSESA and TCAP have led the effort to roll out the new standards, but much work remains. As such, these organizations should continue to work with COEs to develop and share resources (e.g., professional development modules, curricular resources) in support of robust standards implementation. This work could include support for COEs to develop strategic plans to increase access to standards-based arts education and for COEs to work with districts to develop plans of their own.
- **Advocate for improvements in the state’s data system, especially regarding elementary arts education data, and consider how to supplement that data in the meantime.** The state is in the midst of developing a “cradle-to-career” longitudinal data system and is actively collecting community input via public discussions (State of California, 2022a). This statewide data system will seek to consolidate what are currently separate early education, K–12, college, social service, and employment data bases (State of California, 2022b). Now may be a strategic time to advocate for legislative solutions to the current shortcomings of the K–12 data system as they pertain to arts education—specifically the lack of data on elementary students’ access and participation in arts education. At the same time, state and local arts education leaders can support local data collection efforts to learn more about what arts offerings exist and where and for whom improvements need to be made.
- **Connect existing research to state priorities and support new research relating to the indicators measured by the California School Dashboard.** The efforts of COE arts leads and advocates to reinforce arts programming through the Statewide System of Support would benefit from research that demonstrates that arts programming increases student performance on the California School Dashboard indicators. Some of this research may already exist but not be in a format that is accessible to COE and district administrators. Organizing existing research around the state’s priorities will make it easier for COE staff to bring the arts into the district and county LCAP development processes and COE-led differentiated assistance. Similarly, new research that is designed to measure the degree to which arts programs address state priorities, especially if conducted in California, will facilitate the inclusion of the arts as COEs and districts adopt evidenced-based practices.
- **Tailor support for small COEs.** With limited staff and financial resources, it is difficult for small COEs to take advantage of supports even when they are available. Additionally, the variation in COE staff and budget sizes means that some COEs simply do not have the capacity to develop expertise in arts education, much less apply for grants or establish systems of support. CCSESA’s Statewide Arts Initiative already

provides targeted support to small COEs through the Rural Arts Initiative. Continuing this work will be critical for creating equitable access to standards-based arts education for all of California's students.

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Appendix A. Case Study Descriptions

The Inyo County Office of Education (COE) serves a very small population of students the east-central part of California. The COE's part-time arts lead uses California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) regional partnerships to support its teachers with workshops and connect them to other professional learning (including virtually since the COVID-19 pandemic). The COE partners with Inyo Council for the Arts to offer student programs such as art docent volunteers and an arts day. District A is a small rural district with access to an arts teacher at all schools. The district appreciates having access to the part-time COE arts lead and having part of its Career Technical Education: Arts, Media, and Entertainment (CTE-AME) teacher's salary paid by the COE. District B is a very small rural district that also feels well supported by the COE. The COE also pays for a CTE-AME teacher for this district.

The Sacramento COE serves a large population of student located in central-northern California, serving a range of districts with small to large student enrollments. The part-time COE arts lead focuses on facilitating and maintaining partnerships with the City of Sacramento, community arts organizations, and district art leads to advance arts education in the region. The COE also benefits from the support of the court and community schools (CCS)/CTE lead, who has considerable experience in the arts and is tasked with leading an established arts integration initiative, Any Given Child, in partnership with the city. In addition to providing professional learning on the standards framework, the COE is addressing teacher professional learning needs by sending out a survey, which revealed that elementary teachers wanted to learn about arts integration while secondary teachers desired more content-specific learning. The COE plans to design countywide professional learning opportunities to meet these needs. Districts A and B, both large districts in the county, appreciate how the COE has expanded their connections to a wider range of artists, community art groups, and other district arts leads.

The San Diego COE serves a large population of students located on the southern border of California. The full-time COE arts lead focuses on disseminating resources to districts, collaborating within and across its CCSESA region on standards-based resources, and planning and facilitating standards-based professional learning opportunities. This COE also benefits from a full-time visual and performing arts technician who supports arts in the county's CCS. District A, a large unified district, outstrips the COE in terms of arts capacity but appreciates and participates in the countywide arts conferences sponsored by the COE each year as well as the communities of practice for district arts leads. District B, a small high school district without a full-time arts lead, does not always have the capacity to take advantage of arts-related COE opportunities but has been grateful for the trainings and curricular resources provided by the COE in support of the district's creation of online learning modules and the updating of its arts curriculum.

The Santa Cruz COE serves a medium-sized population of students located on the west coast of Northern California. The full-time COE arts lead focuses on collaborating with many community-based arts partners, making suggestions about curriculum to facilitate arts integration and pairing interested classroom teachers with a teaching artist to support arts integration. This COE launched its first strategic arts plan in spring 2022. District A and B were appreciative of county-level support, in particular the ability of the arts lead to make arts more of a focus in the district, as evidenced by the first county strategic arts plan, and the availability of the arts lead to provide professional learning and support. District A is a small district that has a goal in its Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) to create a strategic arts plan. District B is a medium district with a part-time arts lead that works closely with the COE arts lead on professional learning throughout the year.

The Sonoma COE serves a medium-sized population of students in the northern Bay Area that includes 41 school districts, many of them quite small. Though the COE has no designated arts lead, it partners with Creative Sonoma, a county agency that is a division of the Sonoma County Economic Development Board focused on advancing the creative economy, and other community-based arts organizations through the Sonoma County Arts Education Alliance (AEA). Likewise, while the Sonoma COE does not have a strategic arts plan, the AEA developed a “framework” in 2019 that serves as a tool for schools and districts to use as they work to increase equitable access to arts education. District A and B were nominated to participate in this research because they both worked with a consultant (provided through Creative Sonoma) to begin the process of developing a strategic arts plan, using the AEA framework. District A is a relatively large district that had attempted to develop a strategic arts plan in the past and was grateful for the support for its recent efforts. District B is a very small rural district that relies heavily on the county for a variety of types of assistance and finds COE staff to be incredibly responsive and supportive.

The Tulare COE serves a large population of students located in central California. The COE has a full-time arts lead and supports arts education in area districts by providing professional learning opportunities, supporting districts for planning for arts programming, and running student events. The COE arts lead also writes grants for funding for arts education and was recently awarded a federal Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant to support professional learning on arts education and arts integration. District A is a small, one-school district in a rural community. The COE arts lead is facilitating District A’s work to develop its own strategic arts plan. District B, a district serving a large population of Hispanic and Latinx students, has worked with the county on incorporating arts into its LCAP. Both districts also take advantage of arts-related resources, professional learning opportunities, and arts events that the COE provides.

Exhibit A1. Case study site descriptions

County office of education	# of districts	# of schools	total # of students enrolled	% Unduplicated students*	% African American or Black	% Asian	% Hispanic/Latinx	% Indigenous	% White	CCSESA regional lead?	Has arts lead? Full-time or part-time?	Mentions arts in LCAP?	Has strategic arts plan?	# of interviews completed
Inyo	7	23	3,789	74	6	1	53	11	23	N	Y, PT	N	N	4
District A											N	Y	N	1
District B											N	Y	N	2
Sacramento	14	393	242,727	59	11	17	33	1	27	Y	Y, PT	N	N ^a	4
District A											Y, FT	Y	Y	1
District B											Y, FT	Y	Y	2
San Diego	49	796	480,984	55	4	7	49	1	29	Y	Y, FT	Y	N ^a	6
District A											Y, FT	Y	Y	1
District B											Y, PT	N	N	2
Santa Cruz	13	87	38,820	56	1	2	57	0	33	N	Y, FT	Y	Y	4
District A											N	Y	N ^b	1
District B											N	Y	N	1
Sonoma	41	200	64,578	50	2	3	49	1	39	N	Y	N	Y	8
District A											Y	Y	N ^c	3
District B											N	N	N	2
Tulare	44	194	102,353	79	1	2	79	1	14	Y	Y	N	Y	4
District A											N	Y	N	3
District B											Y, PT	N	N	4

Source. CDE, 2022b, document review, and case study interviews.

a While the Sacramento COE and the San Diego COE do not have their own strategic arts plans, they are both members of countywide arts coalitions that do have strategic arts plans.

b “Unduplicated students” is an LCFF classification identifying the percentage of students in a given place that fall into at least one of three categories: English learner, foster youth, or eligible for free or reduced-price meals (a proxy indicator of socioeconomic status). This is used to determine the amount of supplemental and concentration grants a county or district receives to provide “increased and improved services” for these students.

c This district is in the process of developing a strategic arts plan.

Appendix B. Statistical Analysis

Exhibit B1 shows the estimated relationship between the existence of a strategic arts plan and the number of arts activities offered by a COE (of the four activities included on the survey), controlling for COE student enrollment and the existence of a full-time arts lead. As discussed on pg. 27, a COE with a strategic arts plan offers an average of 1.11 additional arts activities compared to similar COEs without a strategic arts plan. COE size and the existence of a full-time arts lead are also positively correlated with arts activities, but results are not statistically significant.

Exhibit B1. Coefficient of county office of education (COE) size, strategic arts plans, and full-time arts leads with number of COE arts activities offered

Variable	Coefficient	SE	p	Sig
Intercept^a	1.89	0.29	0.0000	***
Small COE	0.35	0.39	0.3818	-
Medium COE	0.16	0.41	0.6995	-
Large COE	0.68	0.43	0.1177	-
Strategic arts plan	1.11	0.32	0.0013	**
Full-time arts lead	0.69	0.38	0.0817	-

Very small COE = < 5,000 students enrolled; small COE = 5,000–25,000; medium COE = 25,001–100,000; large COE = > 100,000.

*SE = standard error; p = p value; Sig = statistical significance; *** p < .001, ** p < 0.01; n = 54; adjusted R squared = 0.36.*

^a The coefficient of the intercept indicates the typical number of arts activities offered by a very small COE without a strategic arts plan or full-time arts lead.