

Painting a Picture of the Arts in Providence Public Schools: A Report to the Providence Public School Board Policy Committee

Submitted by Arts Allies | September 3, 2013

BACKGROUND

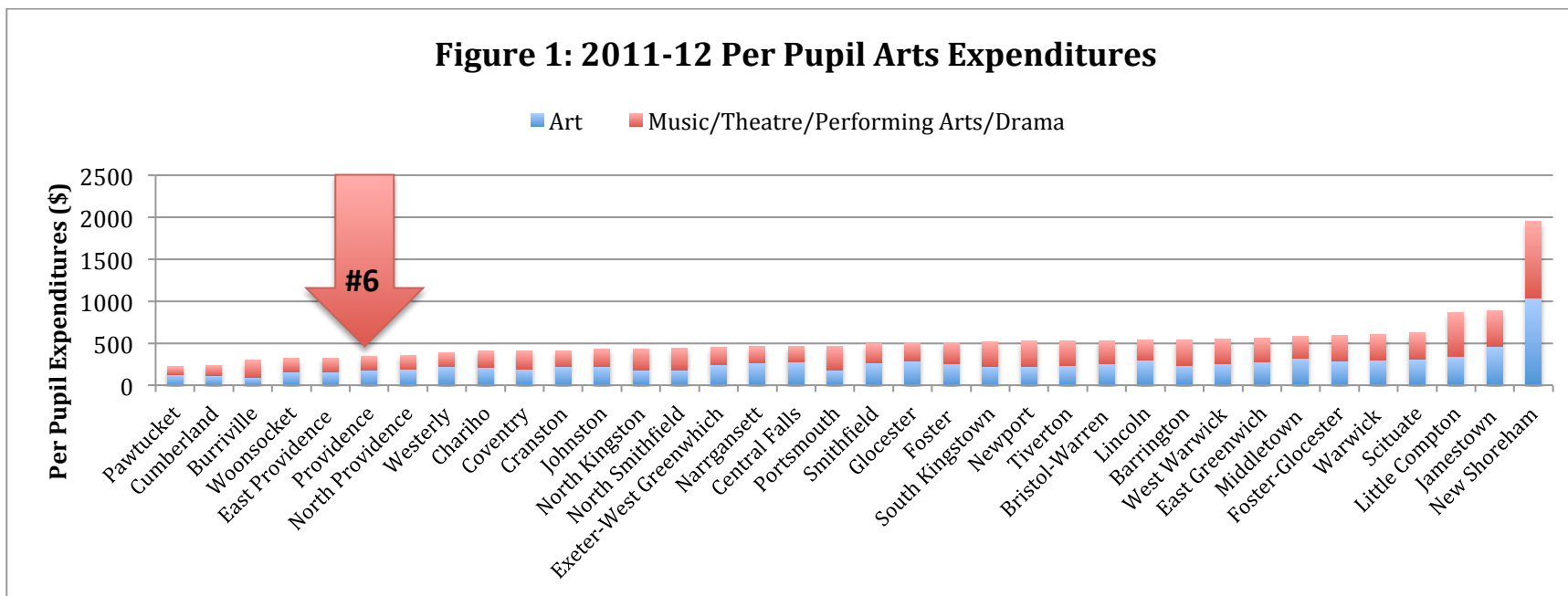
Arts Allies compiled *Painting a Picture of the Arts in Providence Public Schools* to help inform the Providence Public School Department School Board Policy Committee about the current state of arts education in Providence Schools. Arts Allies is a private-public partnership dedicated to increasing access to equitable arts learning opportunities for all Providence public school students. The coalition includes representation from Providence Public School District teachers and administration, the City of Providence, and citizen advocates.

Arts Allies gathered most of the data in this report in an online survey (referred to as “the survey” throughout this document) administered by a Brown University graduate student in Public Policy in cooperation with the PPSD Superintendent’s office to all Providence public school principals and arts teachers in July 2013. The response rate for the Providence survey was high: 78.9% of arts teachers and 82.9% of principals responded with complete surveys.

Some of the data looking at trends in teachers and expenditures was obtained from the Rhode Island Department of Education. In addition, Arts Allies data collection efforts were aided by the Annenberg Institute, Providence Public School District, and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. This assessment is contextualized by an analysis of out-of-school arts learning opportunities in Providence completed in June 2013 by a Brown University Public Humanities graduate student.

PROVIDENCE ARTS EXPENDITURES ARE LOW AND INEQUITABLY DISTRIBUTED ACROSS SCHOOLS

Compared with other Rhode Island school districts, Providence spends little on the arts. According to the Rhode Island Department of Education, Providence had the **sixth lowest** per pupil spending on visual and performing arts among the states thirty-six public school districts in 2011-12 (Figure 1).



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. InfoWorks!

For the most recent year in which school level data is available, 2009-10, average per pupil art spending at Providence elementary schools was \$194, at middle schools \$211, and at high schools \$172. This was 1.6% of total per pupil elementary spending, 1.5% of total per pupil middle school spending, and 1.3% of total per pupil high school spending.

There is inequitable access to arts education opportunities **within** the Providence Public School District. For instance, some elementary schools spend less than \$100 per pupil on arts instruction, while one spends over \$500 per pupil. In middle schools the range is from \$92 per pupil to \$421 and in high schools it ranges from \$64 to \$419 per pupil. (For a complete breakdown of art expenditures by school, see Appendix – Figure 11.)

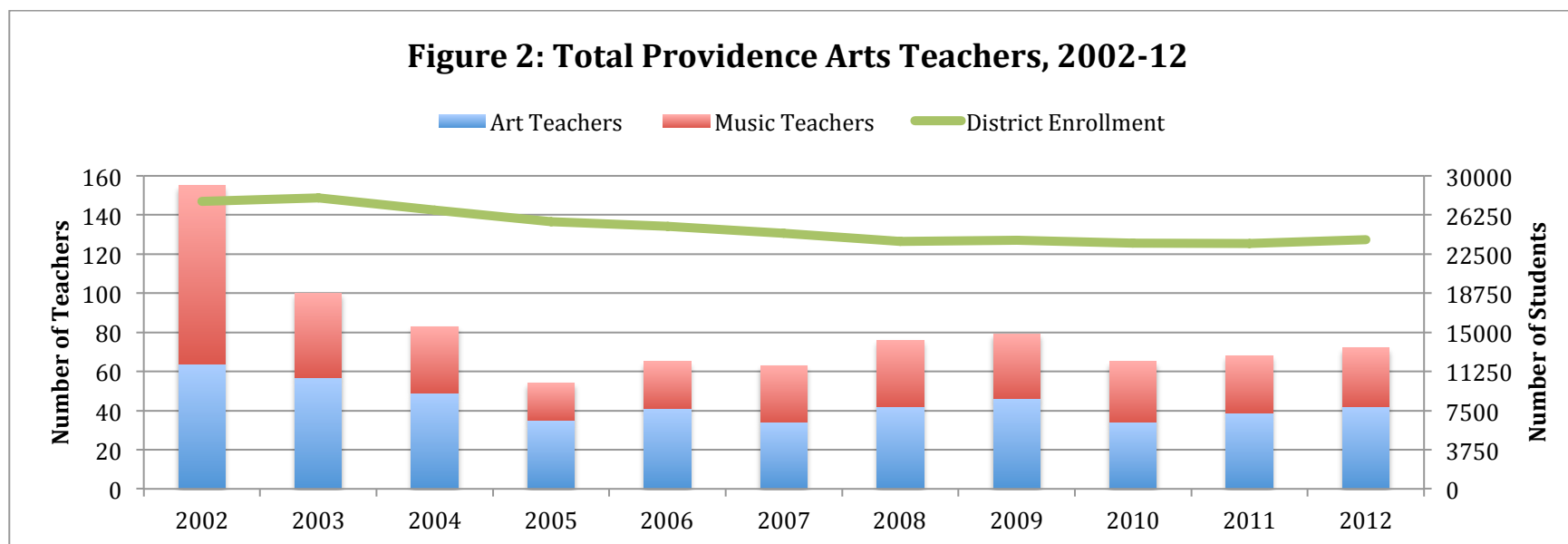
It is important to note that inequity in the availability and quality of arts learning opportunities is unfortunately not unique to Providence. There is a strong correlation between access to arts education and both family educational attainment and household income nationwide (McCartan, 2013).

PROVIDENCE ARTS TEACHERS EXPERIENCE HEAVY TEACHING LOADS

At the elementary level, the average total number of arts teachers in each school (both full-time and part-time) is 2.1. At the middle school level this number is 2.8 teachers, and at the high school level it is 3.2 teachers.

According to the teachers responding to the survey, the average number of students seen in a week by elementary school arts teachers is 391.4. At the middle school level this number is 204, and at the high school level it is 103.4. In total, **68.9% of teachers** in the district see **more than 100 students** in an average week. A middle school visual arts teacher commented on large classes that often contain students with special needs or limited English skills, and there are rarely classroom aides.

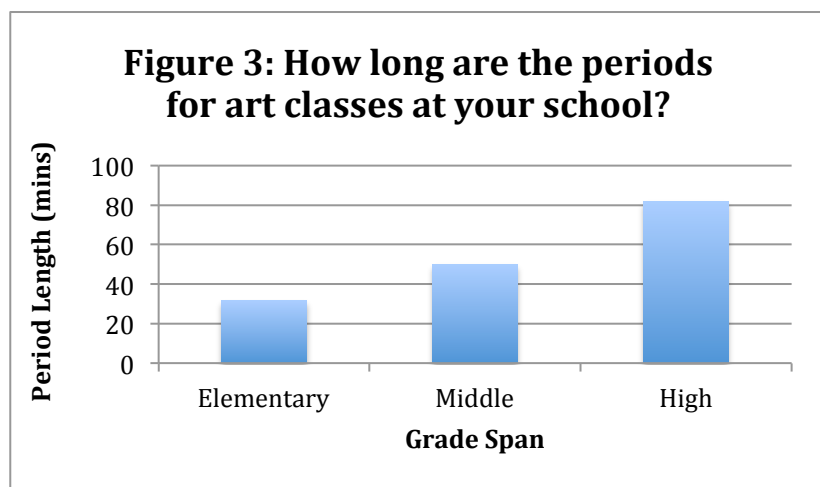
These heavy workloads come in a district that has lost a significant number of arts teachers in the last decade. From 2002 to 2012, the Rhode Island Department of Education reports that the total number of arts teachers in Providence has fallen by half, while the number of students enrolled in Providence Public Schools has fallen by approximately 13% (Figure 2).



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Teacher Assignment Data

PROVIDENCE STUDENTS HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO ARTS CLASSES AND INSTRUCTIONAL TIME IS AN ISSUE

Students in elementary school receive 30 minutes of instruction per week in visual arts and 30 minutes of instruction per week in music instruction. Students in middle school receive art or music instruction in grades 6, 7 or 8 but may not receive art and music in the same year and/or may not receive art or music in a given school year. High school students must take one semester of art but they can choose from visual arts, music, theatre, dance or some other artistic course to fulfill this mandate.



Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey

Art classes at the elementary level are 30 minutes long. According to survey respondents, art periods in middle school average 50 minutes and in high school art periods are about 80 minutes in length (Figure 3).

A majority of teachers (52.5%) and principals (65.5%) indicate that lack of time in the school day is a significant barrier to arts learning in Providence schools (Figure 9). One elementary visual arts teacher notes that between instructional time and cleanup time, students only get “12-14 minutes to work on their art.” Another teacher notes that limited instructional time means little time is spent discussing art, and art projects are often rushed.

LACK OF ARTS MATERIALS MEANS TEACHERS SUPPLEMENT

A majority of arts teachers (52.1%) personally spend \$200 or more yearly to supplement their arts budget (Figure 4). There is agreement between teachers (74.1% responding yes) and principals (58.6%) that the availability of more supplies would be helpful in improving arts learning.

Figure 4: In an average year, how much of your own money to spend to supplement your arts budget?

\$0 to \$50	4.1%
\$50 to \$100	13.7%
\$100 to \$200	30.1%
\$200 to \$300	15.1%
More than \$300	37.0%

Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey

Figure 5: How often do you work with non-art teachers to integrate arts into their instruction?

Never	28.8%
Rarely	26.0%
Sometimes	34.3%
Often	11.0%

Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey

LIMITED TIME FOR ARTS INTEGRATION OR CO-PLANNING

Art integration, the process by which art is used as a vehicle for learning in other subjects, can improve student academic outcomes in non-arts subjects. Research by Dr. Shirley Brice Heath shows that students *of all socio-economic circumstances* who have an education rich in the arts have better grade point averages, score better on standardized in reading and math, and have lower dropout rates (reported by the Americans for the Arts). A majority of arts teachers (54.8%) report that they “never” or “rarely” work with non-arts teachers in order to integrate arts into regular instruction (Figure 5).

Most art teachers (71.2%) report that at the schools where they work, they are either unsure or not aware of any arts integration efforts by non-arts teachers. Principals report a similar uncertainty or unawareness of existing arts integration (68.9%) (Figure 6).

Forty percent (40%) of teachers and three-quarters (75.9%) of principals believe that training in arts integration would be helpful in improving arts learning (Figure 10). Teachers frequently discuss the importance of arts integration and co-planning in their written comments. One elementary music teacher notes that integration “requires planning time with each other and workshops in which classroom teachers actually experience what transpires in arts classrooms.”

Figure 6: What proportion of non-art teachers at your school currently integrates arts into their everyday teaching?

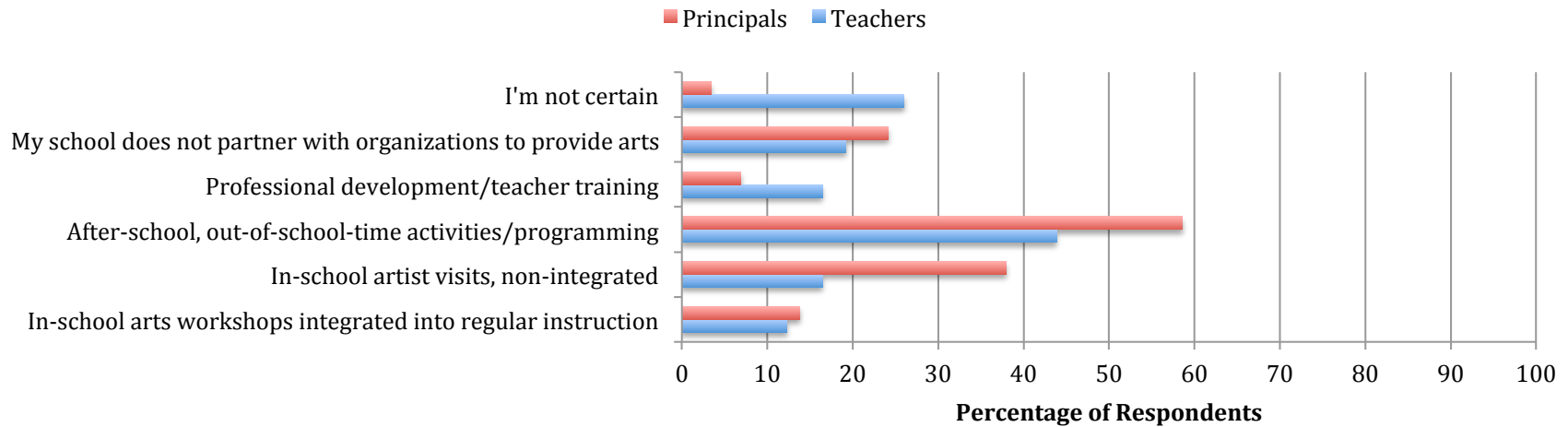
	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Principals</i>
Not certain	39.7%	31.0%
Not aware of any integration	31.5%	37.9%
One-quarter	17.8%	13.8%
One-third	2.7%	6.9%
One-half	2.7%	3.5%
More than half	5.5%	6.9%

Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey and Principal Survey

AFTER-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS MOST COMMON

The most common activity provided by outside arts partners is after-school programming. Teachers and principals surveyed mostly agree about the level of activities provided by outside partners, with the main exceptions being that teachers are less certain about the types of partner activities taking place in their schools, and principals report a higher rate of in-school artist visits. After-school programming is the only art partnership activity reported at more than 25% of schools (Figure 7).

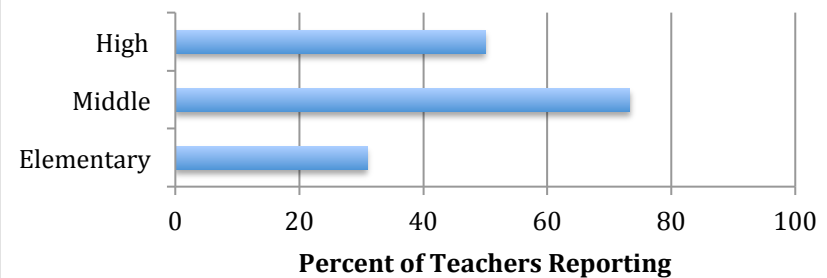
Figure 7: Does your school partner with organizations that provide opportunities for arts education?



Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey and Principal Survey

Teachers at middle schools most commonly report after-school programming. CityArts and the Providence After School Alliance are the two most common partners cited by middle school teachers, and these organizations seem responsible for the higher rate of after-school programming at the middle school level (Figure 8). One high school arts teacher noted that many of her students report last receiving arts instruction in elementary school.

Figure 8: Teachers Indicating After-School Programming, By Grade Span



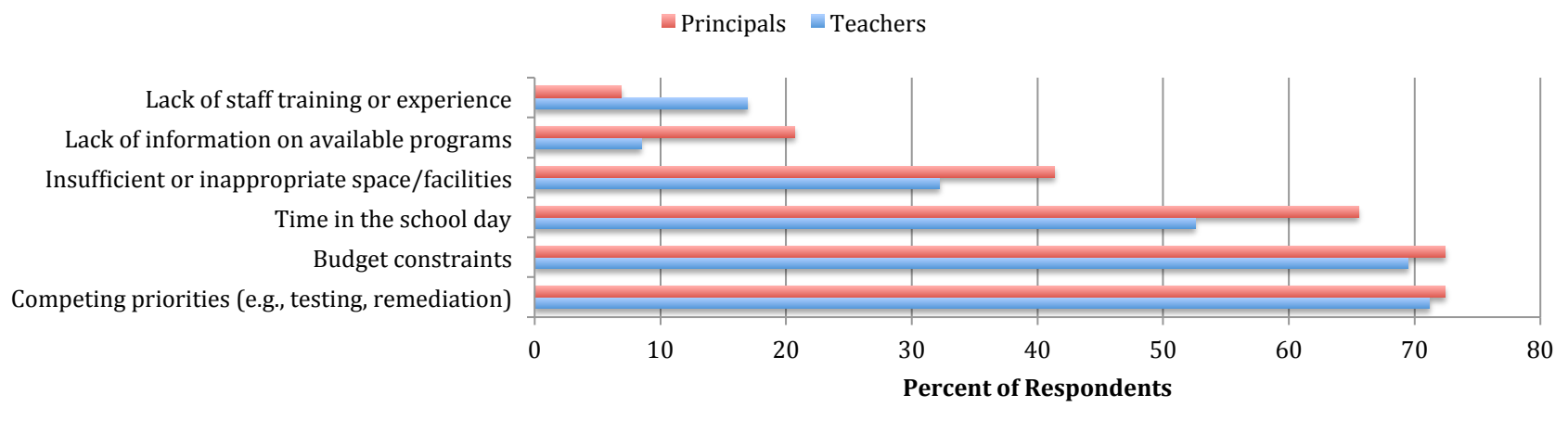
BUDGET CONSTRAINTS AND COMPETING PRIORITIES ARE BARRIERS TO ARTS LEARNING

There is agreement between Providence teachers and principals about the barriers to improving arts education. Competing priorities, budget constraints, and lack of time in the school day are identified as the three biggest barriers to improving arts education (Figure 9).

One theme that emerged in comments is concern over the fact that testing often crowds out arts instruction. Several teachers discuss examples of students being pulled out of art class to work on tests such as NECAP and DIBELS. One middle school teacher notes, “The arts...do not seem much more than an afterthought in the face of test scores.” In addition, No Child Left Behind has pushed arts instruction to the side.

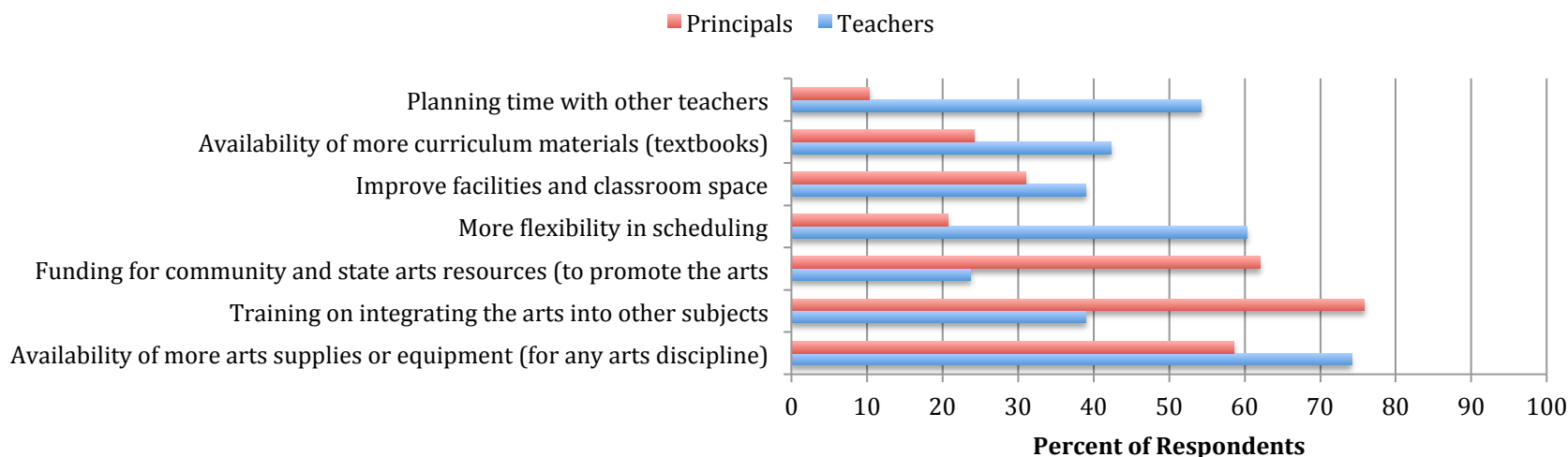
Ironically, information from The College Board demonstrates that students who take four years of arts and music classes while in high school score about 100 points better on their SATs than students who took only one-half year or less (Americans for the Arts, 2011).

Figure 9: What are the barriers to increasing arts opportunities for your students?



Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey and Principal Survey

Figure 10: Which of the following would be most helpful to improve learning in the arts for your students?



Source: Arts Allies, Teacher Survey and Principal Survey

TIME AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPROVE

Providence arts teachers and principals were asked to identify several of the most helpful things could improve arts learning. Both groups strongly support the importance of more arts supplies and equipment and a reevaluation of priorities. There was also moderate support from both groups for improved facilities (Figure 10).

Teachers were more likely to select items that directly impact how they structure their day, such as more flexibility in scheduling and more planning time with other teachers. Respondents write that time is needed to meet with non-arts teachers to plan integration, and to meet with other arts teachers to coordinate arts learning. One teacher notes that flex time could be used to work with especially talented students.

Principals focus on several broader themes, including greater funding for arts in the community and more training on arts integration.

TAKEAWAYS

Numerous teachers commented that, despite the challenges, they love art, love their students, and love their jobs. Principals, as well, think arts learning is important. As one put it: “My students and I love the arts. However, the lack of specific and adequate funding, time, materials, and resources do create challenges for our school.”

WORKS CITED

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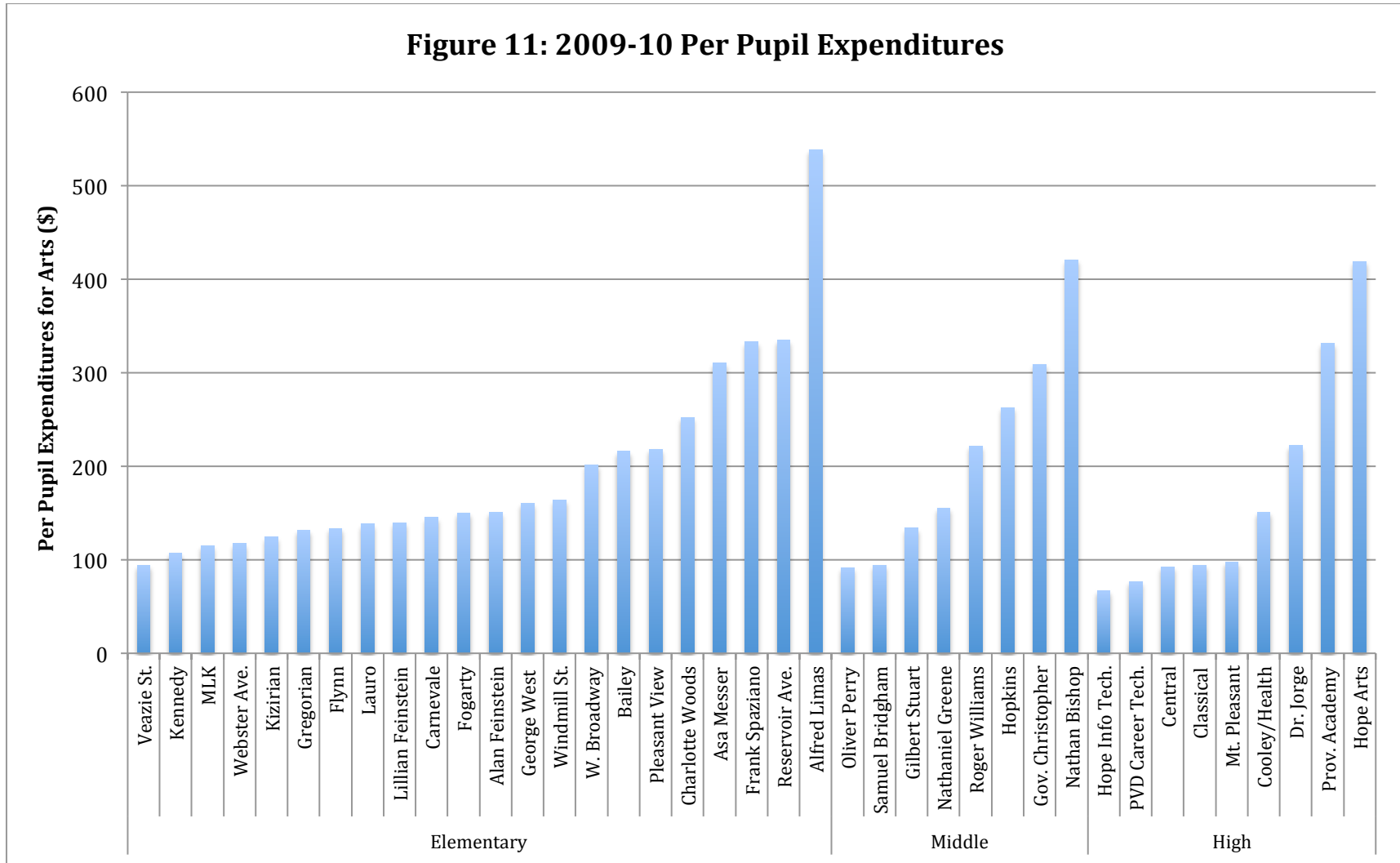
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APPENDIX



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, InfoWorks!

About Arts Allies

Arts Allies, founded in Fall 2012, is a private-public partnership that fosters productive collaborations among the Providence Public School District and a variety of government and community stakeholders to increase access to equitable arts learning for all Providence public school students.

Arts Allies seeks to identify the opportunities for arts learning in Providence and strengthen the existing pathways for arts education in this city. Beginning initiatives include learning from other cities with strong arts learning pathways, conducting research into the forms of arts learning taking place in Providence, establishing a database of the arts learning resources in our city, and working to increase opportunities for educator professional development and implementation.

With funding from the Rhode Island Foundation, *Arts Allies* has organized public conversation with leaders of arts education coalitions from Hartford, the Bronx, and Boston; engaged in conversations with arts education leaders from organizations both in and out of our schools; and conducted initial research into the arts learning opportunities in Providence.

For additional information about Arts Allies and this report, please contact info@arts-allies.org.