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**HEADLINE: Project uses arts to boost lessons: Pilot in 9 city middle schools will weave cultural resources into classroom learning**

**BYLINE: Joe Palazzolo, The Baltimore Sun**

**BODY:**

May 9--With the help of a new arts organization, administrators and teachers at nine Baltimore middle schools will infuse their curricula with arts and culture in a pilot project that could translate to better arts programming for all public middle schools in the city, officials are to announce today.

Arts education has waned in public schools across the United States, even as research shows a correlation between student achievement and participation in the arts.

Members of Baltimore Partners for Enhanced Learning, the nonprofit organization charged with executing the project, hope to reverse the dissolution of arts education in the city and curb the dropout rate by enriching all subjects, from math to English, with slivers of culture and art, said Cecil Flamer, the organization's chairman.

"Our idea is to get arts integrated back into the classroom in Baltimore City schools, across a wide spectrum - visual, fine arts, dance, music - that we think will make for enhanced learning," Flamer said.

To some extent, the No Child Left Behind Act has slowed the erosion of arts education in public schools by reinstating it as a core academic subject, on par with math or science. But Baltimore Partners takes it a step further. Using a formula borrowed from a group in Dallas, the organization will ally local arts and cultural institutions with the middle schools and show teachers how to weave the arts into their lessons.

For example, an English teacher might supplement a class discussion of a novel with a painting that expresses similar themes. Or a social studies class learning about ancient Greece might delve deeper into the cultural conventions of the time by acting out a Greek drama or re-creating a Dionysian feast.

"You take universal ideas that exist in both domains - social studies and fine arts - and you investigate them because that creates a fuller understanding of both," said Clare Grizzard, an arts integration

specialist at Roland Park Middle School, one of the nine schools participating in the pilot.

Grizzard's position is unique to Roland Park, which has a history of arts-rich academics. Underpinning the school's integration program are three directives: build a dedicated faculty, teach them to thread art meaningfully into their lessons and employ Baltimore's cultural resources - through field trips to museums and performances - to the fullest.

Baltimore Partners will bolster Roland Park's program and attempt to reconstruct it in the other middle schools, Grizzard said.

"There's never going to be as much success without a unity of effort," Grizzard said. "We all have the same goals, and we'll benefit through the strength of the partnership."

Representatives from the city's arts and cultural organizations, public schools system and business community make up Baltimore Partners' board, which convened two years ago with \$125,000 in startup funding from the Ford Foundation.

The city and city schools each have pledged \$65,000, said Flamer, and the Ford Foundation will contribute another \$125,000 next month. The nine middle schools are Calverton, Arundel, Barclay, Booker T. Washington, Canton, Dunbar, Hamilton, Mount Royal and Roland Park.

The model for Baltimore Partners, Dallas-based Big Thoughts, has been around for more than a decade, linking cultural institutions to public elementary schools in the Dallas area. It, too, began as a pilot, operating in 13 schools, said executive director Gigi Antoni. Four years later, Big Thoughts was administering to all 157 public elementary schools in Dallas. Baltimore Partners plans to phase the programming, if successful, into all 23 of the city's middle schools over the next five years.

"It's like a new doorway into understanding," Antoni said. "When you're studying West Africa and you have a West African griot come into your class and share, it's such a powerful thing. It's that kind of authentic learning experience that engages you mentally, spiritually, emotionally."

A growing body of research supports Antoni's notion. A study by Dallas ArtsPartners, an organization affiliated with Big Thoughts, found that elementary school pupils in the program had a greater command of the English language and better writing skills, and were more willing to volunteer in class. It also found that African-American and Latino students in participating schools scored higher on the Texas standardized reading test than did their peers in nonparticipating schools.

And University of California researchers in 2002 found that students who had extensive arts education fared better on standardized achievement tests.

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