

Building a System of Opportunities for Creative Learning

Year 2 Research and Evaluation Report



Report commissioned by



Managing Partner



Research Partner



Big Thought commissioned this report from WolfBrown, its primary research partner. Drs. Thomas and Dennie Palmer Wolf wrote the report building on the contributions of many individuals who helped shape, critique and prepare the report.

Thriving Minds Research and Evaluation Team

Big Thought

Jennifer Bransom,
Director of Research and Evaluation

Dr. Katy Denson,
Research Consultant

Sylvia Hemmer,
Project Manager

Dr. Marcelo Pinto,
Research Consultant

Charlene Randolph,
Program Accountability Manager

WolfBrown

Alan Brown,
Principal

Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf,
Principal

Dr. Thomas Wolf,
Principal

Dallas Independent School District

Dr. Nancy Kihneman,
Manager, Grants Evaluation

Veronica Martinez-Cantu,
Evaluator

Dr. Priyanka Singh,
Evaluator

Thriving Minds Steering Committee

Gigi Antoni,
President/CEO,
Big Thought

Dolores Barzune,
Community Arts Leader

Nancy Bingham,
Secretary – Board of Trustees,
District 4, Dallas ISD

Lew Blackburn,
Second Vice President – Board of Trustees,
District 5, Dallas ISD

Hollis Brashear
Former Member – Board of Trustees,
Dallas ISD
President, HNB Consulting Engineers

Patti Clapp,
Vice-President, Education & Workforce Development

Dr. Denise Collier,
Associate Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction,
Dallas ISD

Leigh Ann Ellis,
Board of Trustees – District 3,
Dallas ISD

Laurie Evans,
Director of Libraries, Dallas Public Library

Sue Gainer,
Vice President/Programs,
ChildCareGroup

Dr. Elba Garcia,
Mayor Pro Tem – District 1,
Dallas City Council

Vonciel Jones Hill,
Council Member – District 5,
Dallas City Council

Karen Hirschman,
Big Thought Board Chair,
Attorney, Vinson & Elkins

Barbara Kindig,
Assistant Director, City of Dallas Park and Recreation

Rudy Melendez,
Big Thought Board Member,
Co-Chair, Advocacy

Eli Mercado,
Big Thought Past Presidents Council,
Senior Vice President, Bank of Texas

Maria Muñoz-Blanco,
Executive Director, Office of Cultural Affairs, City of Dallas

Judy Pollock,
Chair, City of Dallas Cultural Affairs Commission

Pat Porter,
Executive Director, North Texas Business for Culture and the Arts

CiCi Rojas,
President/Chief Executive Officer, Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Monica Samson,
Sr. Business Analyst,
Business Intelligence Group

Pam Watkins,
Big Thought Past Presidents Council,
Vice President, Business Strategy, M/C/C

Craig Welle,
Executive Director, Enrichment Curriculum & Instruction,
Dallas ISD

The objective of *Building a System of Opportunities for Creative Learning* is to communicate Thriving Minds' research findings and activities carried out from its inception. The report was commissioned and produced by Big Thought, the nation's largest, most successful nonprofit organization focused on improving public education through creative learning. Big Thought is the driving force behind Thriving Minds, a citywide education initiative that works with teachers, artists and parents to infuse educational experiences with opportunities for students to imagine, create and innovate.

THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE ENGINE

Today, more so than any time in recent history, people are striving to re-imagine and re-invent a better world. It is in the midst of this revolution of change that Thriving Minds, a partnership managed by Big Thought, is emerging as a new kind of civic model.

For a generation, while building a prosperous and successful nation, we have missed opportunities to imagine. We have failed to imagine:

- The long-term costs of wasting the diverse talents and gifts of young people caught in poor schools or barren and dangerous neighborhoods;
- A shared future made possible by savings, mutual effort and empathy for lives less fortunate than our own;
- Ways in which to save our precious natural resources.

With Thriving Minds, we can:

- Invent new forms and places of learning that erode historic and stubborn forms of inequality;
- Call on our shared humanity and empathy to create new personal and civic ethics;
- Invest in the innovations that will create more productive workplaces and communities.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The success of this opportunity relies on the energy and insights of young people. While children make up just 25% of our population, they are 100% of our future. To help re-invent our shared world, they will require:

- Effective public schools, parks, libraries, museums and neighborhood centers where they can learn to imagine and act, from pre-school through college, in both formal and informal settings;
- Meaningful roles and responsibilities that help them to imagine and understand the lives of others so that they, as citizens, mayors or journalists, can act ethically and empathetically;
- Applied learning and school-to-work experiences that foster invention and entrepreneurship.

Thus, Thriving Minds has set out to:

- Develop meaningful creative learning experiences in an equitable fashion for students;
- Support families as the first “laboratories and studios” for the imaginative work of young people;
- Build neighborhoods and a larger city system with strong pathways for creative learning.



THE ENGINE: CREATIVE CAPITAL

Thriving Minds begins with a simple hypothesis: opportunities to be creative are key drivers in improving the lives of children, families and communities. Because of the importance of the opportunity, the largest equity challenge for the 21st century—and quite possibly beyond—is who will have the chance to develop his or her “creative capital.”

Think of creative capital as the capacity of a person, family or community to imagine and express new possibilities through creative activity.

If a community values and supports the creativity of all its members—regardless of income, origin, or address—it develops individuals capable of integrating imaginative thinking into every aspect of community life. This includes investing in the arts, science and business, as well as innovative solutions to challenging social issues.

If all young people have the opportunity and support that allow them to realize what they can imagine, we can look forward to healthier communities, more competitive industries and a richer public life. In short, creative capital is an engine that can increase the effectiveness of individuals, sustain families and fuel a higher quality of life in a community. A graphic representation of the Thriving Minds hypothesis is contained in Figure 1 below.



© Big Thought and WolfBrown

Figure 1: How Thriving Minds Contributes to Creative Capital

The Thriving Minds hypothesis—that opportunities to be creative are key drivers in improving the lives of children, families and communities—was first developed in the context of the arts and arts education. The arts’ clear investment in imagination and its support of what the poet and scholar, M. Njeri Jackson, has termed “inclusive excellence” made it a logical place to start.¹ This foundation equipped Thriving Minds to develop models, tools and vocabularies for creative learning. However, creative learning and the human capital it develops, occurs in a broad range of activities where there is opportunity to do original thinking and work: in science, mathematics, engineering, business and social entrepreneurship. Indeed, the long-term promise of Thriving Minds is that what has been incubated in the arts can inform work in many other domains.

The Importance of Partnership

There is a final, but equally important, part to the Thriving Minds argument: no one organization or portion of a city’s life can generate all of the opportunities necessary to educate and equip the next generation of authors, inventors, scientists, CEOs, politicians, or artists. This is work that requires partnerships across neighborhoods, schools, libraries, museums, parks, and more. Creative capital may be expressed by individuals, but it is built (or withers) in families and communities. Think of the partnership in the case of a young man who likes to work with his hands, but did not see opportunities to pursue his interest or recognition from others that there might be value in his pursuit.

- His mother was concerned that he would spend his summer hours home alone in front of the television or playing video games.
- His father believed his son was unprepared to enter the work force in the near future; he needed to learn some type of job skill.
- He enjoyed working with his hands. He built model planes and ships when he was younger, but he thought he was too old for that now.
- He used to help his uncle, a handyman, fix things. He enjoyed it, but his uncle had moved to a different part of town.
- The family lacked financial resources; community partners collaborated to create a summer welding camp that was free and easily accessible in the neighborhood.
- During the camp, adults noticed that his behavior changed from being “a bit of a trouble maker” initially to being deeply interested in learning and working with fellow student welders.
- By the end of the camp, he expressed an interest in using what he learned not only to make some money welding but also to continue making metal sculptures.
- His parents proudly talk about his welding skills and his ability to commit to regular attendance at the camp.



¹ Interview with M. Njeri Jackson, Vice Provost for Diversity, Virginia Commonwealth University, December 1, 2008.

Thriving Minds seeks to generate conditions in which children's interests and talents can flourish. Another example is a young jazz musician whose playing is remarkable. However, just as interest alone is not enough to ensure that the student's creativity will thrive, raw talent does not guarantee success. Her talents can diminish if community partners do not provide support and encouragement.

- Her grandfather played guitar with her from the time she was three.
- Her mother taught her the songs she remembers from growing up in Mexico.
- Her school ensured that she had music every year of elementary school.
- Her keyboard teacher in middle school urged her to come in before school to practice. Her uncles, aunts and cousins asked her to play at family gatherings.
- Her music teacher helped her apply to a special summer jazz program across the city.
- Her parents saved for her tuition.
- She and her friends spent hours working on improvisation together. She talked to a visiting musician during jazz band rehearsal and learned about a local recording studio where she traded assistance out for learning how to operate new equipment.

Developing creativity in children is a community-wide challenge as well as a community-wide opportunity. Thriving Minds invites and encourages partners from across Dallas to take up the challenge and embrace the opportunity.

THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING A CREATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM

Increasing the creative capital of children throughout Dallas, regardless of where they live or what their family circumstances may be, requires that the partners in Thriving Minds build a system of equitable and high quality creative learning opportunities. Equity without quality is false hope.

Building such a system involves multiple and coordinated efforts to:

- **Nurture creative capital:** Exploring multiple strategies to increase creative learning in individuals, families and neighborhoods and responding to the different ways in which creative learning is developed.
- **Map and distribute the supply of creative learning opportunities:** Documenting what is currently available across Thriving Minds, how equitably it is distributed and identifying sites where available resources are having significant impact.
- **Understand, respond to and build demand:** Identifying where young people, families and neighborhoods are already invested in creative learning and where they want more.
- **Improve quality:** Discovering how to intensify existing opportunities and build continuous pathways for creative learning that could contribute to a set of shared civic outcomes that make Dallas both a livable and productive city.

These tasks are ambitious even in the most flush of times. In many U.S. communities, including Dallas, the chance to become an inventor or to be celebrated as an innovator is currently highly correlated with race and class.² High-achieving low-income students struggle to get the skills,

² At <http://www.subnet.nga.org/educlear/achievement/> the National Governors Association states: "The 'achievement gap' is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. This is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face."

opportunities and support they need to be the immunologists who invent new vaccines, the authors who tell the stories of immigration or the mayors who break new ground in urban development (Achievement Trap).³ In fact, ensuring that all young people receive opportunities to hone their imagination and share creatively with others, may well be this century's equivalent to the struggle for civil rights.

In a nation struggling through a recession,⁴ these challenges become even steeper. Now more than ever, there is a need to address this work in ways that use existing resources wisely, improve the quality of current programs and identify new synergies. A major purpose of the research and evaluation work of Thriving Minds is to identify such possibilities.

FOUR KEYS TO SUCCESS

Big Thought's Research and Evaluation Team, in conjunction with a broad set of community partners, has developed a set of tools to track progress of Thriving Minds. Each tool is described briefly below and then detailed more fully in the rest of this report.

NURTURING CREATIVE CAPITAL

Beginning in Year 1⁵ of Thriving Minds researchers met family members from across the city, asking them to share their hopes for and efforts on behalf of their children's talents. Their aspirations often contrasted sharply with what was available, feasible, and affordable. Subsequently, in the spring of 2008, a diverse group of researchers interviewed nearly 70 families from three different neighborhoods around Dallas. Based on those conversations, it became clear that Dallas children and families participate in different creative ecologies — meaning that they value, access and build on opportunities in distinctive ways.

Major factors shape these ecologies: external conditions (such as poverty and social supports), family values (like family history and patterns of current engagement in creative activities), and children's differing levels of access to and engagement in creative learning (e.g., a school music program or the availability of a dance program in a neighborhood center). These findings have major implications for Thriving Minds continuing work: the initiative will need to develop neighborhood-based strategies tailored to reaching and engaging the children and families who live and learn there.



3 Weiner, J.S., Bridgeland, J.M., & Diurilo, J. J. (2008). Achievement Trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from lower income families. Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and Civic Enterprises: Lansdowne, VA.

4 The National Bureau of Economic Research declared on December 1, 2008, that the U.S. has been in a recession since December 2007.

5 Thriving Minds' major partners have different "years" (i.e., Dallas ISD's year is August 1 - July 31, City of Dallas', including Libraries' and Park and Recreation', year is October 1 - September 30). To monitor partners' investments in Thriving Minds a common calendar was created. It begins in the fall and ends at close of summer/early fall. Although Thriving Minds was not publicly announced until February of 2007, investments began in Fall 2006 in anticipation of this announcement (i.e., new fine arts specialists hired). Thus, Year 1 of Thriving Minds is Fall 2006-Summer 2007 (i.e., August 1, 2006-July 31, 2007: Dallas ISD; October 1, 2006-September 30, 2007: City of Dallas) and Year 2 of Thriving Minds is Fall 2007-Summer 2008 (August 1, 2007-July 31, 2008: Dallas ISD; October 1, 2007-September 30, 2008: City of Dallas).

Looking forward, the research will attempt to measure success utilizing two multi-year tools:

1. Quarterly interviews with caregivers and students (face-to-face, and via phone) examining families' levels of engagement in and attitudes toward creative learning, and
2. An annual survey of youth and family creative capital (discussed later in this report).

MAPPING AND DISTRIBUTING THE SUPPLY

If creative capital is to grow, then the availability of creative learning opportunities will need to be increased in ways that equalize access throughout the city. But increase from what base? And grow in what ways? To answer such questions, Thriving Minds has created an inventory (or “creative learning census”) of the supply of creative learning opportunities across its multiple partners and methods to monitor the yearly growth of available opportunities.

One of the biggest challenges in finding out what creative learning opportunities are available in a city the size of Dallas is that there are few databases that track this type of information consistently and reliably. Creating a uniform reporting mechanism would not only aid in this research, but it would constitute a lasting contribution to Thriving Minds as a partnership that crosses many of the city's major institutions.

In Year 1, the research team began identifying the organizations and agencies from which it could collect and analyze data. The team offered to serve as a central collection agency for sorting through available data and establishing consistency. Some organizations and agencies (e.g., the Dallas Public Library), having made recent investments in data collection systems, helped establish common indicators for tracking creative learning programs across the Thriving Minds partnership. Other partners agreed that better alignment of data collection efforts was needed.

Thus, the strategy in Year 2 has been to build a compatible information system across agencies and organizations. This is intended to serve as a double resource for the long term. On the one hand, it can improve the information organizations and agencies need on a daily basis for their own administrative and programming purposes. On the other, it ensures that Thriving Minds and the community as a whole will have a comprehensive, systemic approach to comparing data on the supply of programming from one year to another.

Thriving Minds agencies are aligning their efforts to document and compare creative learning data. Dallas's Office of Cultural Affairs, a key participant in this effort, agreed to co-develop and field a new survey instrument to collect data on creative learning using indicators such as discipline, location, audience, duration and cost.

Progress will be measured using two metrics:

1. The growth of overall supply and variety of creative learning.
2. The equity of supply across the city.

This census will be repeated every two years, offering Thriving Minds a way to track what is being offered and to determine how equitably it is distributed throughout the city.

UNDERSTANDING, RESPONDING TO AND BUILDING DEMAND

An equally important building block for Thriving Minds has been learning about children's and caregivers' demand for creative learning programs. It is important to know what people want for several reasons:

- First, to see if offerings already exist that serve their needs and whether, through more effective information systems, consumers can be directed toward what they desire.
- Second, to identify and consider how best to fill gaps in supply.
- Finally, to try to shape and guide demand by informing people about offerings that they may never have imagined or considered.

The effort to determine demand was initiated in Year 1 and fully analyzed in Year 2. Research began with six focus groups of caregivers and was designed to learn what they wanted for their children, what opportunities they currently used and what obstacles they had been encountering. Building on that work, researchers designed the Student Activity Survey completed by 4,694 young people in grades 1-12. Student responses revealed both their current participation in creative learning as well as additional activities that interested them.

Program designers and providers in Thriving Minds have already begun to build on the findings from the research and evaluation work. Programmers have increased the availability of dance opportunities across the city in response to students' interests. Further, in the fall of 2008, undergraduate and graduate students from Southern Methodist University were trained to serve as community artists offering dance residencies through Thriving Minds After School program (see Illustration 1 on page 10). Finally, program designers are considering how school- and community-based activities can support and link to informal creative learning opportunities in the home.

IMPROVING QUALITY

While it is a major accomplishment to increase the raw numbers of creative learning opportunities throughout a city as large as Dallas, the opportunities must also be high-quality to have an impact. In addition, they need to be available to children and families throughout the city via well-known, reliable, safe and widely used pathways. A key outcome of these multiple investments should be the steady improvement in the quality of work created and performed by Dallas students.

In Year 2 significant progress was made developing the tools and processes necessary for defining and measuring quality. Data was collected and analyzed in three areas:

- The qualifications of the creative learning workforce in Dallas ISD
- District-sponsored opportunities for professional growth; and
- Pathways for continuous creative learning

In addition, researchers:

- Conducted three additional rounds of quality panels, including a round with national experts to benchmark local assessments; and
- Built a pool of quality observations that included substantial numbers of out of school instances, including summer programs.

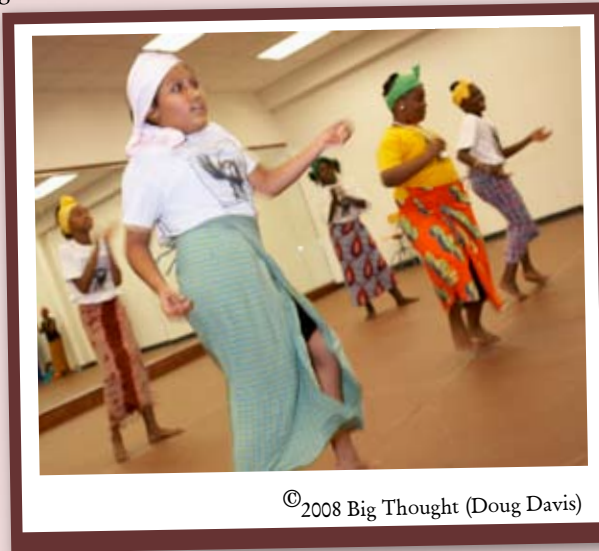
Setting the Stage

In August 2007 parents in focus groups shared their fears for their children. One of their biggest concerns centered on their children being unproductive and unsupervised after school because no safe or trusted programming was available. Thriving Minds responded by writing a grant in collaboration with Dallas ISD and one year later, families began enrolling their students in Thriving Minds After School.

Currently 20 sites exist, 15 elementary schools and 5 middle schools. Each site illustrates how the diversity of Thriving Minds partners can respond to and reflect the community of each school's students, caregivers and staff. One such community is Roger Q. Mills Elementary. Only six weeks into its after school programming, students and teachers decided to celebrate what they had learned.

Relatives flooded into the auditorium of Mills Elementary on Thursday evening November 13th, to watch sons, grandchildren, daughters, nephews, etc., share their talents and new-found skills. Principal Martinez beamed with pride at the terrific turnout. She stationed herself at the entry door shaking hands and warmly greeting every person. The children who would be performing squirmed with excitement and anticipation.

Fourth and fifth grade students began with a dance using hip hop and stomp. Some kids danced well, some looked at the floor and counted their steps—but all danced. They found their places and worked in unison. The audience clapped and hooted. The children's faces beamed: "I learned how to do something. They watched me. They saw."



©2008 Big Thought (Doug Davis)

Then came the first and second graders in bug costumes. The audience was treated to a play based on a children's book, *The Grouchy Ladybug*. For six weeks artists from the Dallas Children's Theater, a Thriving Minds partner, had worked with the 6 and 7 year olds helping them learn lines, project their voices, find their places on stage and many more elements of theater they could use in their "off-stage" lives.

Next, an older group of students with guitars performed three songs. Another Thriving Minds partner, Little Kids Rock, provided training and curriculum to help the school's music teacher offer basic guitar lessons to students. In addition, they provided the school with 20 new guitars for the children to play. Thus, they not only supported after school creative learning but also resourced the music teacher in ways that benefited in school instruction.

"They are not filling time in isolation or getting into trouble."

All students in Thriving Minds After School, whether they attend Mills Elementary or one of the other 19 sites, are tapping into their talents and exploring their interests. They are not filling time in isolation or getting into trouble. They are building a future—one in which they learn to cooperate to achieve a group goal.

Developing imagination, discipline, perseverance and team work are just a few of the outcomes that Thriving Minds seeks to achieve.

Illustration 1: Setting the Stage

Findings indicate that progress is taking place. More instructors have majored and are certified in the discipline that they are teaching. In addition, professional development offerings and engagement is slowly growing. However, most of the investment made in continuing education, on the part of institutions and instructors, is in areas of classroom management and student engagement. Interestingly, the observations conducted by quality panelists indicate that these dimensions of quality are the most developed, while higher-order skills (i.e., facilitating student dialogue that promotes learning, developing students' ability to make creative choices and nurturing self-assessment and recognition opportunities) are underdeveloped.

Successes for Year 2 are the advancement of students' creative learning pathways and establishment of quality advocates across Dallas. Change has been noted in feeder patterns across the city. Dallas ISD has added new fine arts teachers filling some of the gaps identified in Year 1. Going forward, Thriving Minds After School and creative community resources will be included in the pathway data to illustrate how other resources are being leveraged to fill remaining gaps. This work, as well as all the

other work of Thriving Minds, is being supported by a new corps of advocates. Panelists who first engaged to assess quality through observations are now initiating professional development classes, participating in national webinars, re-designing their creative learning offerings, attending meetings, and advancing Thriving Minds in their day-to-day work.

A COMMITMENT TO USING THE EVIDENCE

While Thriving Minds' research and evaluation does serve as a reporting mechanism to ensure accountability, this is not its primary objective. Most importantly, the research and evaluation enables partners and community members to learn how to identify and build on early successes, and invent strong solutions for persistent challenges.

The work deliberately engages many individuals from the community to do the groundwork, as they assist with design, implementation, analysis and reporting.

Thus, the research and evaluation effort is an investment in individual, as well as civic, creative capital.

In 2008, several local public forums were held to report the results of research and evaluation from Year 1. More than 100 people participated in these forums by sharing their ideas and brainstorming ways Thriving Minds could respond to research findings.

In addition to these formal presentations, informal discussions have also produced results. The decision to lengthen time blocks for creative learning from 45- to 90-minutes in the Thriving Minds After School program was informed by what local and national quality review panelists saw as a major gap—existing creative opportunities often did not allow enough time for significant learning to occur. In addition, Thriving Minds instituted a partnership with Little Kids Rock after learning that students were interested in learning to play guitar and keyboards (data collected via the Student Activity Survey). Now, lessons are taking place at more than 20 campuses across Dallas ISD.



WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED?

The previous sections have outlined the ways in which Thriving Minds is committed to harnessing creative learning—in the arts and elsewhere—as a powerful engine for increasing the quality of individual lives and reaching a set of commonly valued civic outcomes. In the sections that follow, the accomplishments of Thriving Minds will be shared in more depth and tracked by the four major keys to success set out in the introductory pages (creative capital, supply, demand and quality). Implications for the continuing work of Thriving Minds will also be discussed.

NURTURING CREATIVE CAPITAL

Thriving Minds is based on the premise that there are many more talented individuals than there are people who get the opportunity to thrive and contribute. In many respects, society squanders talent. As Sir Kenneth Robinson, an educator and leader in modern thinking, remarks:

In my view, we face two resource crises, and they are intimately related. We talk all the time about one of them—the crisis in natural resources. We talk far too little about the other—the crisis in human resources. We need invention, innovation, and imagination to save and transform the world as we know it and to make the best of ourselves and our children. But we systematically waste and degrade human talent—particularly the raw, still-to-be-developed gifts of young people. Exactly like water or forests or fuels, unless we nurture it, it won't be there when we need it. Not in medicine, or engineering, or the arts or sciences. We have to attend to this second resource crisis just as urgently as the first.⁶

Taking these ideas another step forward, noted journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell re-defines talent as the combination of a person's gifts and passions plus the network of opportunities that that person encounters:

People who stand before kings...are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot.

He goes on to say:

We overlook just how large a role we all play—and by “we” I mean society—in determining who makes it and who doesn't.... We could easily take control of the machinery of achievement.⁷

It is with these ideas in mind that Thriving Minds defines creative capital as the underlying capacity of a person, family or community to imagine and express new possibilities through creative activity. However, capacity requires opportunities for exploration, development and achievement, making creative learning—the opportunity for young people to translate what they can imagine into actual dancing, writing, experiments and inventions—critical. It is a human effort, the learning and the work produced by the chance to dance, play an instrument, act, paint, build and design. Realized creativity is what occurs when individuals' and groups' works, performances and innovations are recognized, enjoyed, built on and used by others.

Thus, both creative learning and realized creativity matter to a city just as much as financial capital because they are the forces behind out-of-the-box thinking that produce new products, address challenging social issues, and develop civic activities and innovations that affect the quality of life of its citizens.

Creative Capital in Dallas Families

During the spring of 2008, Big Thought researchers interviewed 69 families with children, from pre-school through high school, attending a range of Dallas public, private and charter schools.

⁶ Meeting remarks from the Alliance of Young Artists and Writers, July 18, 2008.

⁷ Gladwell, Malcolm (2008). *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Little, Brown and Company. Hachette Book Group: New York, NY. p.19

The immediate purpose was to understand how creative capital develops in families living in different circumstances and with different histories of creative activity. The longer-term purpose was to think about how Thriving Minds develops programs to increase creative learning for children growing up in what may be very different ways. A poor family, deeply invested in creative activities, but with few resources and little information about opportunities, has one set of needs. An adolescent who is passionate about music, but whose family has little time or interest, needs other “life-lines” to sustain his creative learning.

In an hour-long interview with one, sometimes two, caregivers and a child, researchers attempted to learn about the family’s and child’s creative history and social dynamics around creative activity in the household. Community researchers also collected information on the family’s resources (e.g., income, education and social networks). An attempt was made to reach a group that was reflective of the realities encountered in Dallas’ communities. Of these families:

- Roughly 50% were African American.
- 33% were Hispanic with Spanish being the language spoken at home.
- Approximately 85% of the adults had not attained a bachelor’s degree.
- Roughly 75% had family income lower than \$45,000.
- More than 60% (42 out of 69) had moved in the past year, necessitating a change in school for their children.

During August and December of 2008, follow-up phone interviews were conducted with the same families. These 20-minute interviews explored what additional creative activities family members engaged in during the summer and fall months. By staying in quarterly contact with the families researchers hope to sustain a strong sample of families over the next three years.

Family Creative Capital

Research shows that young people’s creative capital is, in many ways, an extension of families’ creative capital. It is often families’ daily choices that determine their investment in creativity: choosing what to pass on to their children, how to spend their time, how to use their resources and what to encourage their children to do when they say, “I’m bored.” Drawing on the personal stories and examples that families shared during their interviews, researchers determined that families’ creative capital is a complex network of behaviors, experiences and values included in the following five “domains”:

1. **Positive Family Social Dynamic around Creative Activities:** A child who has had the



opportunity to take dance lessons organizes her younger brothers, sisters and cousins into a “class” where she teaches them what she has learned.

2. **Caregivers’ Creative Values:** Families save up to buy a video camera, using it to record their children’s music performances at school and at family gatherings. They watch their videos with other family members who could not attend.
3. **Accessing Creative Resources Outside of the Home:** A mother goes early to pick up her children at their after school program in order to read the bulletin board and talk with other families about what they are planning for their children’s summer activities.
4. **Creative Tools and Resources in the Home:** A father who works construction brings home scrap materials so that his boys can experiment with designing and building. When he gets home early enough, he joins them, sharing his woodworking skills.
5. **Family Creative History:** A Spanish-speaking mother teaches her young children the folksongs she learned from her father while growing up in Mexico as a way to connect them to their grandparents and their cultural heritage.

The research suggests that in Dallas, children’s creativity develops in four different creative ecologies, ranging from spare to enriching. These ecologies are influenced by factors that include external conditions (such as poverty and social supports), family values (like family history and patterns of current engagement in creative activities) and children’s differing levels of access to and engagement in creative learning (e.g., the availability of a school music program or a dance program in a neighborhood center).

Contrary to previously cited national research, the data shows that income, race and address do not predict families’ creative ecologies. This suggests that other conditions such as access to opportunities, support, role models and pathways may be what assist or prevent children from poor families from realizing their gifts. The example of the Bell family (Illustration 2 on page 15) highlights these points.

Barriers

As Sarah and Cynthia Bell revealed, race, income, marital status and address do not predict families’ investment in creative capital. However, across the U.S. these factors have determined what, if any, opportunities families can find in order to continue their creative development. This is due to significant, and often increasing, barriers to access and opportunity that can stifle or derail later creative development. These barriers have important implications for the program design of Thriving Minds.

- **Safety:** Safety is one of the biggest concerns for Sarah and Cynthia, preventing them from using opportunities that exist outside of home and school. When asked about walking to activities in the neighborhood, Sarah said, “She never walks anywhere. She can only play in the backyard.” Sarah simply does not trust that her neighborhood is a safe place for Cynthia to navigate independently. There are two components to this challenge. First, the location for Cynthia to do creative activities must be safe and second, the means of getting her there must also be safe.

Understanding Family Creative Capital

Information gleaned from the Bell family illustrates how creative capital works in an actual family typical of Dallas's population. The Bells are a biracial family living in an Oak Cliff neighborhood. Sarah, the sole caregiver, makes between \$30,000 and \$35,000 a year as a chef's assistant. She also sells Mary Kay cosmetics to fill out her income. Sarah is a 27-year resident of the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Cynthia, her only child living at home, is 11 years old, and attends the neighborhood Dallas ISD elementary school. The Bells represent a key group of families for Thriving Minds. Even with only a modest income and limited access to traditional forms of arts and culture, they are deeply invested in creative activity as a source of satisfaction, well-being and opportunity for learning.

Domain 1: Positive Family Social Dynamic around Creative Activities

Families like the Bells enjoy participating in creative activities together. Sarah and Cynthia make Mary Kay gift baskets to sell, cook together, decorate the house, repot plants, listen to music and sing with the radio. They also spend time together in other free-time activities like roller-skating and traveling.

Cynthia's grandmother lives nearby in Plano and they visit her on weekends, when she often shares many of her own creative interests with Cynthia. She makes baskets out of bread wraps and they cook spaghetti and stew together. Cynthia's grandmother is from Mexico, and sometimes she and Cynthia speak Spanish together. Cynthia is very proud of a tiara that her grandmother gave her that was hers when she was a little girl. She has passed her enjoyment of making things, like knitting, crocheting and sewing, on to Cynthia, who makes clothes for her teddy bears.

Cynthia's Aunt Martha is a Pre-kindergarten teacher, and Cynthia stays with her after school until her mother gets home. Also, Martha is Cynthia's Girl Scout troop leader.

Domain 2: Caregivers' Creative Values

Like other families with high creative capital, Sarah talked about the importance of her child's creative development, describing why it matters to her and how she supports such activities. Even when Sarah makes gift baskets to earn additional

income, she mentioned how she included Cynthia and valued their time together.

Cynthia is in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program at school. Sarah is pleased with the creative opportunities this program provides. Several times Cynthia has been in plays at school and Sarah always attended.

Sarah: *She's been in TAG since the beginning. They tested her in Pre-kindergarten.*

Cynthia: *I finished my work early and I was always so bored.*

Sarah: *I had to tell them to give her more work to do. Tell her [the interviewer] about the museums.*

Cynthia: *We spent the night at the Museum of Art, and we went to the aquarium.*

“Sarah talked about the importance of her child's creative development”

Domain 3: Accessing Creative Resources Outside the Home

About half (52%) of the creative resources outside the home accessed families with high creative capital are school-based. Yet, families like the Bells make extensive use of other community and city resources as well. For instance, Cynthia learned to roller skate when she was three because she went skating with her daycare. Sarah continues to take Cynthia to the local skating rink (even though she doesn't skate unless it is adult time because she doesn't want Cynthia to see her fall down).

They do not have a computer at home, so both Sarah and Cynthia use the computers at the public library near their house when they need internet access. This pattern of both adults and children making extensive use of public resources to amplify what they can do is a hallmark of families with high creative capital.

Domain 4: Creative Tools and Resources in the Home

Many families like the Bells have rules about watching television. One family interviewed had made the choice not to own a television. This is not the case in the

Bell's home. Cynthia and Sarah laughed and said that the television is almost always on and Cynthia watches it a lot. But there are rules:

There are rules only on school days. Get my homework done and don't watch too much TV so I can be in bed by 8 o'clock.

When asked about books in the home, Cynthia described one of her favorite books:

It's one of these books that my class all made together that we got published. Each of us wrote a short little story that could fit on one page. And we drew a picture for it and our picture [of the class] is on the front cover.

It's even a hardback [Mom adds].

Domain 5: Family Creative History

Families like the Bells draw on a rich set of generational resources. They have many activities that have been passed down through three generations. There are other creative activities that grandparents do with children, even if caregivers are not involved. For example, Cynthia and her grandmother share an enjoyment for sewing and making things.

Cynthia is growing up amidst family members such as aunts and uncles who also spend time in creative activities with her. For example, her aunt does many craft activities with her through Girl Scouts.



Illustration 2: Understanding Family Creative Capital

- **Inadequate Pathways of Opportunity:** Cynthia spoke about a second, different kind of barrier: the lack of continuing pathways of opportunity. She had music at her pre-school where she played the xylophone, but there has been no music teacher at her elementary school. Last year she participated in basketball and track, but this year basketball is only for the boys. Because her expectations have been raised and then left unfulfilled, Cynthia is learning not to get her hopes up, not to invest too much. This is a major way children's interest and longer-term development as creative individuals can be undermined.
- **Cost:** In the context of her Talented and Gifted (TAG) class, Cynthia has been to the Dallas Museum of Art and the Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park. But given her family's modest income and the other demands on their time, those were one-time events. What would it take to turn that initial exposure into ongoing participation? For instance, what programs, coupled with what invitations and transportation, would ensure that Cynthia invited her mother and grandmother to the museum, acting as their tour guide?

Other interviewed families noted additional challenges:

- **Distance and Transportation:** Dallas is a city with uneven public transportation, and even families with cars are concerned about the price of gas. In addition, families with children who had developed interests requiring them to travel to classes or special programs cite transportation as a major issue.
- **Caring for Multiple Children, with Multiple Needs:** Other families discussed the difficulties childcare presents in trying to create opportunities. Even when there is a place where caregivers can take their children to participate in creative activities, they often only fit the age-appropriate level or desire of one child. This leaves caregivers struggling to figure out what to do with their other children. Can it really be called an opportunity if a program serves only one child while challenging the rest of the family?
- **Extreme Economic Demands:** In some of the families interviewed, all adult caregivers are working multiple shifts in order to make ends meet. This diminishes the time and energy caregivers have for creative activity with their children, no matter how much they value it.

Implications for Thriving Minds

The research identified some additional findings that Thriving Minds is currently using to inform its dynamic design.

1. **Connections to Home:** All indications point to the home as a critical place for youth and families to nurture and sustain their creative capital. While Thriving Minds is not designed to deliver home-based programs, its thoughtful development of school and community-based activities that connect to the home will enhance long-term success.
2. **The Key Role of Schools as Distributors of Opportunity:** Despite the importance of the home and the influence of parents and grandparents, school remains one of the key resources in fostering creative capital. Because transportation is so often an obstacle, especially for economically challenged families, after school instruction at the child's own school solve many logistical problems. The new Thriving Minds After School program and its investment in personnel, training and curriculum will be very important in helping families overcome barriers.

3. **Churches as Important Centers for Creative Activity:** For many families, church is a resource and a place where there are many opportunities for creative activities. Also, church often provides an answer to the challenge of caring for multiple children. Many church programs are designed to accommodate children of different ages at the same time with age-appropriate programs. While previous outreach to churches has been on a case by case basis, a December 2008 “Pastors Meeting” in Pleasant Grove signals Thriving Minds’ desire to engage churches as a community of providers.
4. **Participatory Research as a Strategy that Fosters Creative Capital:** The involvement of multiple providers, Big Thought administrators, cultural organizations’ staff, Dallas ISD personnel and interested private citizens as researchers in the family interviews has itself been a form of creative learning. Not only has the research built local capacity but it gave these individuals insights for personal growth as well as ideas for improvements in program design and administration. For example, Ana Herrera, executive director of the Anita N. Martinez Ballet Folklorico, learned through her work as an interviewer that some young Latino boys had an interest in drawing and that many mothers were interested in pursuing better physical fitness. Within a few months, she had designed two programs—a youth drawing class that documented the skirt movements of the Ballet’s dancers and a Latin cardio dance class, “Zumba,” for mothers. Many boys signed up for the drawing class and many mothers signed up for the dance class.

Next Steps

Based on learning from these family interviews, Thriving Minds fielded a major survey of more than 2,000 Dallas families. This survey of current creative learning activities and attitudes will provide an important large-scale complement to the in-depth information emerging from the family interviews.



MAPPING AND DISTRIBUTING SUPPLY

To increase creative capital, young people need access to activities that encourage creative learning both in school and out of school. These opportunities include in school classes taught during the regular school day; disciplines like art, music, drama and dance, as well as arts integration courses where creative learning subject matter is used to teach subjects like reading and social studies. The activities also include after school programs and community-based activities in creative learning; generally grouped under the designation of out of school time.

Providers

The providers of creative learning programs can be categorized into seven broad sectors (see Figure 2 on page 19). By understanding the distribution and depth of activities in each of these sectors, a system-wide picture emerges of the creative learning opportunities for Dallas children and families. By establishing a census of activities, progress can be mapped from year to year.

During the first two years of Thriving Minds, research has focused on the four sectors shaded darker green in Figure 2.

- “Schools” include public, private, faith-based and charter schools.
- “Public library” and “park and recreation” sectors include those creative learning sessions, exhibits and workshops offered by the city’s Public Library and Park and Recreation Department.
- “Arts and Cultural Organizations” include cultural, history and science museums; music, theatre and dance groups; and similar non- and for-profit organizations.

Sectors not yet fully assessed are “engaged citizens” (independent or unincorporated artists, instructors, entrepreneurs and volunteers); “faith-based organizations” (those providing creative activities through religious organizations); and “other community providers” (other institutions or organizations operating within the community such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America and YMCA).

Attitudes About the City

Indirectly affecting any discussion about supply is a variety of attitudinal factors that have an impact on the utilization (or “uptake”) of programs offered. If citizens have negative attitudes about the quality of life in their city or if caregivers do not want their children to participate in creative learning activities, then the quantity of offerings may be a moot point. This is one reason Thriving Minds has regularly consulted an annual survey of attitudes called “The Citizen Survey,” a collaborative effort between the City of Dallas, the National Research Center and the International City/County Management Association.



Figure 2: Sectors for Thriving Minds Providers
 (Circles in darker green indicate those that have been most rigorously examined by the research team.)

© Big Thought and WolfBrown

Looking at citizens’ ratings between Year 1 and Year 2 provides some interesting insights:

- “Recreational opportunities,” “educational opportunities,” “sense of community,” “access to childcare” and “how safe you feel” all rated below national norms. Virtually all of these saw declining scores between Year 1 and Year 2.
- “Services to youth, seniors and low income people” also rated below national norms though there was a two-point increase (on a 100 point scale) from Year 1 to Year 2. Among the services rated, the Dallas Public Library (a Thriving Minds partner) received the highest ratings both for its services and for variety of materials.
- Although ratings for Dallas public schools were below national norms in both Year 1 and Year 2, ratings increased from 36 to 39 points from one year to the next. This three point increase is of particular interest because Dallas ISD is a major Thriving Minds partner.
- The largest increase (from 53 in Year 1 to 60 points in Year 2) among survey items was in “opportunities to attend cultural activities,” in which citizens rated Dallas above the norm.

It is premature to draw concrete conclusions about Thriving Minds' effects from a general citizens survey, especially with only two years of data. Even so, there are some findings on which program designers can build and others that raise concern. The fact that the greatest increases in positive attitudes about the city were in the area of schools and cultural opportunities is an important building block for the program. Yet, the negatives about the quality of leisure time services and the lack of safety amplifies what interviewed families shared with the researchers and aligns with findings from local and national Quality Review Panelists (community creative learning offerings are mixed in terms of quality; discussed later in this report). It is important that program designers be aware of these concerns as they build the supply of activities and promote them to caregivers and students.



Schools

Supported by the partnership with Thriving Minds, Dallas ISD set a goal in Year 1 to provide every elementary school student with a minimum of 45-minutes of weekly instruction in both music and visual arts by Year 3. To move toward that goal, by the end of Year 2, the Fine Arts Department added teachers as follows:

- 38 visual arts and 25 music teachers were added to elementary school faculties.
- At least one music teacher was found in 128 of 151 elementary schools (a 12% increase).
- A total of 31 elementary schools (21%) gained a music teacher, 26 of which did not have a music teacher the year before.
- At least one visual arts teacher was found in 129 of 151 elementary schools (a 15% increase).
- A total of 31 elementary schools (21%) gained a visual arts teacher, 29 of which did not have a visual arts teacher the year before.

In neighborhoods that Thriving Minds had targeted for special attention, the visual arts teacher-student ratio declined to 1:127, resulting from a combination of more teachers and fewer students in school populations. This was not true for music teachers in these neighborhoods, who taught on average 51 more students. While it seems counterintuitive, this decline is a direct result of the district's efforts to ensure equity. South Dallas' elementary schools (a.k.a. learning centers) with more than one music teacher in Year 1 had their "extra" music teachers redistributed in Year 2 to campuses with no music teachers.

While the focus was on elementary schools in Year 2, there were also positive changes in middle schools:

- 26 middle school fine arts teachers were added.
- Teacher-student ratios improved from 1:151 in Year 1 to 1:136 in Year 2. In Thriving Minds neighborhoods, the ratio improved even more, from 1:185 to 1:156 from Year 1 to Year 2.

High schools saw little change in numbers of fine arts teachers.

Public Library

Overall, creative learning events increased by 27% from Year 1 to Year 2 (2,764 to 3,510). However, it is important to note that there was a 40% increase in neighborhoods where Thriving Minds has focused its work for the past two years. The following summarizes the Dallas Public Library's creative learning offerings:

- Literary arts events, which were most commonly offered, increased by 26% (1,955 in Year 1 and 2,456 in Year 2).
- Crafts (n = 235 and 279 events in Years 1 and 2), visual arts (n = 156 and 239), and music (n = 106 and 119) were also reported frequently and contributed to the relative increase in creative learning library events.
- Most library events targeted pre-school (n = 1,022 and 1,434 events in Years 1 and 2) and elementary school children (n = 620 and 809). Many events also targeted families (n = 628 and 550). Events for high school age children were the least frequent (n = 116 and 114).

It is important to note that, while there were impressive gains in the number of programs overall, increases were uneven across branches in the library system as well as in various Thriving Minds' neighborhoods. Careful attention must be given to certain branches most in need of programming.

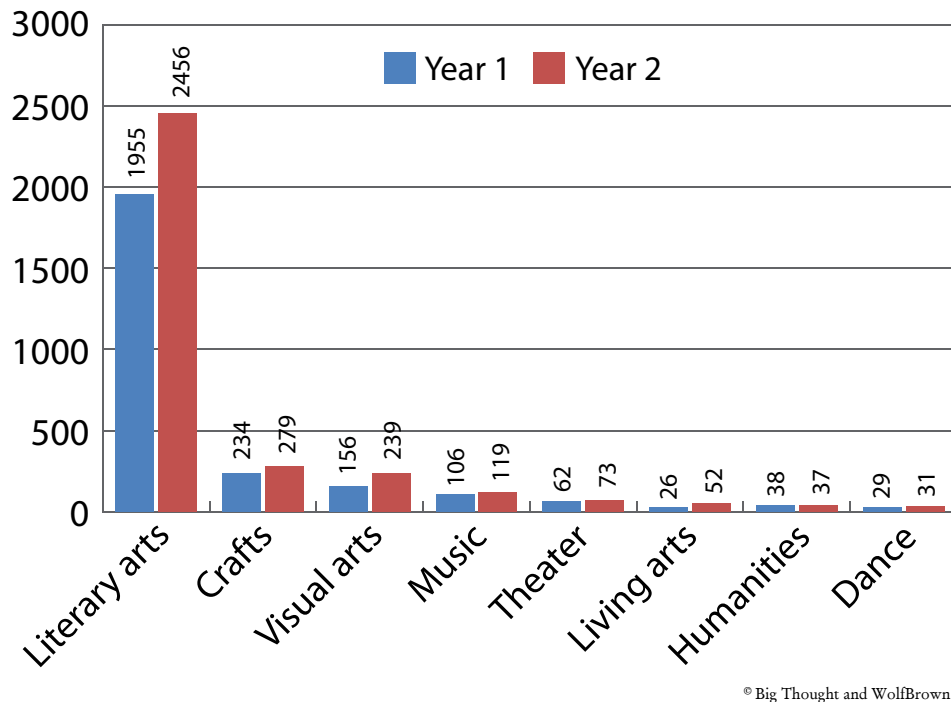


Figure 3: Number of most commonly offered Year 1 and Year 2 Dallas Public Library creative learning programs.

Park and Recreation

Of 5,059 Park and Recreation courses in Year 2, 55% were coded as creative learning programs. The number and distribution of creative learning courses varied greatly by recreation center. Sports courses were the most frequent (22% of all courses); dance (10%) and academic courses with fine arts (9%) were the next most frequent activities. The following observations can be made:

- Courses were generally inexpensive or free.
- More than 37,500 children and adults enrolled in these courses, particularly in the summer and fall.
- While enrollment was very low in a large number of courses, some courses had waiting lists for enrollment. This points to an underutilization of resources and a way for Thriving Minds to connect families with opportunities in their communities.
- The number of sports courses surged substantially in the summer months, possibly leaving fewer resources (i.e., room, staff) for creative learning courses.
- No courses offered were designed exclusively for high school age children.
- Many courses targeted children in broad age ranges, which addresses the need, raised by interviewed caregivers, for programs appropriate for multiple siblings.

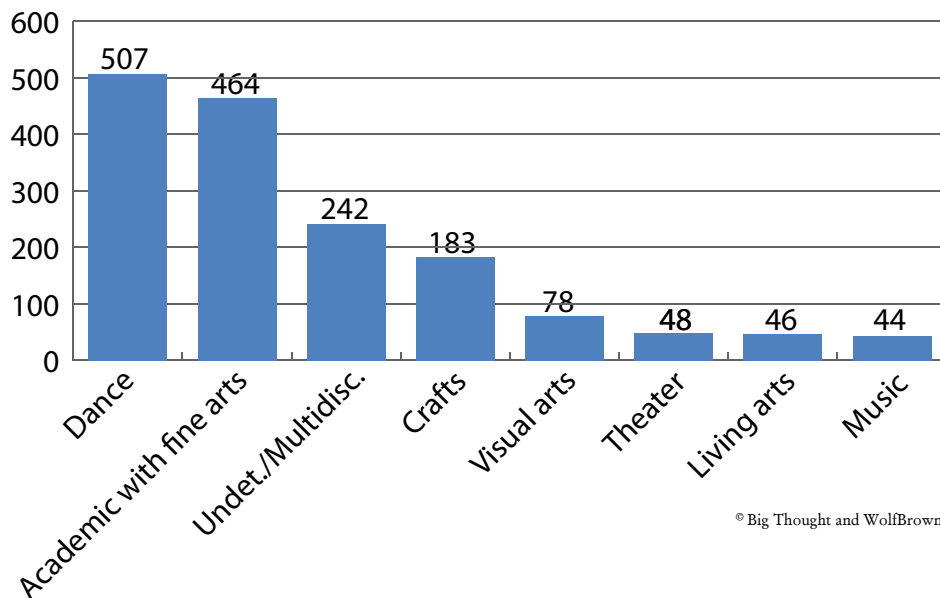
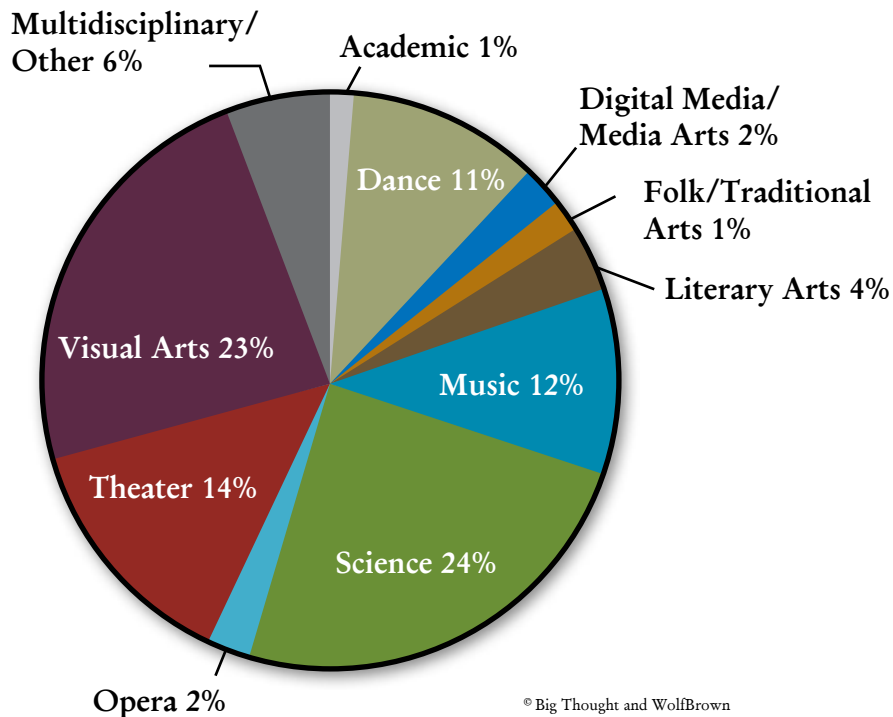


Figure 4: Number of most commonly offered Year 2 Park and Recreation creative learning programs.

Arts and Cultural Organizations

In Year 2, the main accomplishment in the sector of arts and cultural organizations was the redesign of the Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) data collection tool, a new, sustainable survey instrument that collects data on creative learning using consistent indicators (i.e., discipline, location, audience, duration and cost). This will provide comprehensive data for Year 3. For this year, OCA staff compiled data reported by funded organizations and created a database matching as much as possible the variables used in the creative learning census.

From this effort, researchers learned that, of the 4,647 programs in Year 2, 3,244 consisted of performances, presentations, workshops, etc. The remaining 1,403 were exhibits. The most frequent programs were in “nature, history and science” (n = 1,082) and visual arts (n = 1,075). Theater (n = 683), dance (n = 483) and music (instrumental and vocal; n = 569) also occurred frequently.



Note: Instrumental and vocal music programs were combined into “music.” Photography and visual arts were combined into “visual arts.”

Figure 5: Percent of programs by discipline reported to the OCA in 2007-08.

Questions Raised

The macro-trends in supply raise a number of questions for program designers:

1. In some schools, recreation centers and libraries, there is high enrollment in creative learning. Why isn't this true in other places? If the quality of instruction or the popularity of what is offered is so high, can the work that happens in these sites be replicated by others where the demand for offerings is lower?
2. Some sites (e.g., libraries in Thriving Minds' communities, Harry Stone Recreation Center) appear to be specializing in arts offerings and succeeding. What can be learned from them?
3. Cost should not be an issue for families—a majority of the offerings are free or very low cost. Yet, caregivers in focus groups cited cost as a barrier. Does this stem from misinformation or is it another issue?
4. Safety remains a paramount issue for caregivers as noted in the Citizens Survey and reported by caregivers in focus groups and interviews. In many cases, the safety issue has to do with getting young people to the sites where programs are offered, not necessarily the sites themselves. How should the issue of transporting children be addressed?
5. Current data has schools as the only provider of high school specific programming. In community programs, high school students are lumped into adult programming or programming geared for middle and often elementary school students. How can Thriving Minds bridge this gap in services?

The new Thriving Minds After School program will offer many answers to these questions as it grows and evolves. Already it has made headway in addressing caregivers' struggles with safety and transportation by bringing programming directly to students' at 20 campuses. In addition, the part-time After School Guide positions are being developed as mentor roles that can offer high school students continuing pathways in creative learning with skill-building as well as financial rewards.

Next Steps

The framework for the Dallas Creative Learning Census includes sectors other than those reported here. Private and parochial schools, churches, community-based providers and individual entrepreneurs offer opportunities to young people and their families. The ability to collect data comprehensively on all sectors will require developing linkages to individuals in those sectors who are willing to utilize existing databases to capture information that will be useful to Thriving Minds. Researchers have already created a successful model for how this can occur in its work this year with the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs. Efforts will be ongoing to extend the data collection to other sectors.

In the meantime, qualitative and anecdotal information is available from many sources that provide examples of program delivery that can be studied as models. Indeed, when seeking to answer the question, "What does success look like?" this information has great value, as can be seen in the Camp Metal Head profile provided in illustration 3 on the next page.

Finally, going forward in Year 3, supply will be reviewed based on its distribution across the city.

What Does Success Look Like?

Statistics about the supply of creative learning programs tell part of the story of Thriving Minds. But what does an actual on-the-ground successful program look like? Gather a few teenagers into a dusty, workshop—a tin roof, no walls or air-conditioning—in the middle of Texas’ sizzling-hot summer and one can find out. Tell them they will be welding pieces of metal together for the next six hours. How long would it take until a rebellion occurred? How many of these teenagers would actually want to take part in this scenario?

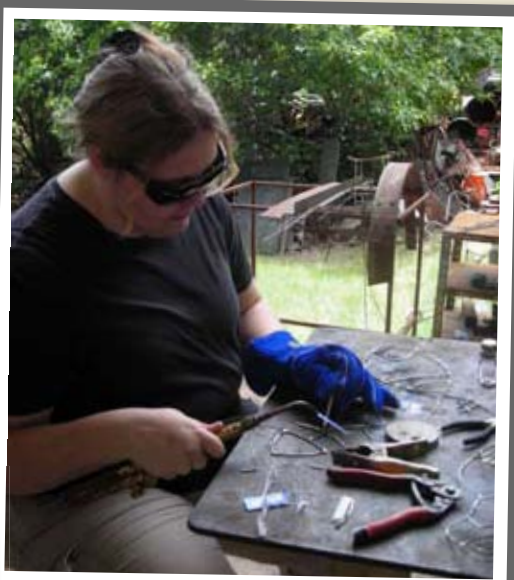
In the six weeks of Camp Metal Head, a free program in Far East Dallas, a rebellion never occurred. Eight 14- to 17-year-old young men and women actually wanted to attend. Camp Metal Head was serious business for the teenagers. The program engaged their creativity while teaching them how to weld—a professional skill the average teenager might not consider pursuing.

“Parents wanted job skills as well as engaging activities for their teens”

Thriving Minds’ community strategy is to create Neighborhood Leadership Teams (NLTs) comprised of creative learning leaders to determine what programming would best meet youth’s needs, and then support the implementation of such programs. Camp Metal Head is an example of NLT determined and realized community-responsive creative learning programming.

Nikki Young, a Thriving Minds Creative Communities Liaison, who facilitated the Far East Dallas NLT, explained that Camp Metal Head was a joint effort from the outset. “It was a learning opportunity for the Neighborhood Leadership Team—parents and caregivers; school teachers and counselors; community liaisons; librarians and library branch managers; recreation center managers and program coordinators; community-based organizations program staff; pastors and youth directors from local churches.” Applying action research

methodology, first the group discussed findings from Thriving Minds’ research and evaluation and anecdotal information gathered from parents in the community. “Parents wanted job skills as well as engaging activities for their teens,” Young elaborated. “When we mapped what services were provided where and in what disciplines, we could quickly see there was nothing for teens to do in the summer. That spurred conversations about what we could do with them.”



The Creative Arts Center of Dallas already offered adult metal sculpture courses. The idea of a welding camp for teens evolved to target children that normally would not attend the center. Participants quickly joined forces. The local Dallas Public Library branch collaborated with the arts center to recruit teens. Daniel Sellers, Camp Metal Head’s instructor, developed a comprehensive curriculum. Thriving Minds provided technical assistance and funded materials and the artist’s time. Local businesses donated food and gasoline.

The team created Camp Metal Head to involve participants in creativity and the arts; provide job skills training; and, keep teenagers away from unproductive, unsafe activities—a concern parents had often echoed in focus groups and informal discussions.

In the morning, the teens were busy learning about welding safety, techniques and applications. They created shapes and metal sculptures. The program inextricably combined the acquisition of professional welding skills with creativity and the arts.

Katy Denson, volunteer assistant to the instructor and Big Thought researcher, asked participants what they would have been doing had they not been at the camp. “Most of them said they would have been sleeping. One said he would have been playing computer games.”

During afternoon field trips, participants observed the work of welders, sculptors or scrap-metal artists. This provided interaction with real people for whom welding is a part of their professional and creative lives. In one of the projects, the teens collaborated to create a mobile, which is now on display in the community. This fostered teamwork and a sense of pride in their accomplishment.

One of the young women described Camp Metal Head as, “addictive... I never thought welding could be this much fun. I could be here all day.” Young recalls one of the teens she knew in the community before and during the program. “He was a ‘difficult’ child, disruptive... Now he’s committed to the program, taking more of a leadership role.”

According to a mother, her son “can’t wait ‘til Friday to come here. He wasn’t involved in anything before, but this is really exciting to the kids.”

Camp Metal Head paved the way for future programming. Based on the successes of its implementation, adjustments to curriculum and delivery should improve the program and extend the offering to more children and other disciplines. The NLT is considering a fused-glass workshop for teens using a similar model.

Likely developments include an advanced level of the program and employing program graduates as peer tutors to future beginners. Using this experience as a springboard, children will be coached on how to seek professional and artistic opportunities.

Perhaps the greatest measure of success came from two of the younger boys who saw new possibilities in their futures. When asked what they saw themselves doing with what they had learned, one said, “Maybe I can be a welder and do some sculptures.” The other replied promptly, “I want to do exhibits.”

Camp Metal Head offered a unique learning experience not only for these teens but also for those involved in Thriving Minds in this East Dallas neighborhood. And it should inspire artists, educators, programmers, donors and civic leaders to get involved.

Quadrants (i.e., northwest, southwest, southeast and northeast) have been established based on city and school district frames. Future census work will consider how equitably creative learning opportunities are distributed in and across these areas.

UNDERSTANDING, RESPONDING TO AND BUILDING DEMAND

Most creative learning offerings are built on educators' concepts about which activities children should do or might be interested in doing. Their choices lead to a supply of classes, programs and other activities determined by professional program designers. In order to stimulate demand, they either try to make the programs interesting and fun or simply require they be added to school curriculums. But what if program designers took a different approach? What if they responded directly to what students and parents said they wanted, filling gaps where appropriate programs did not exist?



During Year 1, the leadership of Thriving Minds requested research that would determine what arts activities children were doing and wanted to do. This information, combined with what was learned in caregiver interviews and parent focus groups, as well as information about the supply of programs already in place, is helping determine where more program development is needed.

The Study

In March 2008 research was completed that painted a detailed picture of the arts activities of a sample of more than 4,500 children enrolled in Dallas ISD schools. The research employed a lengthy questionnaire administered through Dallas ISD to a stratified random sample of 343 classrooms covering grades 1 through 12. Different versions of a questionnaire were designed for grades 1-3, 4-6 and 7-12. Of 6,000 surveys distributed, 4,694 were completed by a group that was roughly reflective of Dallas ISD's student population (63% Hispanic, 32% African American and 5% White with gender split approximately equally).

To aid in the design of the survey, six focus group discussions were conducted with parents and caregivers in the summer of 2007. These not only provided important background for designing the survey but provided additional perspective on parental attitudes about their children's activities that augment the family interview data reported earlier in this paper.

Findings

Student interest in arts activities: Virtually all students reported participating in music, dance and visual arts activities of some sort, with somewhat fewer reporting theater and drama activities. Students reported interest levels (a merging of “very important” and “somewhat important”) as follows:

- 31% in music
- 26% in visual arts and crafts
- 25% in dance
- 18% in theater and drama

While this distribution should not be construed as a recommendation for a perfect division of supply, it does serve as a general guideline for considering system-wide investments (in school, after school and community) in the future.⁸

The special case of dance: The general picture that emerges from the study, which is corroborated by results for specific activity preferences, is that dance is an under-developed avenue of artistic expression for Dallas ISD students, yet it is a pathway for engaging many more students in arts activities that also provide physical and other benefits. Indeed, parents and caregivers spoke passionately in focus groups about the often sedentary lives of their children and their need for “physical and psychological release.”

Drums, guitar and keyboard: Within the domain of music, much higher activity levels were reported for singing vs. playing an instrument, by a factor of approximately two. However, in answering an open-ended question about what activities they would like to do more often, singing and playing an instrument were given nearly equal weight. Three-quarters of elementary school students and half of middle and high school students indicated an interest in learning to play an instrument, independent of whether or not they currently did. By a wide margin, drums and guitar were cited most frequently as instruments of choice. The third most requested instrument students wanted to learn to play was keyboard or piano.

Technology: Some forms of arts activity among students are nearly universal, including listening to music on the radio or on an iPod. Of the 71 activities tested, taking photos was the third most popular activity, and downloading music was the fifth most popular. These results may suggest a major strategic rethinking about how to achieve scale of impact by repurposing universal content delivery vehicles (like iPods and DVD players) for educational purposes. This might include, for example, providing students with free access to a wider range of digital music for their iPods. It also suggests the possibility of harnessing the creative potential of the digital listening and imaging devices that are already in children’s backpacks or providing low-cost devices such as digital cameras in many different educational settings.

Informal and home-based activities: As was noted in the family interviews, student data also indicates that a great deal of creative learning happens informally and within the context of the

⁸ Calculations underlying the “hypothetical calibration to demand” figures are based on interest levels reported by students. If a student identified a category of activity as “very important,” a score of 2 was given. If a student identified a category of activity as “somewhat important,” a score of 1 was given. The scores were then added up across the four fine arts disciplines and normalized to 100%.

family. Activity levels were consistently higher for informal learning as opposed to instructional learning. With respect to settings for arts activities, the study found the home to be the dominant setting, and the only place where some children do arts activities. This suggests the importance of designing school and community-based activities that can extend to home and family. Opportunities to scale up involvement in creative learning on a broad basis may be partly tied to leveraging the home as a setting for arts activities, facilitating family-based and peer-based activities and sowing more seeds of interest in schools.

Additional Findings, Program Implications and Cautions

The Thriving Minds program designers are studying this demand data carefully, looking at gaps in supply and designing programs to fill the gaps. As a start, an increasing number of community-based dance programs have been created and an investment has been made in training and supporting dance majors from Southern Methodist University to lead after school dance programs across Dallas.

At the same time, it is important to understand that simply responding to demand is not the full solution. Understanding what is or what can drive demand is equally important. Additional findings from this study and other Thriving Minds research highlight many things influencing demand that program designers must keep in mind:

- 1. The Impact of Popular Culture:** We know from the research that students are highly influenced by popular culture, finding role models through the media. High levels of interest in dance, for example, are impacted by watching dance in music videos, which turns out to be a pervasive form of dance consumption for both girls and boys according to the data. It has also clearly fueled the worldwide phenomenon (and interest in) hip hop dance among young people. Likewise, reality television shows serve to reinforce dance participation as an acceptable and popular activity. Perhaps this is why looking across the disciplines of music, dance and theatre, even boys are more likely to cite “I dance for fun with friends or family members” as a favorite activity more often than “I sing with friends or family members.” The low level of demand in certain areas may have less to do with a lack of latent interest and more to do with a lack of good local role models and strong mentorship programs. Bolstering these could also increase demand.
- 2. Supply Influencing Demand:** Similarly, people’s interest (both students and families) is sparked by things that they know or are at least aware of and one should not expect demand in certain art forms to be prevalent if they are not widely available. Take, for example, the discipline of opera. Many Dallas ISD students are not familiar with the art form, so it would be difficult for them to express an opinion about whether or not opera is something that interests them. Yet, if one looks in the field of opera, there are many stories of opera professionals whose backgrounds are similar to those of Dallas ISD students. Their vocal training came from church choirs and they only considered opera because of a fortuitous exposure to a performance, a special mentor or seeing an opera on television.
- 3. The Need for Good Information:** In focus groups and family interviews, caregivers talked about the lack of information about available programs as a reason their children did not participate. If demand is determined by, among other things, the number of students that sign up for a program (as measured in the census data from Libraries or Park and Recreation), then

it is essential that Thriving Minds develops the necessary information vehicles that will reach target families. This effort has already begun in the neighborhoods where Thriving Minds is now active and is a priority for the program. Spanish/English newsletters mailed directly to homes as well as Internet technology—email blasts and development of the Thriving Minds portal—and talking with people and sharing materials at neighborhood events are just a few of the ways Thriving Minds is seeking to provide families with more information.

4. **Parental Desires, Concerns, and Barriers:** Already family interviews have revealed that parental attitudes and concerns have a major impact on the uptake of offerings by children. These may often have little to do with what activities children most enjoy. Safety is of such paramount concern that, unless a program is accessible with safe passage to it, many caregivers will not allow their children to participate. On the other hand, caregivers may be interested in any programs that foster physical activity (whether sports or arts), given their concerns about the need for physical and emotional release, increasing obesity and depression. Finally, many caregivers want to know that there is a continuing pathway of opportunity. Currently, many children who begin an activity (say instrumental lessons in 4th grade), find that there is no easy way to continue their interests as they grow older.
5. **Differential Demand by Age and Gender:** Classroom involvement in the arts declines precipitously between grades 4 and 7 in music, theatre/drama and visual arts/crafts. By 7th grade, overall levels of activity are roughly half what they are in 4th grade (though in the visual arts this trend is reversed somewhat between grades 7 and 12). Overall, results suggest the need for renewed efforts to reverse the trend away from arts activities, even in the elementary grades. Similarly, significant disparities exist between boys and girls for most of the activities, with boys reporting systematically lower interest levels, especially in dance. The differences were somewhat less severe with respect to certain music activities (e.g., sampling and remixing other people’s music), which many boys seem to enjoy, and some visual arts activities (e.g., “I build things with bricks, wood or clay”). While lower levels of interest in arts activities among boys may not be surprising, both the consistency and magnitude of the disparities between boys and girls are cause for serious reflection about what can be done to push back on the social norms and other barriers that keep more boys from achieving their creative potential.

IMPROVING QUALITY

Historically, research in arts education and creative learning has struggled with the attempt to measure quality in a precise and rigorous way. While there is general agreement that quality is an important hallmark of sound program design, it seems in many ways elusive, too qualitative to measure, too subjective and “in the eye of the beholder.” Perhaps one of the most profound contributions of Thriving Minds’ work to date is the design of both a framework for understanding the dimensions of quality and a series of measurement tools that allows quality to be analyzed, measured and compared from year to year. The effort to examine quality in this rigorous way has been aided by a large team of nearly 50 practitioners and researchers, including local teachers, arts organization representatives, Big Thought staff and national experts in the various fields being analyzed. It has been based on over one hundred observations followed by discussions and further refinements of the tools.

The Quality Framework

The partners in Thriving Minds have agreed to examine the evidence for improvement in quality in four areas:

- **Human Capital:** This refers to the initial qualifications and relevant continuing professional development of all members of Dallas' Creative Learning Workforce who teach or support creative learning, beginning with arts specialists, but expanding to organized, as well as unincorporated, citizens that deliver or support youth creative learning opportunities.
- **Teaching and Learning:** This includes curricula, instruction and assessment, as well as the ways in which youth respond to and extend creative learning instruction.
- **Learning Pathways:** This describes the likelihood that a child anywhere in Dallas can enter kindergarten, continue through elementary, middle and high school and continuously deepen his or her creative learning within or across disciplines. Currently, available data can map arts learning pathways through the school system. Eventually, the pathway data will also include measures of creative learning opportunities across communities aligning school data with data from libraries, recreation centers and other organizations.
- **Students' Thinking, Works and Performances:** As an assessment strategy is implemented in Year 3 of Thriving Minds, the intent is to capture the caliber of student work and thinking, as well as student knowledge of creative learning in his communities.



©2008 Big Thought (Steve Riley)

Building Human Capital

Teacher qualifications: Few things improve the quality of education as certainly as the cultivation of skilled, informed and compassionate teachers, whether they are parents (children's first teachers),⁹ classroom teachers or the mentors whom children encounter in learning situations outside of school.¹⁰ Following this line of reasoning, researchers have examined two forms of investment in human capital that are likely to build the city's ability to educate creative children:

- The qualifications of individuals who are hired to teach fine arts in Dallas ISD.
- The professional development opportunities that the district offers arts teachers to support their own continued growth.

⁹ Education Testing Service.(2008).*The Nation's Smallest School*. Educational Testing Service: Princeton, NJ.

¹⁰ Education Trust. (2001). *Good Teaching Matters: How well qualified teachers can close the gap*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.

McKinsey & Co. (2007). *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. Available online at http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf

Findings show important progress in this area of quality:

- **Arts majors:** The percentages of teachers who majored in the arts discipline that they currently teach has risen. This is true at all three levels (elementary, middle and high school) for dance, music and visual arts, and at two of three levels for theater.¹¹
- **Arts certification:** The percentages of teachers who are certified in the arts discipline that they currently teach has also risen. There are significant gains in elementary and middle school dance and high school visual arts. However, there are also declines in elementary theater and middle school visual arts.
- **Graduate degrees in the arts:** The number of teachers who have pursued graduate degrees in the arts discipline they teach remains fairly steady across years and disciplines. The most notable change is in dance, where there is an increase at all three levels.

Professional Development through a Learning Community: A key to retaining qualified teachers is creating a professional learning community where novices and experienced professionals alike can refine existing skills and expand their repertoires.¹² This is particularly critical in urban districts like Dallas, where teacher turnover is often a significant factor preventing the system from building a stable, informed and cohesive corps of professionals. One retention strategy is to offer teachers opportunities for professional growth that interest them and make them more effective (see Illustration 4 below). As part of its commitment to building a system of creative learning, Dallas ISD

11 Only in elementary theater did this percentage decline and it was because one of the district's three campuses with an elementary theater teaching position had a degreed teacher who had retired (counted in Year 1) and was replaced by a non-theater degreed teacher. Thus, the difference is explained by one incident.

12 National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). *No Dream Denied: A Plea to America's Children*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future: Washington, DC.

Building a Learning Community

In August of 2008, 30 dance instructors in the Dallas ISD took a two-day professional development seminar conducted by Michelle Gibson, a veteran dance teacher at A. Maceo Smith High School. The focus of the workshop was African dance, covering a large number of dance forms from a range of different cultures. Because the majority of the dance teachers came with traditional dance education backgrounds rooted in ballet and modern dance, the goal of the professional development was to orient the teachers to a sampling of African dances and to give them a context, discussing the occasions and ideas that gave rise to them. The seminar was also designed to suggest the best ways to introduce African dance to students in the Dallas ISD, from kindergarteners to 12th graders.

In the mornings, the group convened in a more traditional classroom setting to learn about the tribes, languages and the historical

context that gave rise to the dance forms. The instructor used short, focused lectures, followed by longer discussions in which the group asked questions, made connections to other dance forms and brainstormed ways to introduce these forms and information to their students.

“The teachers were asked to participate as learners.”

Afternoons were dedicated to learning specific dances. One of the participating teachers described these dance sessions as “very intense, very difficult.” Accompanying Gibson was Tony Browne, an expert on African drumming. In addition to accompanying the dancing, he provided insight into the rhythms used in the various dance forms. The teachers were asked to

participate as learners, to experience and learn the dances as their students would in the weeks ahead. After learning a dance, the teachers took time to write up notes and descriptions in order to document the dance and their experience of it, and then have a conversation about how to tailor the different dances to the age and ability level of their students—slowing down the drumming, dancing half-time or deleting certain steps.

The consensus among the dance teachers is consistent with the research findings from Thriving Minds. Students in the district wish to pursue dance instruction in forms outside of traditional ballet and modern dance. Consequently, the classically trained teachers need to gain experiences that give them more than a cursory knowledge of these forms. Gibson's training addressed both of these needs through a well-designed teaching and learning experience that was rigorous, deep, active and engaging.

Illustration 4: Building a Learning Community

offers a range of workshops that span basic to more advanced and specialized techniques in specific disciplines. The trends in this area are as follows:

- **Number of arts offerings:** There was a marked growth in the numbers of professional development offerings sponsored by the district for fine arts teachers. Between Year 1 and Year 2, this number increased from 13 to 29.
- **Types of offerings:** There was also a change in the nature of offerings. In Year 1 the majority of opportunities were conferences held outside the district, whereas in Year 2 the majority of offerings were courses focused on concepts and techniques central to fine arts disciplines that were conducted and presented in the district for arts specialists.

In Year 2, the data reveal a more detailed profile of participation in these offerings:

- There was identical participation across levels (elementary through secondary).
- There was more participation among theater and dance teachers than among music and visual arts teachers (16 attending out of 41 total dance teachers, 35 out of 71 for theater, 76 out of 280 for visual arts and 90 out of 377 for music). For dance and theater, more than 1 out of every 3 teachers participated, a level that is significant but that should rise even higher if the quality of instruction continues to rise.
- There was higher enrollment for basic information and technique classes, but lower enrollment for courses involving higher levels of skill. For example, 11 elementary music teachers took *Movement in the Music Classroom*, while only 5 were enrolled in *Level II Vocal Pedagogy for Children*.

Looking across these findings, one can see important trends:

- Strong gains in teacher qualifications with music and dance are leading the way. However, there is still room for improvement in theater and visual arts.
- An increase in the number of district-sponsored courses are open to fine arts teachers.

The challenge in increasing participation in district-sponsored courses is engaging more teachers to take them; particularly the courses that go beyond the basic levels. It is important to discover the obstacles and remove them. One possibility is that experienced teachers may have “outgrown” one-day offerings and are seeking in-depth professional challenges. A district partnership with the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards could help to create a corps of master teachers in the fine arts.

Dance educators’ engagement in professional development opportunities reflect the concerted work of the Dallas Dance Educator’s Association (DDEA) in partnership with Dallas ISD. DDEA has created a professional community that attracts and retains skilled teachers in the public school programs as noted in Illustration 4. The qualifications and professional development activities of these teachers are impressive and provide a model for what might happen in other less developed areas of the arts curriculum, such as theater.

Quality of Teaching and Learning

In Year 1, the Research and Evaluation Team worked with local and national panels to develop a framework (see Figure 6 on the following page) for determining the quality of teaching and learning. It was based on commonalities among a number of state as well as national arts standards and aligned with Dallas ISD's adoption of the University of Pittsburgh's Principles of Learning.^{13,14} The first three dimensions can be thought of as elements necessary to support learning, while the last three are elements necessary for rigorous and creative learning:



- Climate that Supports Learning
- Engagement and Investment in Learning
- Classroom Dialogue and Sharing
- Skills, Techniques and Knowledge of the Discipline
- Creative Choices
- Expectations, Assessment and Recognition

A six point rating scale was used to score observations of arts learning and is summarized below:

NA = Not applicable to this episode or type of instruction.

0 = Not observed in this segment.

1 = Instructor and students worked together at a less than basic level.

2 = Instructor and students worked together at a basic level.

3 = Instructor and students worked together at a proficient level.

4 = Instructor and students worked together at an advanced level.

Trends: Across three observation periods (fall, spring and summer) and across all disciplines, there are persistent trends:

- The dimensions on which quality ratings were highest were “Climate that Supports Learning” and “Engagement and Investment in Learning” followed by “Skills, Techniques and the Knowledge of Discipline.”

¹³ National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts; the California, New York City, Washington (state), Virginia and Vermont standards in the arts; along with arts standards from a number of other nations, notably the Netherlands and Great Britain.

¹⁴ A set of widely respected principles developed by the Learning, Research and Development Corporation at the University of Pittsburgh.

SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING			RIGOROUS AND CREATIVE LEARNING		
<p>Climate that Supports Learning</p> <p>Classroom climate in which educator supports learning through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the classroom in a way that is consistent with focused and productive work in the discipline • Using physical space conducive to learning in the discipline • Using clear rituals and routines matched to the discipline (e.g., warm-ups, focusing exercises, strategies for taking care of tools) • Creating a climate of mutual respect between the instructor and the students 	<p>Engagement and Investment in Learning</p> <p>Educator and students build a community of learners by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and responding to clear expectations • Presenting and engaging in tasks/projects that are relevant to students and adapted to different learning styles • Providing students with clear entry points to demanding assignments • Helping students to synthesize complex processes; work on sustained projects • Motivating work to reach high standards • Inspiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hard work ○ Trying new things ○ Risk-taking 	<p>Classroom Dialogue and Sharing</p> <p>Educator and students work together to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that students' contributions and discussions form an integral part of the class • Clarify and develop powerful ideas and big questions in the discipline • Learn key vocabulary and concepts in order to better understand how to communicate about and through the discipline • Construct explanations based on evidence and examples • Share, critique and discuss ideas, works and performances with the goal of improving and extending work <p>Note: All evidence in this dimension must be verbalized.</p>	<p>Skills, Techniques and Knowledge of the Discipline</p> <p>Educator and students develop skills, techniques and knowledge by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling or demonstrating skills and techniques to build mastery and expressive power for making meaning • Focusing on powerful ideas and concepts in the discipline • Applying and extending familiar practices and approaches in ways that solve problems and generate original possibilities • Actively exploring historical and contemporary as well as cross-cultural works in a discipline to broaden or deepen the choices students can make 	<p>Creative Choices</p> <p>Educator and students collaborate on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using their imaginations and expressing themselves and their unique interests and experiences • Making creative choices that are warranted and that inform the product or performance • Anchoring choices in focused inquiry and exploration of the materials, the genre and the discipline • Creating distinct and original works or generating new interpretations that develop or extend existing works 	<p>Expectations, Assessment and Recognition</p> <p>Educator works with students to think about issues of quality by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering useful and timely feedback • Using rubrics that students contribute to and understand for discussing and assessing student work • Teaching students to assess their own work and activity and/or providing students with opportunities to self-assess • Facilitating respectful response and reflection among students that opens up new approaches or ideas for next steps or new works • Providing students with opportunities to revise or revisit work in light of evaluations • Supporting students in settings where their work will be evaluated using high, external standards

Note: Bullets in each column illustrate examples of “evidence” for that dimension that one might observe. Bullets are not meant as a checklist; it is doubtful that so many types of evidence would be seen in one 45-minute session. Nor should one imply that a variety of evidence is better than one illustration that is explored in a deep, rich way.

Figure 6: Quality dimensions for teaching and learning

- The areas in which quality was lowest were “Classroom Dialogue and Sharing” and “Creative Choices.”

At the broadest level, this pattern suggests that instruction focuses on a didactic approach to the basics and foundation skills but that it lacks attention to higher order skills, give and take, and consideration of alternative interpretations or classroom-wide critical analysis and feedback.

When looked at by type of program:

- After school programs trailed in school programs in the quality of teaching and learning.
- School-based summer arts programs were of lower quality than programs provided by community organizations.
- High-quality, community-based summer programs occurred most frequently in tuition-bearing courses and camps, which clearly raises issues of equity.

Quality of Pathways

A final dimension of quality measures Thriving Minds efforts to construct and maintain continuous courses, or pathways, in creative learning for all Dallas children. In many urban districts children may experience the arts in a “smorgasbord” or “hit-and-miss” way. A child may enter a middle school that has a remarkable band, but be unable to join because she has no general music training. A 4th grader may have his interest in drawing ignited through a trip to the Dallas Museum of Art, or a powerful residency with a visual artist, only to have that interest dwindle due to lack of support or follow-up.

However, a city with excellent pathways can leverage in school, out of school, and community-based learning, along with home supports, into continuous opportunities to learn in and through the arts. For example, consider a child who has an interest in joining band. Her elementary school may not have a general music program, but in her after school program, a community artist might provide beginning lessons. In the summer, the recreation center close to her home might provide additional opportunities. Now the child has a pathway through after school and community programs that meet her desire to learn enough about music to be a candidate for band in middle school.

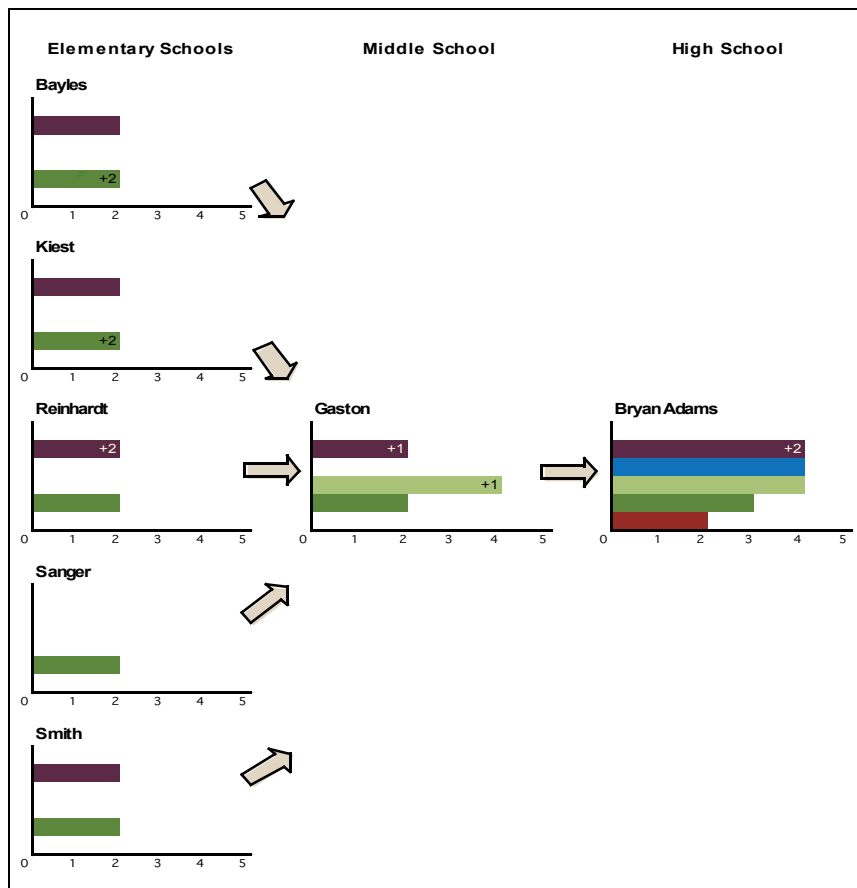
In a two-year comparison of creative learning pathways in five Dallas neighborhoods, there is strong evidence of growth of a few well-developed pathways where students can begin their engagement in the arts in elementary school and follow it through high school. This represents good news for Thriving Minds. However, there is still much work to be done. On the next page, Figure 7 illustrates the progress as well as the on-going gaps in one particular neighborhood.

Rated on a scale of 0 to 5, the pathway data of a school feeder pattern is highly descriptive of both the advances and the remaining challenges of arts learning in Dallas. There has been major movement toward an important and equitable foundation for children throughout the city. For general music and visual arts there are many possibilities or feeder patterns for continuous K-12 arts learning, at least at the basic level.¹⁵

¹⁵ Basic Level = Limited range of courses available, no sequential course pathways.

However, Dallas ISD currently supports only a few well-developed pathways where students can begin their engagement in the arts in elementary school and follow it through high school (e.g., in the Pleasant Grove neighborhood, there is only a continuous pathway in vocal music). In other neighborhoods, there is no such pathway. Thus, the majority of students in these neighborhoods are faced with arts learning pathways that are either narrow (i.e., 0 or 1 arts discipline in elementary school) or broken (i.e., no continuous options for learning visual arts). Even where pathways exist, the choices within them are typically very limited.

The findings indicate where the district and its partners have to work toward achieving equity of pathways. This will, undoubtedly, entail addressing challenging arts education policy questions. In an urban district, with limited resources, it simply may not be possible to provide continuous pathways in all four arts disciplines. Given a highly mobile student population, it seems the only way to achieve arts education equity is to guarantee that each neighborhood, through a collaboration of Thriving Minds’ partners, offers continuous paths for creative learning in all four disciplines.



Note: Numerals in bars indicate change from 2006-07 to 2007-08.

Ratings:

- 0 = No courses available
- 1 = Limited range of courses available, no sequential course pathways
- 2 = Adequate range of courses available, limited sequential course pathways
- 3 = Above Average range of courses available, most with sequential course pathways
- 4 = Excellent range of courses available, sequential pathways available
- 5 = Superior range of courses available, sequential pathways available

Key:

- = Visual Art
- = Theater
- = Instrumental Music
- = Vocal Music
- = Dance

© Big Thought and WolfBrown

Figure 7: Example of pathway data of a school feeder pattern

NEXT STEPS

This report has summarized the second year of a longitudinal (multi-year) study of the impact of Thriving Minds, one of the largest creative learning efforts in recent history in the United States. Detailed study reports are available as appendix material for the four keys to success: creative capital, supply, demand and quality. These provide much more detailed findings plus discussions of hypotheses, methodologies and case history material.

The third year of the research and evaluation effort will revisit each of the keys to success in order to measure change and in some cases to add additional dimensions to the effort:

- To further understand family and youth creative capital, quarterly interviews will continue. Also in year 3, the Creative Capital Survey (CCS) will provide statistical amplification and clarification of findings from the family interviews and focus groups about creative capital. The CCS was conceived as another longitudinal effort to occur every other year. The first cycle of baseline data collection took place in October 2008. At the time of this report, the data collection work has been completed and the analysis of its findings is underway. Results will be available in the first quarter of 2009.
- Research on supply will, for the first time, access new comprehensive data on arts and cultural organizations available from the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs as a result of a recently launched, new data collection instrument developed in collaboration with Big Thought researchers. It will also begin to explore additional provider sectors that go beyond public schools, Park and Recreation and Libraries, thus widening the data pool of providers and programs. Where multi-year data is available, progress on increasing supply will be assessed.
- In the area of demand, a second student activity survey will be launched, with the intent of gathering data that will assess the changes in demand.
- With respect to quality, literary arts will be added to the disciplines being considered. In addition, the fourth dimension of quality—student work—will become a focus area of examination. Thriving Minds also will begin to measure qualifications and opportunities for professional growth for the Creative Learning Workforce that includes, but extends far beyond, currently assessed Dallas ISD fine arts teachers. This will include a survey of incorporated and unincorporated professionals and citizens engaged in teaching or supporting creative learning and will track aspects of their continuing learning and activity as creative adults (e.g., the classes or workshops they take, their creative activities in the Dallas community, etc.).

CONCLUSION: INVENTING A CREATIVE FUTURE

In concluding this paper, we return to the challenge of re-inventing and re-imagining a better world with which this report opened.

Big Thought took up the challenge of building a creative learning system and ensuring a better system for Dallas children at a time when the local, state and national economies were relatively healthy and when it appeared that there were ample resources to build a system of creative learning opportunities.

Today, the initiative is moving forward at a time when the overall economy (local, state and federal) is under stress—a perfect storm of declining public revenue, reduced private philanthropy and a stock market that has taken hundreds of millions of dollars out of the endowments of many important cultural providers. Across the nation, neighborhood libraries are reducing hours, parks and recreation centers are cutting staff and cultural institutions are examining how they can afford programs for children and families. These same challenges and others that are Dallas specific, confront the Thriving Minds partners.



Under such pressures, it might be tempting to think about a simple, direct fix—slowing down, cutting back and being more modest. But the research and evaluation reviewed here suggests the opposite approach. Major progress has been made toward building a system of creative learning. A visitor can travel the city and see a bilingual family story-hour in a neighborhood library, an after school program where middle school students are learning ballroom dancing, or a high school project where students are discovering the art of filmmaking in order to document both the cultural riches and the needs of their communities.

At the same time, the research is clear: There are investments that can be made to strengthen this growing system:

- If families are going to be the first laboratories and studios, they need differentiated forms of support, information and programs that address their specific needs and concerns.
- The supply of creative learning opportunities needs to be coordinated and equalized across the city.
- Creative learning opportunities have to be developed to meet the current demands of young people and families—and to build their appetites for further learning.
- The quality of creative learning experiences in and out of school can become more engaging and challenging.

What the research suggests is that it is time to roll up our sleeves and build the best possible system of creative learning opportunities. The question is how to use existing resources well, identify powerful synergies and deepen the learning that has started—for both children and adults.

In the end, creativity and imagination will turn out to be part of the solution to the challenges we face: the “literacy” of our time and a modern civil rights struggle in this 21st century.