Inside the State of the Arts of Chicago Public Schools

by Will Flanagan - General Manager at Chicago Inno 07/10/14 @1:52pm in Tech

This week, a Chicago-based arts advocacy group released the most comprehensive data set to ever address arts education in a major urban school district.

In its report, Ingenuity details the level of arts instruction, staffing, partnerships, and funding in Chicago Public Schools. The data was collected to measure the success (or lack thereof) and progress of the CPS’ first-ever Arts Education Plan, which went into action in November 2012. You can read the full report - all 46 pages - here. (Full of info-graphs and charts, the report is more accessible than you’d expect; Ingenuity has done an excellent job of packaging the data).

“This report sets the baseline by which the District, schools, community arts organizations, parents and others can track progress going forward, and represents the next step in ensuring an arts education for every CPS student,” said Paul Sznewajs, Ingenuity Executive Director, in a release.

The report reveals that CPS schools “compare favorably” to other urban schools when it comes to the arts; 94% of the 577 schools have at least one full or part-time credentialed arts instructor. And over half of the schools (56%) meet the recommended arts instructor-to-student ratio of 1:350 or less.

But there are still several art-related areas the CPS schools need to improve in. The Arts Education Plan called for a weekly instruction requirement of 120 minutes per elementary grade student and less than 25% of the schools are meeting that requirement. (And nearly 42% are providing only 90 minutes or less).

So now that the schools and the city have this data, what can they do with it?
For one, community arts partners can now align programming to CPS student needs more efficiently. Philanthropists and charitable initiatives can also target underserved schools and departments accurately, allowing more programs to reach that 120 minute requirement. Finally, with a universal measurement tool, schools can easily spot peers that are excelling and duplicate their success. For example, in sports, you chase the teams with the most wins. In education, you need to know who is “winning” before you can try and compete.

Though the data set is a landmark achievement, more can be done. Many schools provided insufficient data and the CPS needs to reinforce the value of data collection. Schools will not be able to grow their programs if they’re not aware of what actually exists. In the Fall, Ingenuity will release a report card which “will track progress toward student access to the arts.”

In several months, we’ll see how much data did for the arts.