CPS has arts lessons in most schools, but access unequal: report
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The Chicago Public Schools has an arts teacher in almost all of its schools but still doesn’t provide equal access to all students, according to report by a school arts advocacy organization.

Ingenuity identified a part-time or full-time arts teacher in about 94 percent of CPS-run schools during the 2012-13 school year. The lion’s share of quality arts education is on the city’s North and Northwest sides.

“Looking at all this data collectively, the thing that becomes self-evident: There is more in the system than we initially thought, but the distribution of the resources is uneven, and there are gaps,” said Paul Sznewajs, executive director of Ingenuity Inc., which is publishing a report Wednesday that will show where the district stood before adopting its arts education plan in November 2012.

“It was striking that a lot of the provision of arts services in our city are drawn across socioeconomic lines,” he said.

CPS started a Creative Schools Certification process for the 2013-14 school year, and it laid out goals such as giving 120 minutes per week of arts education to every CPS student and maintaining an arts teacher for every 350 students.

“There are almost enough teachers in the system to fulfill that goal, but the challenge is those teachers are not distributed equitably among schools,” Sznewajs said. “There needs to be an examination about how the staffing could be distributed equitably across the system.”

About 56 percent of the 577 schools run by CPS have an arts teacher for every 350 students, but less than a quarter of district-run schools provided the recommended 120 minutes a week of arts education for every student, he said. And on average, schools with an arts teacher had more community partner programs than schools without one, he said.

Ingenuity didn’t include charter schools because not enough charters responded to its requests for information. It plans to include charters in a report to be published this fall on the 2013-14 school year, Sznewajs said.

The 2012-13 baseline year studied was also the first full year of Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s longer school day, when the district gave extra money to schools to hire 477 enrichment teachers in art, music, foreign language and physical education, said John Perryman, an elementary music teacher who
heads the Chicago Teachers Union’s arts committee. At the end of that year, about 150 music and visual arts teachers lost their jobs when the district changed how it funds school budgets, according to the CTU.

“The bigger issue is we need steady and consistent funding for our positions — it needs to come out of the general fund,” Perryman said.

CPS is going to use $10.5 million in tax-increment financing district money to help schools hire 84 arts teachers, paying 75 percent of the teacher cost in the 2014-15 school year and 50 percent in 2015-16.

“So what’s going to happen in two or three years then?” Perryman said. “Why would an arts teacher want to work in Chicago if their funding isn’t consistent?”

CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett called the Ingenuity report a “snapshot in time.” She said the district now has, for the first time, a district-level plan to integrate arts into the curriculum, including the appointment of arts liaisons at nearly 600 schools so far.

A Creative Schools Fund, including $1 million left over from the NATO summit, helps schools pay for arts supplies and materials, she said. And the 84 teachers hired with TIF money will go mostly to schools on the South and West sides, where they’re needed most, she said, though the district would not provide the full list Wednesday.

“We’re working . . . to make sure the arts education plan doesn’t exist in a vacuum,” she said. “The Ingenuity plan is really a snapshot in time that really helps us to understand how we need to move forward to meet the needs of our students despite dwindling funds.”

Mario Rossero, director of arts education for CPS, would not commit to a guarantee that every CPS school would have an arts teacher in the 2014-15 school year, saying only, “I am hopeful we have definitely increased our coverage.”

Urban Gateways Center for Arts Education is one of 10 nonprofit groups that furnished nearly a third of all arts programs offered at CPS schools. The groups served 89 CPS schools in the 2012-13 school year with assemblies, artists in residence or after-school programs, according to Carrie Rosales, manager of measurement and documentation for Urban Gateways.

“I would love for CPS to have a dedicated arts person on staff, who can be the champion for the arts and be able to coordinate where they’re unable to support arts programming within the school with the designated arts instructor. That person knows who to contract to come in and fill the space or supplement what they’re doing,” she said.

Rosales added: “We are filling a bit of a void. A lot of schools they just cut the funding for arts teachers, and we have to come in and be the answer for that. It’s really critical work.”