

Building Community Support The Public Arena—Mission and Image for the Elementary Art Educator

by

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As art educators, we should be committed to doing all we can to assure the best possible education for all students. Toward that end we must become involved in building community support for our programs. Art education extends beyond the classroom; community involvement is an important and enriching component. Elementary art teachers must be aware that schools exist in a political arena, competing for support and scarce funding.

Times have changed making maintaining support for elementary art programs even more difficult. Increasing public awareness can bring recognition, rewards and can impact an art program in ways that are permanent as well as positive.

Elementary art educators can't ignore the public relations aspect of their work. The following points will help you develop a mission and image that reflects an accurate depiction of your art program.

The various community stakeholders that an art teacher should address include: the Board of Education; Parents; Senior Citizens; Town Councils and other Public Officials; Local Businesses; Social and Civic Organizations, and, every other Community Resident.

Where to begin?

- Set goals and objectives.
- Plan a time line.
- Hold a small informal meeting with other elementary schools in the district to develop an action plan and the commitment to carry it out.
- Get in touch with key community groups personally.
- Evaluate your progress as you go along.
- Plan a provision for internal and external communication (via school newsletters, bulletins, faculty meetings, art exhibitions, press releases, electronic message boards, public television and public access channels).

Community involvement will not just happen. Once conceived, an art plan must be put into action. The following is a list of suggestions for getting the community involved:

- A brochure about your program (it's goals, purposes, rationale and how it achieves the National Arts Standards).
- Children's art auction to raise public awareness about funding.
- Exhibitions complete with an annotated guide that will help your public understand works of art created by young artists. Purposes, practices and standards for the elementary art program can also be conveyed through this forum.
- Orientation display boards with statements that reflect national standards (what a student has learned) should accompany individual works of art.
- Video exhibition openings for your local public access channel.
- Solicit art work and artifacts from community members for exhibitions within the school. Guest exhibitors and artists can be invited to talk about their work to students.
- Celebration of the arts festival—publicize the program through flyers, press releases, radio, public access channels, billboards, street banners, bumper stickers, church bulletins and post cards.
- Municipal displays in such places as:
 - libraries,
 - outside the mayor's office,
 - town halls,
 - malls and business fronts,
 - hospitals, and
 - senior citizen centers.
- Talks and presentations to parent groups and civic organizations (Rotary, Lions Club, Junior League).
- Teacher resource consulting in the community for the historical society, arts council, parents of the gifted and talented, PTA/PTO, and other civic groups.
- After school enrichment programs, studio time and instruction for students, parents and community members.
- Student-designed business ad competitions for the local newspaper.
- Elders and youngsters creating art together, bridging the gap; seniors volunteering in the art room and children teaching seniors (e.g., computer graphics and crafts).
- Collaboration with community organizations:
 - art walk and talk through the community—a look at local architecture and history,
 - museum/school partnerships, and
 - business partners in art education.
- Museum in the school.
- Resource center for the community: lending out student artwork to local businesses, slide talks, and presentations.

With the changes occurring in our society at large as we approach the 21st Century, it will be more important than ever to ensure collaborative planning between school and the community. As educators, we must do our part to strengthen linkages with parents, the community and other agencies because they are critical partners in a child's educational progress. Professionals must recognize that partnerships with parents, the community and outside agencies are complex relationships that are built on communication, nurturing, and reciprocity.