



metis associates
partners for meaningful change

Connected Arts Network (CAN)

**Leveraging Arts Learning Communities for
Teacher Leadership and Student Achievement**

Summary of Findings

SUBMITTED TO

National Art Education Association

SUBMITTED BY

Metis Associates

Background & Context

What is CAN?

The Connected Arts Network (CAN) was a multi-year grant initiative to create nationwide virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with educators in visual arts, music, theater, dance, and media arts. Based on New York City Public Schools' (NYCPS') successful arts education professional learning model, CAN employed a train-the-trainer approach in which experienced arts teacher leaders facilitated monthly PLCs for their peer art teachers. Teacher leaders received intensive professional development in PLC facilitation practices and in strategies for integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) principles into standards-based arts instruction, which they then translated into meaningful learning experiences for teacher participants in their PLCs.

Who Was Involved?

176

Teacher Leaders

813

Teacher Participants

48

States

55

PLC Groups

Key Partners:

National Art Education Association (NAEA), Educational Theatre Association (EdTA), National Association for Music Education (NAfME), National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), Metis Associates

Implementation Timeline

- 2021-22** NYCPS pilot, resource development
- 2022-23** PLCs launched nationally with teacher leaders
- 2023-24** Teacher participants onboarded nationally
- 2024-25** Full implementation, dissemination

CAN Origins

Since 2005, NYCPS has received four federal grants to build professional learning communities for arts teachers. This proven model emphasizes formative assessment, peer collaboration, and teacher leadership—providing the foundation for CAN's national expansion and enabling this distributed leadership model to reach hundreds of arts educators nationwide.

Project Goals

- 1 Support arts teacher skill development in ED&I and SEL
- 2 Support arts teacher leadership development
- 3 Develop & disseminate arts education resources
- 4 Create a model for effective partnerships

Evaluation Methodology

CAN Teacher Leader Survey (pre/post)

CAN Participant Survey (post)

CAN Rubric for Task Design & Teacher Reflection (post)

CAN SEL Student Survey (pre/post)

Teacher Leader Focus Groups

Outcomes for Teacher Leaders

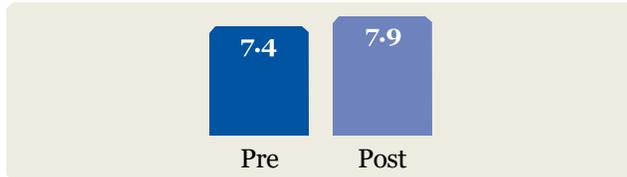
Statistically Significant Growth in ED&I, SEL, and Leadership Skills

Growth in Self-Efficacy and Use of ED&I and SEL Practices*

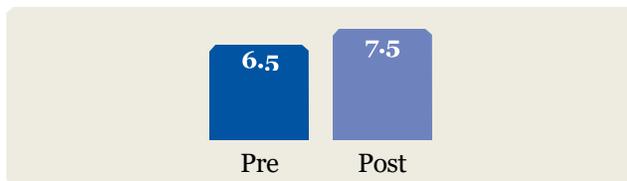
Scale: 0 (Lowest) to 9 (Highest)

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Self-Efficacy

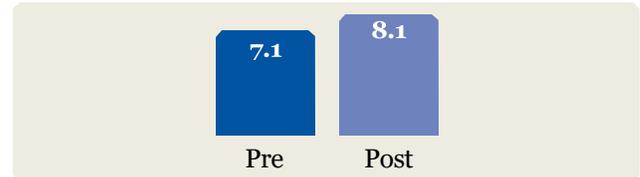


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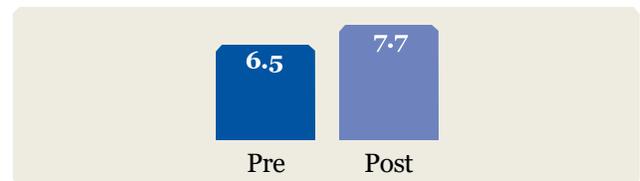


Social-Emotional Learning

Self-Efficacy

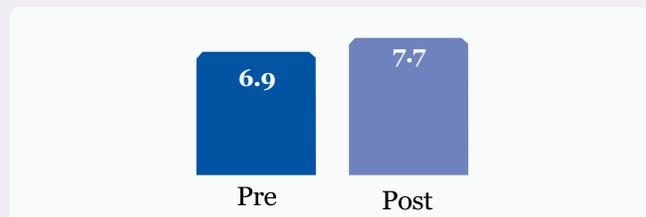


Use



*Statistically significant ($p < .05$). Source: CAN Teacher Leader Survey, $N=132$

Teacher Leaders' Ratings of Their Own Facilitation Skills Growth*



*Statistically significant ($p < .05$). Scale: 0 (Lowest) to 9 (Highest)

Participants' Ratings of Their Teacher Leader's Facilitation Skills

9.0
Average
(0-10 scale)

PLC participants highly rated their teacher leaders' facilitation skills in areas including setting the stage, encouraging depth, checking in, and debriefing and reflecting.

Source: Spring 2025 Participant Survey, $N=315$

Key Finding: On average, CAN teacher leaders self-reported significant improvements in perceived self-efficacy for implementing culturally responsive instruction and SEL practices, in the use of ED&I and SEL principles in their arts-based instruction, and in their perceived effectiveness as a PLC facilitator (based on pre/post CAN Teacher Leader Survey results). PLC participants also highly rated their teacher leaders' facilitation skills.

"I'm working in two new positions this year, as a result of the work and the professional fellowship that we have in this group... I know for a fact I would not be in the places where I am professionally [without CAN]. And I really am so grateful for that."

— **Teacher Leader, Dance**

"We [teacher leaders] have been together for a very long time... Just to see the sense of community that has now been established... everyone feels comfortable being themselves, that they can express themselves, and that we can lean on each other, even outside the PLC."

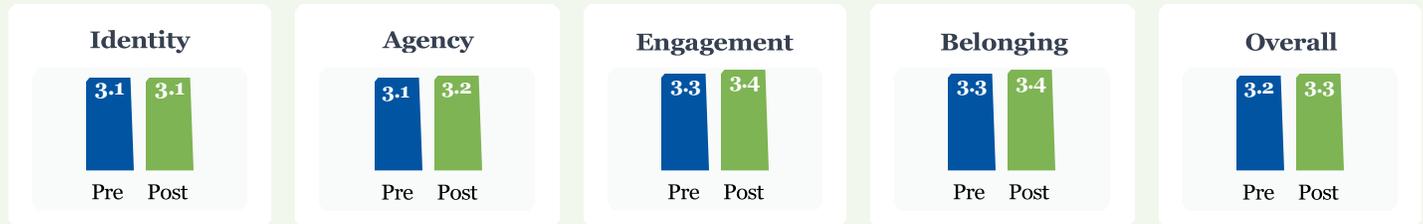
— **Teacher Leader, Music**

Outcomes for Students

Growth in SEL Skills and ED&I Capacities

Social-Emotional Learning Growth

Scale: 0 (Lowest) to 4 (Highest)



Source: 2024-25 CAN Student Survey, N=220

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Skills



Source: Spring 2025 CAN Rubric for Task Design & Teacher Reflection, N=220

Key Finding: On average, students of CAN teacher leaders self-reported improvements in SEL competencies overall, and in the domains of Engagement and Belonging in particular, as measured through pre/post surveys. Further, many of the student works assessed by CAN teacher leaders demonstrated an expression of an authentic or personal connection to their own and/or others' identities, cultures, and beliefs (60%), understanding of their peers' artworks and processes (51%) and/or demonstrated understanding of the societal, historical, and cultural context of artworks (43%).

"There was one student...when he saw some of the other students giving their final presentations and realized how some of them had really put a lot of effort into the work that they had created, he reflected and he came back to me and he was like, wow, I really should have taken this more seriously. I really should have brought more of my gifts and talents to this work."

— Teacher Leader, Theater

"I have a 97% retention rate this year of students who are re-enrolling in music classes in 5-12th grade (up from an average of around 70%) because of my increased focus on creating community and improving student belonging!"

— Teacher Participant, Music

"I did start having one-on-one interviews with my students and getting to know them more deeply and understanding what their communication, their language is... it opened up a whole new form of communication and an understanding of how I talk to my students and how we relate to each other."

— Teacher Leader, Visual Arts

Outcomes for Teacher Participants

Impact of PLC Participation on Arts Educators

Teacher Participant Learning and Growth

96%

I was able to use information I learned in my PLC in my teaching practice.

94%

I learned ways to integrate SEL into my practice.

93%

I am a better teacher because of my involvement in my PLC.

93%

I learned ways to integrate culturally responsive teaching practices.

90%

My students benefit socially & emotionally because of my involvement in my PLC.

% Agreed + Strongly Agreed. Source: Spring 2025 Participant Survey, N=315

Key Learning Areas Reported by Participants

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration

Participants learned ways to authentically integrate SEL into their arts instruction

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) Practices

Participants learned culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices

Based on 2025 CAN Participant Survey responses to items about areas of professional growth through PLC participation.

“Better insight to my place among a national community of theatre educators may be the biggest personal and professional gift that this PLC has provided. For my students, this PLC has created a space for their teacher to be nourished cognitively, to be challenged and supported through the challenges, and to be validated, which led to more confident, committed, successful teaching practices and tangible outcomes for them.”

– Teacher Participant, Theater

“Taking the time to focus on one aspect of my classroom environment (belonging) and doing the work to follow through with its development. As a result of this participation, I realized how much of an impact it makes when you focus on students time to share their voice and talents with one another fosters a tremendous amount of trust and a sense of belonging in the classroom.”

– Teacher Participant, Visual Arts

“This by far has been the most positive thing I have done for myself as a teacher! The confidence and courage to try techniques and strategies in my teaching is unparalleled compared to any workshop, meeting or district PLC I have ever attended in my entire career.”

– Teacher Participant, Music

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

Key Insights from Four Years of Implementation

✓ Key Successes



National Scale Success

Successfully expanded proven NYC model to 48 states with 813 teacher participants.



Strong Partnerships

Effective collaboration among NAEA, EdTA, NafME, NDEO, and NYCPS.



Multi-Level Teams

Cross-team communication and coordination kept all components aligned.

Challenges Encountered

Leadership Changes

Transitions in project and organizational leadership required adaptation and relationship rebuilding

Sustainability

Ensuring long-term viability beyond federal funding remains an ongoing priority

Cross-Team Communication

Maintaining alignment across multiple organizations and contexts required intentional coordination

Future Directions

Continued Dissemination

94 conference presentations and ongoing resource sharing through national associations

Scaling Beyond Federal Funding

Exploring sustainable models for PLC continuation and expansion

Partnership Guidebook

Documenting best practices and lessons learned for replication in other contexts

CAN by the Numbers

176

Teacher Leaders

813

Teacher Participants

48

States

320

Teacher Leader PLC Meetings

1.2M+

Students Reached (est.)

94

Conference Presentations

CAN successfully demonstrated that arts educators have tremendous potential for leadership and that professional learning communities provide fertile ground for transforming pedagogy. The initiative's focus on ED&I and SEL integration positions arts education as essential for engaging students in the 21st century. While federal funding has concluded, the partnerships, resources, and community of practice established through CAN provide a strong foundation for continued growth and impact.