What practical approaches can principals and teacher leaders use to successfully integrate the arts into their elementary schools? The recommendations in this article are the result of interviews with 32 national arts education leaders, each with 20 years of experience in arts education, including principals, superintendents, researchers, teaching artists, leaders in performing arts centers, education associations, advocacy coalitions, and funding agencies.

Common themes that emerged from these conversations focused on sustaining arts education in schools, integrating the arts into systemic change, helping teachers (arts educators, classroom teachers, and teaching artists) become agents of change, and identifying what the arts education community can do better as a field to further arts in schools.

Reflecting on the themes, concerns, and action strategies identified in these interviews, the following recommendations guide principals and teacher leaders to increase support for high-quality arts education programs.

1. **Create a school culture and environment of support that values the arts, sets goals for building arts programs, and monitors progress.** Consider appointing an arts leadership committee that includes individuals from within the school as well as from the community, including parents and community cultural leaders.

2. **Ensure access to resources for building quality arts education programs; do not accept the premise that the arts will be the first cut from the curriculum or budget.** The value of school district leaders who support the arts is unquestionable. It is often the belief in the arts among individual school leaders that ensures programs are not only able to survive, but to grow.

*Thomas Street Elementary, Tupelo, Mississippi*
over time. While some schools have reduced access to the arts, many schools and districts have expanded arts programs and have included the arts in school turnaround strategies.

3. **Provide shared professional development experiences for classroom teachers, arts educators, and teaching artists.** Support integrating the arts into the identity and culture of the school through standards-based art integration within the curriculum and authentic arts assessment, ongoing collaboration, and a shared vision and investment in the school arts program. Consider the arts educators as the school’s chief creative officers, encouraging them to identify ways to infuse their work throughout the school.

4. **Connect the arts to overall educational goals by embedding arts learning throughout the curriculum.** Include art integration with STEM/STEAM initiatives and other schoolwide efforts to support creativity and innovation among teachers and students.

5. **Develop content-rich partnerships with community cultural organizations.** Expand resources and build communitywide understanding of, and support for, school arts programs.

The leadership of principals and teacher leaders in supporting the arts in teaching and learning is extensive. In their book *Creative Leadership, Skills That Drive Change*, Gerald J. Puccio, Mary C. Murdock, and Marie Mance explore research on the relationship between leadership and creativity. Along with Peter G. Northouse, they cite four basic components of leadership: it’s a process, involves influence, occurs within a group context, and involves goal attainment. “Transformational leaders focus on developing others to their fullest potential. Their goal is to change and transform others in a positive way,” they write.

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