

ARTS EDUCATION

Kennedy Center picks Madison for arts education push



JULY 19, 2013 11:45 AM • [GAYLE WORLAND](#) |
[WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL](#) |
GWORLAND@MADISON.COM | 608-252-6188

All young children in Madison public schools will have greater access to the arts under a program being launched in the city this fall by the Kennedy Center.

The Washington, D.C.-based Kennedy Center — best known as a national showcase and landmark hub of the arts — has selected Madison as the 12th U.S. city for its “Any Given Child” program. The

initiative is designed to create a long-range arts education plan to reach every public school student in grades K-8.

“The (Madison) district has specific goals about closing the achievement gap, and we know that the arts can help achieve that,” said Ray Gargano, director of programming and community engagement for the Overture Center for the Arts, which is coordinating the local side of Any Given Child.

In the first year of the multi-year program, two representatives from the Kennedy Center will assist a committee of about 35 local citizens to audit the arts resources in every Madison elementary and middle school, said Darrell Ayers, vice-president of education for the Kennedy Center.

That information will be used to create a long-term plan to make sure healthy arts programs are happening in every school for every child, not just some.

“The next two or three years (following the audit), we stay with the community to assure that the work is going to be completed,” Ayers said. “We’re not bringing money, but we’re certainly bringing expertise. We’ve done this in a number of communities and been very successful.”

The local panel working with Kennedy Center staff, known as the Community Arts Team, will consist of representatives from the Madison school district, Overture Center and other arts groups, higher education, local museums, the Urban League, United Way of Dane County and arts-related businesses such as Full Compass and Johnson Brothers Entertainment.

The focus is on younger students because the Kennedy Center believes “strong K-8 programs breed the need for strong high school programs,” said Laurie Fellenz, fine arts

coordinator for the Madison school district.

Fellenz said the program will help address arts equity “collectively as a city, with arts organizations and the district together.”

“We feel that although the focus of the program is on the curricular aspect, that in Madison we need to have that bigger conversation about what our kids are doing outside of school and what they have access to,” she said.

The areas of theater and dance will get special attention since those disciplines, unlike music and visual arts, are not standard offerings in Madison schools, Fellenz said.

Madison was selected by the Kennedy Center in part due to its “really wonderful application” for Any Given Child, Ayers said.

“We felt that the resources were available in Madison, with the art education that’s already happening there, so there’s a potential for success,” Ayers said. “It’s important for us with the newness of the program — it’s only a few years old — that this first group of about a dozen communities will be successful in ensuring equity and access to the arts for every child kindergarten through grade 8.”

Any Given Child has its roots in a nationwide tour that Kennedy Center president Michael Kaiser made in 2008 to assess the impact of the economic crisis on the arts.

The tour revealed “a real hodge-podge” of arts resources in public schools, Ayers said.

“When you look at a community, there are wonderful things going on, but a lot of times they’re just not fairly distributed so that every child in the community is having the arts as a part of their educational lives,” he said.

Madison’s Overture Center already participates in the Kennedy Center’s Partners in Education program, which helps performing arts centers work with the local school district to provide professional development for teachers.

“There’s also opportunities for young people to come and study at the Kennedy Center with our career development programs in the summertime,” Ayers said.

Communities currently participating in Any Given Child include Springfield, Mo., Sacramento and Fresno, Calif.; Portland, Ore.; Southern Nevada; Tulsa, Okla.; Sarasota, Fla.; Austin, Texas; Iowa City, Iowa; Baltimore.; and Juneau, Alaska. Two other communities will likely be added in August, Ayers said.