



## Kennedy Center's 'Any Given Child' aims to improve arts in Madison schools



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Madison will be the 12th city to participate in a nationwide initiative to improve arts education in K-8 schools, city officials announced Friday.

Madison follows larger cities like [Portland, Ore.](#) and [Austin, Texas](#), in being chosen for the Kennedy Center's [Any Given Child](#) program.

The program is essentially three years of free consulting — a gift of resources and not grant money. A publicly funded program, Any Given Child will focus here on the Madison Metropolitan School District, with assistance from city arts coordinator Karin Wolf and Ray Gargano, director of programming and community engagement at Overture Center for the Arts.

"We are thrilled," said Laurie Fellenz, fine arts coordinator for the school district. "We want to do a better job of coordinating resources for our kids."

As part of the program, Kennedy Center reps will come to Madison and help the district compile data about how well students are being served in visual arts, music, theater and dance. (The latter two forms are historically under-served in schools, likely for both space and cultural reasons.)

The city has already formed a 35-member community arts team, with representatives from the school district, the city, Overture Center, and community groups like the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County and United Way of Dane County.

In a prepared statement, Mayor Paul Soglin said that "taking the temperature" of arts education is necessary in light of financial and political challenges facing the schools.

"Equal access to arts education is not only an indicator of the well-being of our school district," he said, "it is the litmus test of the health of our city."

Any Given Child comes on the heels of [another Madison arts education study](#) done in 2007-2008. It concluded that students have difficulty registering for courses, teachers feel excluded from planning the arts curriculum, and arts courses are considered "extras" rather than essentials.

"It's about access and equity," said Wolf, who was involved in that earlier study. "There

are so many factors ... some schools have teachers that are more active about seeking resources or have more principal support than others. There are things like transportation, economic (challenges) — can they afford private lessons? What else is happening with their class schedule?

"How do you make a structure in place where every child has access?"

Currently, the district provides visual art and music education at every elementary and middle school. But Fellenz said it's not consistent in how much time and access to the arts students have. Often what makes a difference is teachers willing and able to advocate and seek resources for their students.

The idea, Fellenz said, is to create a kind of triangle around arts education, consisting of the classroom teacher, the arts specialist (usually a music or art teacher) and the teaching artist, "integrating the arts with other concepts instead of the arts standing alone on the side."

"We're trying to build a model," she said.

According to the Kennedy Center website, Any Given Child focuses on elementary and middle school education because "if more demand for the arts is created in grades K-8, then more demand will follow in high schools."

Fellenz emphasized that the program will adapt to what Madison students need.

"It's not a cookie-cutter program," she said. In other cities, they're "trying to get (arts) back into the schools that aren't there. We need help to give our students equity and access.

"The Kennedy Center helps you lead the conversation, so you end up with something your city wants."