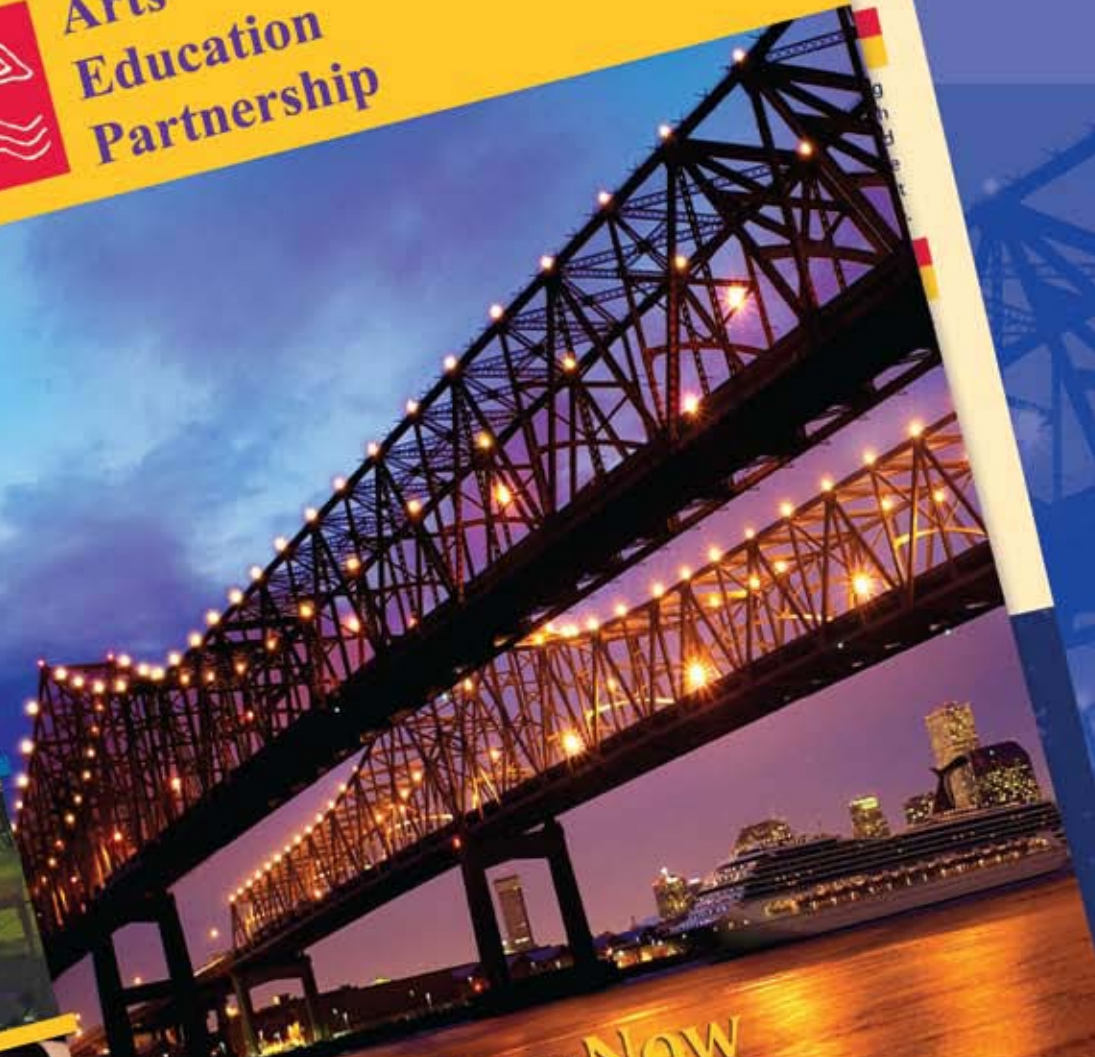


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# All Together Now

Building Strong Communities Through  
Arts and Education Partnerships

February 12-13, 2009  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Reflections  
*on the Forum*

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# Introduction: An Invitation to Reflect

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**W**hen we first started thinking of how we might disseminate information about the AEP Winter Forum in New Orleans, we knew we wanted to shake up the format of a traditional Forum report. At this stage in the evolution of the Partnership, and of the arts education field as a whole, we felt we would learn more about what really happened at the Forum, and what could be shared, by hearing from multiple voices from the field rather than our own interpretation of events. And since the theme of this Forum was All Together Now: Building Strong Communities Through Arts and Education Partnerships, it seemed especially inappropriate that the story of the event unfold through multiple perspectives and voices.

We were also, quite selfishly, eager to hear from you in response to new directions at AEP and in our nation. As Sandra said in her opening remarks, AEP wants to build on our established and solid foundation as the premier source for the field for clear, high-quality, relevant information on research and policy in arts and education. We want our Forums to be an opportunity to weigh and sift that information, as well as a chance to consider challenging and new ideas from both within and outside the field. As a partnership that focuses on both the arts and education – two challenging, complex and changing fields each in its own right – we cannot help embracing many points of view. But we hope we always do so with an eye toward a common goal: ensuring the vital and central role of the arts and creative learning in the quality education of every child. In New Orleans, we brought together government leaders, legislators, grantmakers and practitioners for a sampling of that kind of cross-pollination. It was clear from the eavesdropping we did on both casual and official conversations that participants engaged with the topics on many levels.

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# Introduction: An Invitation to Reflect *cont'd.*

It is difficult not to come away from a Forum energized by the work going on all over the country in support of the arts and their place in the lives of young people. When we all get together in one place, the room seems to hum. For this new AEP staff, to have our first meeting together in New Orleans, a place where culture has been at the heart of its survival, was very moving and significant. After two days of informative and challenging presentations, it was an honor for us to end the meeting with a day in the Lower 9th Ward, shared with many of you, in which we had a chance to meet and work alongside artists committed to the recovery of their hometown.

The reflections you'll read in this report come from participants across broad spectra of geography, professional affiliation, role, and stage of career. As you'll see, there is no scarcity of perspectives or opinions, from the content and format of the meeting to the state of the field itself. As a group, they really showcase the great passion and intellectual resources we have at hand as a field. From the large plenary sessions to the small group discussions to unofficial networking time and exploration of our host city, it's obvious from even this small sample that we continue to grow and evolve as a field. We hope that all of our readers – both those of you who were with us in New Orleans and those who were not able to attend – will enjoy these reflections as much as we did.

Finally, we are so grateful for the generosity of time and spirit of our colleagues who agreed to write these reflections. It's a privilege to be part of a field where we can learn so much from each other. Happy reading, and we hope to see you in Cambridge in October!

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# Shining the Light on What Works

## Doug Herbert

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**A** first impression that has stayed with me since the forum in New Orleans is how fortunate we are to have Sandra Ruppert and her team at the helm of the Partnership as it begins a new chapter in its history. What began in 1994 in response to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act has adjusted course with the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, and now the Partnership is poised to help us all navigate another new and exciting era of school improvement. And judging from the high caliber of the speakers and presenters, as well as the depth of our engagement with such issues as 21st century skills, reform of the American high school, and others central to the Forum's agenda, Sandra and her team have put us on a good course to begin the latest journey.

While I was inspired by the thoughts and eloquence with which they were delivered by many of the forum's presenters, the session that provoked the most thought for me was the breakout in which Jean Hendrickson of the Oklahoma A+ Schools and Judi Holifield of Mississippi's Whole Schools Initiative shared their impressive stories of success and the strategies of arts instruction and arts integration that the schools in their networks have used to make the arts part of a complete education. I, like many others, have watched these two statewide networks, along with others like them in other states like North Carolina, where the A+ schools network is in its 14th year, successfully weather the comings and goings of school reform efforts, staying the course and adhering to their core principles – maintaining the integrity of the arts disciplines as well as providing meaningful, cross-disciplinary connections with the other core academic subjects. And, instilling a commitment to that principle and insuring its accomplishment through high-quality professional development and other services for teachers that enables them to do their best for students in and through the arts.

As I listened to Jean and Judi talk about their reform models and their successes, I wondered why it's taking so long to make their and others' experiences with the arts as a strategy for whole school reform more widely recognized and replicated in more places. Just before and since our gathering in New Orleans, several important, national-level organizations that are influential in school improvement

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# Shining the Light on What Works *cont'd.*

have focused special attention on arts education and arts integration. [The January/February issue of \*Principal\*](#), the journal of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, was devoted almost completely to arts education, as was the [February issue of \*Middle Ground\*](#) from the National Middle School Association. ASCD's March "[Education Update](#)," contains a major article on arts integration, featuring North Carolina's A+ Schools. And [February's \*Edutopia\*](#), from the George Lucas Educational Foundation, titles its edition, "Why the Arts Must be Saved," and answers that with an excellent set of articles, one about the Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Bartlesville, Okla., an Oklahoma A+ School. Quite an impressive affirmation of the critical role of the arts in a complete education!

Shortly before our forum in New Orleans, the staff of the Department of Education met and heard from our new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Among the things he told us is that, as a nation, we need to identify the things that work for schools and students, shine a light on them, and then scale them up so that more students can benefit from them. I was thinking about these words from the new Secretary as I listened to Jean and Judi in their breakout session. Before and since then, as I've read the above affirmations of the role of the arts in school improvement, I've thought about what an auspicious time this is right now for us to shine that light on the efforts in Oklahoma, Mississippi, North Carolina and many other places where the arts are at the center, rather than the margins, of making schools successful and helping all children to achieve. In fact, we at the Department "shone the light" on arts integration on March 26th, when our Education Policy Briefing series features the [Comprehensive Education Through the Arts](#) program of the Kennedy Center.

Together, with the continuing efforts of the Arts Education Partnership, let's be sure that, as our country invests anew in public education with federal stimulus funds, the light shines brighter and brighter on the arts, allowing them to be a more integral part of the solution for American education.

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