

Why Data-Driven Decision-Making in the Arts?

Why is it important to consider data when making decisions about programs in arts education for K-12 education? A better question might be why would we consider any other method? For the first time, New Hampshire educators have the opportunity to collect data regarding K-12 arts education in music, visual art, dance, theatre and media arts using a common tool, a common process, toward a common goal—stronger arts programs and greater opportunities for students.

The New Hampshire Arts Education Survey is, for all practical purposes, a programmatic inventory for schools that includes specific questions on five main categories: Quantitative Information (courses offered, enrollment, instructional delivery); Facilities and Resources; Policies, Curriculum and Standards; Instructional Support and Professional Development; and Community Resources. By responding to the survey questions, schools are provided with a full view of the arts education opportunities available to their students. A comprehensive measurement of student opportunities K-12 is created when responses from other schools within the district are combined.

As with any data collection, it is not the data alone that is telling, but rather how the data is analyzed, the professional conversations that ensue as a result of looking at the data, and ultimately, the decisions that are thus made. Logically, the first step in data-driven decision making is the gathering of data. This is the beginning of the process and not an end by itself.

To establish baseline data, schools will necessarily be putting more time into the data collection process this year than in subsequent years. In future years it will only be a matter of updating the responses, and probably not many changes will occur year to year. Some teachers have said that it takes only 30 minutes to go through the questions, especially those in smaller schools. For larger schools, the work may take more time.

The on-line collection tool of the NH Arts Ed Survey is designed to be as user friendly as possible; individual school address, school code, grade levels and enrollment are automatically filled. Many fields include drop-down menus for limited options. Text boxes are kept to a minimum; however the inclusion of a narrative text box allows users to provide context and nuance about their programs. Users can save data between sessions allowing them to log out and re-enter at a later time to continue completing the input process.

Many resources about how to complete the NH Arts Education Survey can be found at <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/arts>. These include a *User's Guide* that details every question for common interpretation, a *Definitions Document* for clarity of terms, a *Top Ten Reasons* to complete the survey sheet, and instructions for setting up a user account for new users in the system (TBA).

Arts education in our state has been void of any data. Other content areas are able to look at student level testing data to make decisions about programs. Providing arts teachers with an equal opportunity to look at their programs from a data perspective seems only fair. The data collection being asked for by each school is only the first step. What we learn from the data—school by school, district by district, and as a state is the next exciting phase of this statewide project for the arts. Your participation now will create benefits in the future.