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Promoting Equitable and Holistic Education: The Role of Arts Education and Whole Child Policy in Unleashing Potential and Advancing Progress

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by

Collette Alleyne

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the beautiful possibilities that live in all of us. May this work shine a light on the opportunities to work together for the good of the whole person living inside us and in our community.

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ABSTRACT

Promoting Equitable and Holistic Education:

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Inclusive arts education policy considers the arts a viable entry point to a holistic educational experience. It encourages educators to engage with students on a social and emotional level. Several studies have explored challenges with policy implementation that identify educators' interpretation of policy or assimilation to existing policy as a barrier to the full actualization of policy.

Through a rigorous convergent mixed-methods study using convenience sampling, I present a thorough analysis of data that reflects internalized values, beliefs, and ideas. Seven contributors, five educational leaders, and two alumni completed interviews, and twenty-one educational leaders completed surveys utilizing Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com/), a web-based survey tool. The results identify contextual relationships and offer a comprehensive narrative encompassing knowledge and understanding, resource availability, beliefs, and psychological factors influencing the interpretation and implementation of whole-child arts inclusive policy. The results were: Insufficient policy awareness of federal and state policy, significant knowledge of teaching and general assessment practices, and remarkable administrative support coupled with resource limitations; challenges with structural design, prioritization of arts education despite

financial challenges, students' perspective reciprocates structure; and alignment with mission and past experiences in arts education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cantor, leading researcher in whole child education, noted, “If, however, the purpose of education is the equitable, holistic development of each student, scientific knowledge from diverse fields and sources can be used to redesign policies and practices to create settings that unleash the potential in each student” (2021). Similar beliefs regarding a holistic approach to instructional practices are stated in various ways across policies on the federal, state, and local levels (ACT, n.d.; Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, 2022 ; Jones & Workman, 2016). However, little has been accomplished to transform and fully actualize the education system to reflect the holistic approach required to address the whole child. According to Cantor (2021), systems in and out of schools need to see each other as vital contributors to a child’s development before change can begin. Considering arts education as a viable tool in equitable, holistic development, it is essential to recognize its value in developing cognitive, motor, and social skills and supporting a child’s decision-making skills, innovation, and ability to take risks, all of which contribute to success in school and life. A human absent of these abilities is a shell waiting to be filled. A socially just education is not a means to an end but an entry point to uncovering that which we bring to this world, woven with our experiences, desires, and aspirations of becoming the fulliest version of ourselves and ultimately leaving the world better than when it found us.

There is little question about the value of the arts, with research over time (Catterrall, 2009; McFerran et al., 2017; Peppler et al., 2023) indicating its ability to support holistic development including increased acadmic performance. But how is value translated from the

policy text to the schools? There are great obscurities in defining what is needed to successfully educate the whole child, let alone all children, from a lens of equity to support reaching their maximum potential. Adding the divergent intersection of policy developers, policy implementers, and communities served introduces complexities to the Education process and its success. With most, if not all, policies established on a governance level, the margins of error increase when all stakeholders are not working collectively from development of education policy to its implementation.

Existing Policies

Considering policies that have shaped our education system and the impetus of their development being rooted in relation to the state of the economy, the labor force, and most often the political climate, one must question where the children are situated in the process. Dating back to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965), designed "to strengthen and improve educational quality and educational opportunities in the Nation's elementary and secondary schools" (Skinner & Riddle, 2020) and the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), which focused on narrowing the achievement gap by promoting accountability, flexibility, and choice, ensuring every child succeeded, the challenges with interpretation and implementation of policy have persisted, specifically within the context of arts education due to ambiguous requirements, reporting and accountability centered on core academic subjects leading to competing priorities. Each policy was created to improve on the former, reemphasizing the successful elements and redesigning the areas where clarity was needed (United States Department of Education, n.d.). The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA; 2015) was no different in that it maintained some elements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), for example, requiring states to measure

individual student progress and the progress of identified subgroups. Addtionally, for accountability, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) focused mainly on math and reading test scores. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) expanded indicators to consider a variety of measures for accountability.

As an educator with over 20 years of experience, policy implementation is the area that has suffered the most as policy trickles down from its developers to those responsible for operationalizing for the intended audience. Education First Consulting and Grantmakers for Education and Graham (2011) noted that, "It is the great middle of public policy that is implementation, and it is often left on its own." Witnessing the rollout of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and the highly qualified teacher mandate that sent school leaders spiraling is one example of a subset of a policy with great intention that fell to the responsibility of states to define and ultimately failed (Guisbond et al., 2012). The educators felt forced to focus on teaching to the test, which was different from student-centered learning.

Exclusion of Art Education and Policy Changes in Supporting Arts Education

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) noted that:

> For over a decade, U.S. education policies focused on how to raise academic achievement as reflected primarily in student test scores often to the exclusion of other goals, such as student health and welfare; physical, social, emotional, and psychological development; critical and creative thinking; and communication and collaboration abilities.

This exclusion, as mentioned above, is more present for populations under-resourced in multiple indicators.

In 2015, President Obama reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), intending to distribute oversight of education funding and accountability to local education agencies through state legislation. The National Art

Education Association (2015) described *Every Student Succeeds Act's* focus as "reducing federal oversight and increasing state flexibility in the use of funds" and "cementing states' obligation to support arts education programs in public schools." The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), as federal policy, guides subsequent policies established on the state and local levels. It informs how states develop policy and provide instruction. According to the United States Department of Education, whose mission is to offer leadership in strategies to "improve the results of the education system for all students," (United States Department of Education, 2024) funding for the arts in the form of discretionary/competitive grants has been made available intermittently through the Arts in Education National Program since the passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015). The California Department of Education declared the enactment of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* as an "opportunity to streamline local, state, and federal requirements into a single, coherent system for planning, accountability, and continuous improvement and support" (California Department of Education, 2016). With the passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), California was required to file a state accountability plan with the United States Department of Education and, in 2017, received approvalfor the plan, which noted in Section B. Title I, Part C: Education of Migratory Children that students identified as such would receive instruction in visual and performing arts as funded by the state (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 67) . Also noted in Section D. Title II, Part A: Supporting Effective Instruction that the State Board of Education approved visual and performing arts and world language standards (California Department of Education , 2017, p. 72), with updated standards approved January 2019. Five years after the enactment of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015),

California adopted the Arts Education Framework for Public Schools on July 8, 2020 (California State Board of Education et al., 2021).

In spite of the extensive scholarship supporting the necessity of arts-inclusive education for all students and the federal and state policies stating the legal rights of all students to have access to free public education that includes the arts, according to research from Create California (2021), the state continues to fall behind in effective and sustainable arts education programming. The passing of Proposition 28 in November 2022 was set to allocate funding to California schools in perpetuity, for quality arts education. Upon completetion of this study the plan for implementation lacked clarity for community interpretation, and did not provide flexibility or workarounds for the longstanding shortage of teachers and arts educators. The proposition requires funding provisions for schools annually restricted to arts and music education. The allowance is set at 1% on top of total state and local funding allocated to schools under Proposition 98 (1988). Proposition 28 (2022) is designed to supplement not supplant existing arts education funding.

Statement of the Problem

Students in California are not receiving the mandated arts-inclusive education as stated by the law. Only 11% of California schools meet the state-mandated requirement for standards-based arts education (Woodworth et al., 2022). With this discrepancy, one must consider factors contributing to schools' inability to interpret and implement with fidelity, policies designed to meet the needs of the whole child. Are policies too ambiguous and leading to increased complexity in actualizing the policy? Are there competing priorities diminishing the arts inclusive policy value?

Insufficient funding and lack of educator training are stated as the most significant barriers. Helton stated, “The complexity of policy accompanied by a general lack of policy dexterity fuels the legitimacy gap between advocacy arguments and policy implementation and, thus, weakens the arts in the education policy realm” (2020). Districts and charters fall victim to the shortsightedness of faulty or no implementation plans for newly developed policies. School leaders are frequently placed in a position of competing priorities when assessments are misaligned with loosely developed policies consistent in the field of arts education. Too often, resources, accountability, funding, and time are incongruent, falling short of practical implementation and sustainability. Morrison et al. (2022) noted the following characteristics are present in the most consistently impacted schools: low socioeconomic neighborhoods, a high population of English learners, and underperforming students. Seven years after the signing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), which aimed to provide more flexibility to local education agencies (LEAs) to utilize funds to support a well-rounded, whole-child education plan, according to a report by SRI International (2022) California continues to show insufficient improvement in providing consistent and equitable access to all students in K–12.

Accessibility is multifaceted. The lack of staffing and resources to provide learning opportunities to students makes it impossible to address the accessibility through a whole-child approach. A system not designed to support the whole-child can negatively afect a child’s perspective the relevance of leanring, which is increased through the whole-child approach; however, according to Nelson (2009), “Students are too often denied access to school experiences in which they are motivated and successful because they are struggling in other areas (p. 16).”

The axis of disparity is the incongruence of equity in education, referring to fairness in allocating resources, services, and time, thought of systemically and structurally. Researchers and advocates have touted the benefits of arts education, and policies across all levels of governance are consistently adopted to support the proclaimed value but persistently fall short (Arts for LA et al., 2013; Carter & Roucher, 2019).

Renewal of the whole child inclusive arts educational policy development is essential with a critical focus on considering accessibility based on the individual's authentic needs. This approach values an individual's unique needs, not prescribed or historically associated needs. Building relevance that connects to new and existing knowledge increases efficacy and will open possibilities to create paradigm shifts throughout the child's ecosystem. The disruption that results from shifting oppressive systems and interconnected barriers is an intentional design to create opportunities for successful and sustainable outcomes. This approach centered on renewal, relevance and disruption are pivotal in addressing the social justice context of this study.

Purpose of the Study

This mixed methods study explored policy interpretation and implementation strategies of arts education. The exploration centered on a well-rounded, whole-child education, given its focus on the development of equitable, rich, and engaging learning experiences across disciplines, including the arts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Jones & Workman, 2016.) This study utilized the five tenets of whole-child education: healthy, safety, engagement, personalized learning, and challenged; Global environment, with four of the five aligning with arts education (Silverstein, 2020).

With that in mind, the first goal was to understand school leaders' interpretation of the existing policies, including the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), the California Education Code, and, more intimately, the school's mission, and Proposition 28 (2022). The second objective is to understand the intersection of the whole child and well-rounded arts education policy and goals on a school site level. The third objective is to evaluate how the structure within the school site supports the school leaders' interpretation of the policies to promote arts education. With the current post-pandemic challenges, the essentiality of effective policy implementation related to addressing the needs of the whole child exceeds the need for adhering to the law and leans heavily on recovery and improved well-being. In this study, I aimed to identify barriers to the effective implementation of art-inclusive education policy and to support or codify strategies for the sustainability of art-inclusive education, emphasizing the social justice implications. Additionally, this study contributes to existing research in considering different approaches to promote school leaders in developing meaningful policy actualization plans.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to conduct this study:

RQ1: How is arts education policy operationalized on a school campus?

RQ2: How does the school structure support whole-child inclusive arts education?

RQ3: What is the relationship between school leaders' understanding of successful whole-child inclusive arts education and equitable access to such education?

The Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that it sought to interrogate the full scope of the policy process, evaluating the landscape informing policy development and the influences and influencers on policy interpretation and implementation. This study was also meaningful in that it investigated the relationship between resources and successful implementation and has recommended tools and resources to provide educational leaders with practical strategies to actualize policy.

Given the rebuilding of a post-COVID education system and the emphasis on student well-being, this study's focus on the arts in the context of whole-child policy will support school leaders in advocating for equitable art-inclusive whole-child education with the resources needed to develop and implement a plan thoughtfully. Making the arts a practical and accessible component of the school communities' success will influence the proclivity of inclusive arts education as a necessity, not a nicety. In addition to school leaders benefiting from this study, students will eventually gain their rightful access to the full expression of a framework designed to enhance their learning and awareness of self and others, redesigning their trajectory and possible contribution to society.

Theoretical Framework

Current research indicates the environment heavily influences a child, and the depth of influence can be informed by the length of interaction with and in the environment (Cantor, 2021). Accordingly, a child's environment is informed by the resources available in the community and the families in that community. Too often, resources in historically marginalized communities do not meet the needs of students. For this study, two theoretical frameworks were

employed, one that magnified the holistic developmental ecosystem of a child and the other that centered equity toward that development.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1994) defined the complexity of the societal layers of influence that inform a child's development. Bronfenbrenner noted the interaction "between factors in the child's maturing biology, his immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape" as the driving forces of development, identifying development as a series of contextual influences occurring within five distinct spheres: the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) referenced "four defining properties of the bioecological model: (1) Process, (2) Person, (3) Context, and (4) Time" or "PPCT" (p. 794).

At the core of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Model (1994, 1995) is an analysis of five essential concepts:

1. Settings and organizations that affect the learner's growth;
2. Interactions between learners and spheres;
3. Impact on the learner in their immediate surroundings;
4. Impact on settings and organizations that are connected to but not part of the learner's immediate environment;
5. Reciprocal interactions between the learner and other people, objects, and symbols within their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1995; Peppler et al., 2023).

The innermost layer of the bioecological model is the microsystem. Microsystems "invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). Within the context of inclusive arts education, micro-system level interactions included the students' holistic art-related interactions with parents and teachers within the home, school, and immediate community settings (afterschool programs, recreational activities, etc.).

The mesosystem supports the interactions between microsystems (i.e., school, home, peers) and exosystems (i.e., parents' work environment, local school board, teachers' lounge/district, etc.). According to Guy-Evans (2020), "The mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another (para. 5)." By this measure, the amount of perceived support for and encouragement of holistic, inclusive arts education that school boards and local governmental agencies exert (exosystem) directly influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and perceived importance of arts education at the micro—(intra-home/school interaction) and meso—(inter-home-school interaction) levels.

Further noted by Guy-Evans (2020), at a space of intersection in any system, the convergence of information is influenced by beliefs, attitudes, and experiences with effects predicated by role and proximity (para. 9). An indirect but proximal exosystem effect, for example, might have been the sense of joy a child experienced in class because a teacher's work environment outside of the classroom was fulfilling and joyful, leading to teacher-child interactions in the classroom that were calm and engaging.

The outermost level is the macrosystem, a sphere encompassing any cultural group whose members shared value or belief systems; and that enveloped the remaining systems, being bi-directionally influenced by all of them (Tudge et al., 2009). As Tudge et al. (2009) noted, for any particular macro-system to have any influence on a developing child, it must be experienced within a microsystem in which that child is placed. Therefore, even if a culture values embracing and encouraging art education, for example, this value must be directly felt and operationalized into a child's microsystem to be influential on their development.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework was time, which Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) described as micro-time (occurring during a specific activity); meso-time (the extent to which activities occur consistently over time in a child's life) and macro-time, the latter of which was captured in the chronosystem, which provided an examination of the time in which a macro-level practice, policy or event (e.g, the Great Depression, the global pandemic, new state educational policy) occured within a child's own developmental trajectory, and the timing of a policy practice within a moment in our cultural history.

Taken together, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Peppler et al., 2023) invited an analysis of the complexities of education and educational policy outcomes, highlighting tenants of the whole-child framework and its focus on the multilayered facets of a child's learning and development. Collectively, each sphere symbolized a layer of input and output integral to holistic development, which considered a person's intellect, social, physical, and emotional growth as influenced by its parts. With policy guiding schools and districts to make decisions and establish goals and

accountability measures for students and staff, utilizing and situating ecosystems as central to understanding (a) policy developers, (b) implementers, and (c) recipients was essential to this study.

Ascertaining the intersectionality of inclusive arts education within the dynamic strata of ecosystems enhances the implications of policy interpretation and implementation. The Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (LACDAC; 2023) stated that the arts were essential in supporting the human development of a child. With that in mind, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1995; Peppler et al., 2023) emphasized resources, attention, and care provided in and through layers of the ecosystem that impact and inform progression and retrogression. From the outer layers to an analysis of the innermost microsystem interactions, viewing individual, arts-inclusive education policy within this multilayered ecosystem initiates a more holistic understanding of perspective, plans, and values. For that reason, the effect of policy development is contingent on (a) its origin, (b) the perspective of the need of the people integrated with the policy developers' authentic desire to fulfill that need for transformation of outcomes, and (c) interactions within the ecosystem. Deliberating policy context stratified in this way presented increased attentiveness to the needs of the entire system (human and institution) and improved outcomes.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework of People and Environment, relationships (2005)—in context—influence processes, trajectories, and developmental outcomes. Osher et al. (2018), noted that "[A] need exists to operationalize 'relationship' in a manner that accounts for the power of relationships to shape development in constructive ways (p. 8)." Thus, complementing the research of Osher et al. (2018) and Bronfenbrenner's theory

(1994, 1995) was the social-constructivist theory of Lev Vygotsky (Kozulin et al., 2003), which suggested that intellectual and social development occurs in its most productive, healthy form when adults scaffold—or provide tools of encouragement—to guide a child's natural curiosity, allowing them to construct their own knowledge about concepts within their "zone of proximal development," or area in which they need only a little guidance and help to come to their own construction of knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) analysis of moment-to-moment, micro-level interactions between a student and an older adult or peer indicates that children learn best when they are "met where they are," emphasizing the critical role that relationships play in allowing space for students to collaborate in student-initiated learning (Kozulin et al., 2003).

Along with Vygotsky, Guba (1984) complemented Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework (2005) by providing the context in which to analyze policy derivation and implementation, applying meaning at various stages: intention (what the developers mean); action (the actors responsible for operationalizing the text to test the cure designed to solve the problem); and experience (the encounters of the people on the receiving end of the policy in action). Combined, these scholars present a multifaceted lens to view the compelling reciprocation of policy ingress and egress at divergent levels of the ecosystem.

Transformative Social-Emotional Learning

> *Transformative SEL is aimed at educational equity—fostering more equitable learning environments and producing equitable outcomes for children and young people furthest from opportunity. This educational equity implies that every student has what she or he needs when they need it, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income*. (Jagers et al., 2019, p. 163)

Although not the main framework for this research, transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019) functions as a supporting structure within a social justice context. Its emphasis is on

educational equity, focusing on a child's social and emotional development and well-being. Relevance is the context of whole-child arts inclusive education, and its premise is that grounding SEL competencies within a transformative context is critical in moving beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to SEL competencies to understanding the cultural and holistic needs of the child-in-context, specifically noting "that identity is multifaceted and reflected across competence domains; agency is an important aspect of self-management and relationship skills, and that belonging, and engagement imply social awareness and require responsible decision making" (Jagers et al., 2019, p. 167). Unearthing the idea of every child having what is needed to reach their full potential is a catalyst for school leaders to demand and implement instructional strategies to uplift all students' needs.

The goal of transformative SEL is to build strong and respectful relationships between young people and adults that facilitate colearning through a Vygotskian, social construction of knowledge to examine inequity critically and create solutions that benefit individuals, communities, and society (American Federation of Teachers, 2021). Parallel to Bronfenbrenner's theory (2005) is the essence of this healthy student and adult relationship and its impact on student development. The adults exist within the spheres of the ecosystem and more directly in the student's microsystem within schools and classrooms. Specifically, Jagers et al. (2021) noted that "Students learn through the co-construction of knowledge that is actively applied to address an identified concern and evaluated for its effectiveness; adults serve as coaches or facilitators, thereby increasing students' agency in their own inquiry and reflection" (p. 15).

Research Design and Methodology

The methodology for this study was mixed methods design utilizing existing state data and research on frequency and accessibility to the arts at the school site. I surveyed the school community via Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) to assess the community's understanding of the whole-child arts inclusive education focus. The survey process supported the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics (Leavy, 2022) which documented the number of responses that identified an awareness of the arts focus aligned with the curriculum available to students. I reviewed the charter petition to understand the school makeup and triangulate the school budget, active course offerings, and bell schedule. All of these elements provided perspective intentions and goals compared to actual offerings and insight to what and how resources are utilized and prioritized. From a policy standpoint, I used federal policy, California Education Code, recently approved Proposition 28 (2022), and the school's mission. I conducted qualitative research by interviewing school educational leaders and school alumni and transcribed the collected data using Zoom (www.zoom.com) transcripts.

Assumptions and Limitations

As an arts educator and arts education administrator who consistently provides service to schools and has conversations with school leaders, the lens through which I conducted this research yielded a baseline understanding of the California arts education ecosystem. The independent variable is the interpretation and implementation of the art's inclusive education plan. The dependent variable is the classes offered to students. Limitations include sample size of one school site, limited data collection timeframe, low school enrollment, and possible language barriers. Generalizability was not applied because the school is a charter school.

Positionality

I work in and through the perceived inconsistencies of application, knowledge, and value of arts education and observe firsthand the varied interpretation of policy, the competing priorities with scheduling, and the uncertainty if the sacrifice of providing an arts education will yield immediate, measurable results. I have confirmed that biases exist based on 6 years in my current role and as a teacher and administrator in a nontraditional charter school serving students who chose to enroll in the school in some cases and had been dismissed in other instances from traditional public schools and attended a charter school as a last resort. I continuously checked in with my assumptions and past experiences to ensure the data was telling the story on its own. With this practice and conscientious effort in place, I utilized Constructivist Grounded Theory (Flick, 2014, pp. 6-9) for the analysis of my qualitative data to support this focus.

Definitions of Key Terms

The terms I used in this study needing clarification are as follows:

California Education Code

The California Education Code provides guidance in various areas of education from instruction to facilities usage and assessment. By definition, the Education Code is "A collection of all the laws directly related to California K–12 public schools. Ed Code sections are created or changed by the governor and Legislature when they make laws. Local school boards and county offices of education are responsible for complying with these provisions" (Allen, 2018).

School Board Policy

Rules adopted by school boards to guide school district's actions that provide standards for all stakeholders.

The Accrediting Commission of Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accreditation:

The process by which schools are recognized for the work and acedemic structure offered to studenst. One of the organization responsible for providing accreditation is the "[Accrediting Commission of Schools] ACS [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] WASC accreditation is an ongoing cycle of quality. Schools assess their program and the impact on student learning with respect to the ACS WASC criteria and other accreditation factors" (Accrediting Commission of Schools & Western Association of Schools and Colleges, n.d.).

Proposition 28 (2022)

A citizen-initiated statute that provides additional funding for arts and music education in all K–12 public schools.

Charter School

There are a variety of types of schools for students to attend, e.g. private, traditonal public and public charter schools:

> A charter school is a public school that may provide instruction in any combination of grades K–12. Parents, teachers, or community members may initiate a charter petition, which is typically presented to and approved by a local school district governing board. The law grants chartering authority to county boards of education, such as the appeal of a petition's denial by a school district governing board or the direct approval of countywide benefit charter schools.
>
> The specific goals and operating procedures for a charter school are detailed in the agreement (also referred to as the charter, petition, or charter petition) between the

> authorizing entity and the school's organizers. Charter status frees the school from many of the state statutes and regulations that apply to school districts.
>
> (California Department of Education, n.d., para. 1 & 2).

School Structure

For this study, school structure will refer to the school's staffing model, funding allocations, bell schedule, and pedagogical frameworks.

Whole-Child Education

A belief that a child's learning and development is multilayered, and "depends on affirming relationships operating within a positive school climate" (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The success of a policy is based on practical implementation, including collective understanding, to the extent possible, precise (clear) interpretation, training and resources, clear action planning, and accountability for all parties. Shaw (2019) noted it is essential when analyzing art education policy to consider the interplay of various factors of implementation. McLaughlin (1987) stated that the interplay as the macro level, policy developers, and micro level, how policy is experienced by the implementers and students.

Policies, like any law, consist of rules and regulations that can be breached, disregarded, or bypassed. Despite good intentions, policies may be flawed due to poor motivation, purpose, or implementation. Furthermore, self-interest and interest convergence may prevent individuals from looking beyond tangible outcomes. Spillane (2005) argued that policy implementation is often skewed by administrators' and teachers' assimilation of new policies into existing practices. Lefstein (2004) noted that policy, as it travels from derivation to implementation, is distorted as it is filtered through each stakeholder.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (1994, 1995, 2005) and Guba's (1984) policy conceptualization as a basis for this literature review, I examined the relationship between arts education policy, its creators, and those responsible for its implementation. I analyzed how federal policy flows to local schools. I explored how policymakers' intent affects the policy-making process, how policy implementers' actions affect implementation, and how

individual students are affected by the nuanced complexities that interfere with and prevent fully actualizing and sustaining policy.

In addition, I centered the well-being of the whole child as the focal point of arts-inclusive education policy. By doing so, I explored the intersectional implications that access to arts education can have on a child's development and how policy interpretation plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to such education.

The Confluence of Policy and Practice

Numerous studies have demonstrated the value of the arts in supporting academic progress and promoting social development among students (Catterall, 2009; Workman, 2017). Policy initiatives in California such as the *Creative Workforce Act* of 2021—SB-628 have recognized the positive impact of arts education on human development, particularly in fostering a thriving creative economy. However, until the passing of Proposition 28 (2022), there had been limited consistent and sustainable investment in building sustainable arts programs in California that align with policy. Despite laws mandating access to arts education for all children, it has often been overlooked or deprioritized. The inconsistency in access to the arts is not solely attributable to policy but is influenced by various factors, including people's reluctance to let go of their preferences and explore new possibilities. Duke (1990) noted the discord regarding the value of the arts as "mind-builders" compared to other subjects and its marginal position often appointed by parents and educators. Shaw (2020) contributed to the complexity of being interwoven with the convergence of macro—and micro-level policy.

The Evolution of Federal Policy and National Perception

Education policy has evolved, with successive updates reflecting changing societal needs. The initial federal policy that served as a foundation for subsequent policies was the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965), which aimed to address perceived achievement gaps through an equity lens. This policy was part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" (Paul, 2024) and provided federal funding to states to help achieve the established goals. The funds were intended to benefit low-income students and combat the disparities in racially segregated schools through Title I funding. The policy laid out the federal government's role in education and emphasized the importance of education in altering the life trajectories of students in underserved and historically marginalized communities. Along with allocating federal funds, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) relied on states to distribute funds, leading to a greater need for state-level departments of education (Skinner & Riddle, 2020).

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 did not include provisions for arts education, as its primary focus was to provide funding through Title I for local education agencies serving children from low-income families. The law allocated funds for instructional materials, professional development, and other resources. Title I was one of five provisions introduced and affirmed in 1965 that did not exist prior to the passage of the ESEA. According to McClure et al. (2008), it was not possible to pass legislation aimed at providing an equitable education to low-income families, who were disproportionately Black, until the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, Title VI paved the way for President Johnson to champion the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965).

Title I appeared transformative respective to creating an equal playing field intended to get students off the road of poverty; however, the absence of detail in how allocated funds were to be used and trenchant application would prove an ongoing challenge for those responsible for apportionment and usage. When policy is established reactively and without a clear understanding of the problem it is designed to solve and consideration of the vast differences in experience of the people charged with elucidation and implementation, it leads to various interpretations on how funds should be used.

> These alternative interpretations of the statute—general aid to school systems versus categorical aid to poor children—set the stage for the struggles within the Office of Education for the direction and mission of Title I. The result of varying perspectives ensued in 'watered down regulations' and reactive spending at the district level disregarding practical use of all resources from staff to technology and materials. (McClure et al., 2008).

According to the Martin and Hunt Institute (2016), between 1965 and 1980 the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) was amended four times to provide clarity with the use of funds, specifically Title I, to ensure proper use focused on historically under-resourced students.

The years that followed produced reauthorizations of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) (see Appendix B: The first three items listed are federal education policies) that sought to codify the federal government's role in education. In the context of arts education, each policy identified the arts at different priority levels and under various categories. Whole child and well-rounded education were referenced to encompass the arts as a tool or resource toward progress and identify the multidimensional complexities of a child's development (Jones & Workman, 2016).

To further emphasize accountability and maintain the United States' competitiveness, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), introduced in Chapter 1, redefined the qualifications required to be a teacher (e.g., highly-qualified teacher). Complementarily amplifying the challenges of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), teachers identified as not highly qualified were disproportionality represented in high poverty and high minority serving communities, which is the antithesis of the policy's purpose of addressing the historical shortcomings of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965; Hunt Institute, 2016). There were also consequences for not meeting new standards, while also implementing high-stakes testing and proficiency requirements. As a result, the arts were recognized as a core subject and states were mandated to develop arts standards. However, this policy failed to align core subject assessment. Spohn (2008) indicated the reduction of visual art instruction to allow for student testing. Professional development and resources for the arts were also impacted, leading to division between art and academic teachers. The arts were not included in the mandated assessment, nor did researchers believe the arts could be assessed in the same manner. Slade and Griffith (2013) emphasized that test scores do not accurately reflect a student's achievement in important subjects such as the arts, connection to the school community, or preparation for civic engagement. Taylor et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of connecting learning through the arts and the need for professional development to support this journey.

Researchers posited that the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) was not the issue; rather, the problem was implementation and arts-related accountability before the enactment combined with hyper-focused testing in content areas with a more significant impact on funding (Music for All Foundation, 2004; Taylor et al., 2022). That funding source was Adequate Yearly Progress

(AYP) one of the standards of measure of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001)to report the schools' proficiency and designated subgroups in math and English Language Arts (Dillon & Rotherham, 2007)

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) was established to level the playing field, similar to arts-inclusive education policy. However, it regenerated high standards, refocused on data-informed instruction, and gave freedom to states and communities on how to allocate federal dollars (US Department of Education, n.d.). Success was based on standardized test results but did not consider the achievement gaps, prepolicy, or being closed by schools deemed as failing (progress, not proficiency). Additionally, researchers stated a disconnect between meeting the *No Child Left Behind Act's* testing requirements in that it affected not only how they taught but what they taught, further emphasizing the isolation of the arts (Bunting, 2007). In the era of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), Engebretsen with Americans for the Arts noted that "two-thirds of public school teachers believes the arts are getting crowded out of the school day" (2013, p. 15). Many factors of existing disparities were not cogitated in the planning and implementation process.

Following the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) was the reauthorization of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), offering lucid contemplative focus on music and the arts and supplementary clarity of Title I, as advanced by Tuttle (2020) with replacing the core subject priority with the term "well-rounded" education originally referenced in President Clinton's *Goals 2000 Education Act* (United States Congress, 1994), which also initiated the National Arts Standards.

These acts created well-rounded opportunities for districts and local education agencies to continue intention toward improving "traditional" core subjects such as math, English language arts, and Science, while recognizing music and the arts can improve student achievement, engagement, problem solving, and conflict resolution. The acts also expanded activities in 21st-century community learning centers and focused on improving achievement in magnet programs (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Broader provision was made accessible through the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) related to the arts through the deliberation of supporting students' social-emotional development (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Covert stated, "Even though ESSA recognizes the arts as core content, it does not mandate instruction" (2022, p. 189).

With each iteration of federal policy, the creators intended to improve outcomes, increase equity and funding, and address the needs of historically underserved students. Researchers at American College Testing (ACT) called attention to the progress of each iteration of *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965), highlighting the "advancement of the right to a quality education and access to research-based assessment, for all students (para. 14)." It is difficult to argue against many positive outcomes, perhaps most obviously the advancement of the right to a quality education and access to research-based assessment for all students. Funding for the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) has increased almost continuously with each reauthorization (ACT, n.d.). Although improvements are indicated in the general education policy context, there is no evidence of the improvement related to arts-inclusive education other than it being incorporated in the category of well-being.

The Space Between—Making Meaning: Policy Versus Practice

Before proceeding with the demonstration of the disconnect between policy and action, it is important to highlight perfunctory disruptors in the early stages of the California arts education landscape. The disruptions started on June 6, 1978 with the passage of Proposition 13 (California Budget Project, 1997), "a property tax limitation initiative" (Gaines et al., 2018, p. 1). San Luis Obispo County Assessor noted, "Essentially, Proposition 13 converted the market value-based property tax system to an acquisition value-based system" (n.d., para. 2) and subverted general school funding, eliminating electives including the arts (Los Angeles County Arts Commission, 2001). Although funding diminished, the state remained committed to the arts, with the adoption of the first California Arts Education Framework (California Department of Education, 2021). These actions were followed by the establishment of the Fine Arts Curriculum Implementation Center (Burns, 2003) and the passage of the *California License Plate Bill* in 1993 (California State Auditor, 2013).

Southern California Public Radio stated, "Since 1995, the arts have been a requirement in California" (2018). CA Education Code section 51225.3 [California Education Code & California County Superintendents Office, n.d.] established visual or performing arts or foreign language courses as a graduation requirement. Section 60605.1 required the State Board of Education to adopt visual and performing arts content standards. Section 51220 (g) (California Education Code & California County Superintendents Office, n.d.) mandated offering students in grades 7 to 12 Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA), and Section 51210(e) (California Education Code & California County Superintendents Office, n.d.) required VAPA to be included in the school curriculum for all students in grades one to six. Section 8811 (California Department of

Education, 2005) "defines the 'arts' to include the four disciplines of dance, drama and theatre, music, and visual arts as set forth in the state's adopted curriculum framework for visual and performing arts." Finally, Section 8810 (2005) acknowledged the necessity of including the arts to improve the quality of education (California Department of Education, 2005). Southern California Public Radio (2018) rightly assessed that "The law has no teeth. Districts are empowered to police themselves." Laws are meaningful, but implementation and practice are the only means of measuring effectiveness.

In addition to the California Education Code, the State has also made provision for LEAs to access The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which provides funding for specific populations of students to elevate student outcomes. The State has also furnished the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), a planning instrument designed to support LEAs by outlining their commitment to achieving annual targets for all students and require LEAs must unambiguously specify arts education along with objectives and associated actions/services that facilitate the execution of arts standards (California State Board of Education et al., 2021). Lastly, the State University admissions requirements reference "discrete arts learning" as a requirement for enrollment in any school in the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) system.

Although not yet researched, the latest arts education policy in California impacting the arts, in the nascent stages of the implementation, is Proposition 28 (2022), which guarantees schools funding and "requires an amount equal to 1% of the Proposition 98 (1988) Guarantee to be allocated to schools to increase arts instruction and/or arts programs in public education (Newsom, 2023, p. 24)

According to Americans for the Arts (n.d.), as of 2020, only 19 states in the United States have included arts as a significant aspect of their state accountability system. Despite the legislative intent of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), the California Education Code (California Education Code & California County Superintendents Office, n.d.), and research acknowledging the undeniable benefits of arts education (Carter & Roucher, 2019; Arts for LA et al., 2013)., over 80% of California schools fail to provide full arts access, with schools serving historically marginalized populations having even less access, according to the American Civil Liberties Union Southern California, 2018).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) found that 29 states consider the arts as a core subject, 50 have adopted arts standards for early childhood through high school, 44 require the arts to be offered in elementary and middle schools, 20 include the arts as an option to fulfill graduation requirements, 16 require state or district-level assessment, 17 require the arts for school accreditation, and 22 provide state-funded grant programs or a state-funded school of the arts. California is included in all of these categories except requiring assessment in the arts and requiring arts for accreditation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Although there are existing standards, there is a lack of follow-through accountability to ensure action. Shaw (2019) noted that expectations related to arts policy are often overlooked.

In California, after the adoption of the arts education code in 1995, the state passed Senate Bill 376 (California Department of Education, 2010), authorizing the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, which omitted the arts but provided schools with funding for every student tested. Inconsistencies in funding and lack of resources through community partnerships were reported in the results of the County Arts survey, which

contradicted the educators' reported desire to improve the arts education system (Los Angeles County Arts Commission, 2001).

Despite numerous arts policies over the years, such as those detailed in the table, sustainable implementation falls short, as noted in the 2020 California Arts Council Strategic Framework. California, the fifth-largest economy in the world, has missed the mark on funding for the arts (California Arts Council, 2020, p. 24). The Otis Report found that the effect of policy and resource "inaction" set the state further apart from other states at a time when production had increased, resulting in negative growth between 2018 and 2021 (CVL Economics, 2023, p. 9) in California. The report acknowledged barriers to the creative economy regarding accessibility to building and expanding apprenticeships in the creative sectors.

Notwithstanding efforts by various organizations to cultivate a K–12 rich arts learning ecosystem, students in California still fall short in preparedness for the robust creative economy in California. Although California has a long-standing commitment to arts education policy, including the establishment of standards, frameworks, and initiatives to support high-quality arts education in schools, substantial difficulties persist in comprehending and executing these policies.

The Individual and the Locus of Influence (The Cognitive Processing of Policy)

To consider the needs of the whole child in a policy context, one must first recognize the uniqueness that students bring to the classroom. Access to a global perspective is at their fingertips. They are influenced by various factors at different levels of interactions in their environments and are affected more directly by the elements in closer proximity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Peppler et al., 2021).

The whole-child model emphasizes the importance of addressing the individual student's physical, social, and cognitive development. It requires a cross-sector collaboration with agencies and entities providing various resources. Slade and Griffith (2013) argued for collaboration across government agencies and offices serving families and children, simultaneously recognizing bureaucratic systems as barriers to systemic change. Noddings (2014) emphasized the need to focus on the whole child, promoting intentional connections to the individual student. This approach also supports the development of non-cognitive skills positively associated with adult outcomes and academic achievement. The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (2024) advocated for grounding education in human development, central to the whole-child model. To fully adopt this approach, policy development must shift to include each child's central and peripheral environment.

The Learning Policy Institute et al. (2022) established the "Whole Child Policy Table" to align policymakers, researchers, and community members to move forward with the initiative. As of 2019, the arts were not explicitly referenced in reviewing the Whole Child Policy Toolkit (Learning Policy Institute et al., 2022.) and California Whole Child Model- California One System Serving the Whole Child (California Department of Education, 2013). Although the California Department of Education enacted a Whole Child Division, the connection to the arts is through Social Emotional Learning Competencies.

The Kennedy Center (2020), in an effort to define parallels between arts education and the whole-child model, conducted a study aligning whole-child tenets to arts education. The tenets are a healthy environment, safe environment, engaging environment, personalized (child-centered) learning, and challenging globally focused [environments]. This study drew a

connection between the ecosystem cultivated when the arts are present and the ecosystem centered on holistic child development.

Cantor (2021) stated the following:

> The dynamic concept of whole-child development, learning, and thriving that my colleagues and I have crafted emerges from research describing the malleability, agency, and developmental range of children as they draw on available resources and build a web of relations and experiences across multiple settings. If well-designed and intentional, these webs can provide the foundation for the development of complex skills that ultimately reveal the talent, passions, and potential of each child. (p. 21)

Students' skills can grow outside of the classroom while participating in the arts and in sports. Cantor (2021) underscored healthy development, rich learning, safety and belonging, and the development of skills, habits, and mindsets. There are various approaches to promoting healthy growth, knowledge, and success, but longstanding practices and outdated policies regarding school structure, evaluation, and teacher development have hindered progress. The current education system, including the federal laws that mandate high-stakes testing in reading and math, does not facilitate the effective implementation or integration of these methods, nor does it prioritize collaboration between schools and the community. As suggested by Peppler et al. (2023), "Arts education can have a more holistic impact on youth" throughout various aspects of their lives (p. 3). Policies supporting sustainable resources are critical for actualizing whole-child arts-inclusive school structures.

Importance of Beliefs, Experiences, and Values in Policy Implementation

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Develpoment (ASCD) was cited by Slade and Griffith (2013), emphasizing the basis of policy decision-making,"If decisions about education policy and practice started by asking what works for the child, how would resources—time, space, and human—be arranged to ensure each child's success? If the student were truly at

the center of the system, what could we achieve?" (2007, p. 4). To achieve centering student [success] in the system, we must consider the human and structural influences guiding the current processes.

Owens and Valesky (2015) examined participation as "mental and emotional" involvement and explored the depth of engagement required for participants to be all in relative to effective change (p. 296). A factor that affects change is the belief-bias effect, which is relevant to human beliefs that affect an individual's ability to accept a conclusion or intended outcome that does not align with their existing values, knowledge, and experiences. Accepting policy as fact without sufficient information and time to process, draw connections, identify relevant applications, and release existing beliefs can lead to policy implementation failure, as seen with the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965). According to research on the self-efficacy of primary teachers in art education (Welch, 1995), a teacher's level of confidence in their artistic abilities affects their readiness to include the arts in the classroom (Leonard & Odutola, 2016). Educators must believe in the work and remove ego and self-interest to activate creativity and ownership in simple change and with policy adoption and policy implementation context leading to belief in the possibilities of new ideas and, ultimately, change. Furthermore, educators' perceptions can affect what they believe is possible for student achievement. Negative perceptions are more prevalent in historically under-resourced communities (Madon et al., 1997), which may also impact policy implementation and practices. Owens and Valesky (2015) argued that in an organizational change context, participants' responses to organizational events are shaped by their experiences over time, rather than just the events immediately preceding their behavior, when viewing the necessary changes at the school level.

Challenges in Implementing Arts Education Policy in California Schools

Covert (2022) stated that successful implementation, access, and decision-making processes are interconnected. One element that can significantly challenge the interconnectedness in California schools is the need for more sustainable funding and resources for arts education. Despite the state's commitment to the arts, budget cuts and other resource constraints make it difficult for many schools to provide high-quality arts education. The California Alliance for Arts Education (2021) revealed that 89% of California districts struggle to meet the state's recommended levels of arts education staffing.

Importance of Professional Development for Arts Educators

As stated above, change requires access to effective resources, time to unpack the proposed changes, and meaningful strategies for implementation. Professional development is the mechanism by which each can support arts educators. Researchers from the Woodworth et al. (2022) reported that 47% of California school districts provide professional development opportunities in support of arts instruction. This lack of support can make it difficult for teachers to stay up to date with the latest research and best practices in arts education, impacting the quality of instruction they can provide. According to the literature, teachers must engage in effective professional development to enhance their subject matter expertise, keep updated with the latest developments in their field, reflect on child development, establish connections with colleagues, boost their confidence, remain relevant, and, above all, stay motivated to continue doing the work. In the *No Child Left Behind* (2001) era, professional development, among other factors, was a great wedge of progress on a local level. High-stakes testing and highly qualified teacher assertions at school sites separated traditional core subject teachers from art teachers.

Professional development and learning environments are needed that support diverse thinking and create opportunities for innovation, preservation, and cultivation of teacher leaders, not doers. Sabol (2013) observed teachers reporting job satisfaction more often received, among other factors, professional development and adequate time of practice and application of knowledge with colleagues. As Seidel et al. (2009) affirmed:

> Arts educators need pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities to help them develop tools and strategies for observing student learning and identifying signs of quality. In addition, teachers need professional development experiences that allow them to reflect on their philosophy of practice through the lens of quality, considering their purposes, approaches, and effectiveness. (p. 86)

Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2014) noted that "[A]dult development effectively makes schools growth-enhancing places for children and adults." School leaders identified evidence of the value and impact of professional development when teachers worked with teaching artists to increase their knowledge of the visual arts curriculum, and the school leaders increased their capacity to support their teachers with integration strategies (Cunnington et al., 2014).

Complementary to a growth-enhancing environment is the assessment of student learning. This area has a persistent imbalance in the assessment of art education, which should align with the philosophical foundations of creativity and artistic practice and be regarded equally to math, science, and English (Allison, 2013). Like core academic subjects, the arts involve trial and error, problem-solving, critical thinking, and a mix of nature and nurture, emphasizing what comes naturally to individuals versus what is learned. Assessment of art education is formative and ongoing. Hargreaves et al. (2013) said, "[T]he U.S. has focused on whatis easily measured rather than on what is educaiotnally valued (p. 24)." Considering what is

needed for effective professional development, consider Fullan's (2003, p. 62) thought that change requires the individual and the system to activate with the individual taking action alone and when possible, along with the system, because one cannot change without the other.

Human Sense-Making in Policy Implementation

Spillane (2005) emphasized the importance of human sense-making in policy implementation, noting that "implementing agents" must first understand the policymakers' intent for the policy to advance or fail. Covert (2022) noted the influence of personal behaviors and biases on administrative decision-making relative to colleagues in the same decision-making space. Considering the impetus of policy development being geared toward problem-solving and effect change, policymakers must recognize the need for a clear, concrete understanding of the change process paired with resources and proper training when looking at a school as an organization. All community members' human beliefs, experiences, values, and behaviors that influence processes and outcomes cannot be ignored if effective policy implementation is desired.

Lack of Clarity in Policy Implementation

Clarity on what is required to comply with state arts education policy is pervasive. Placier et al. (2000) suggested that the advancement of federal and state policy on a local level can depend on its strength and clarity. There needs to be more consistency in how schools and districts interpret and implement the state's arts education policy, which in its current state can lead to inequities in access to arts education. This lack of clarity can make it difficult for educators to know what is expected of them and prohibit creating practical arts education programs. Researchers have found gaps in implementing standards and practice (Bequette &

Brennan, 2008; Lim, 2017). Without clarity and clear guidance, district and school leaders may act as "nonauthorized policymakers," redefining and redirecting policy, affecting implementation (Levinson et al., 2009, as cited in Shaw, 2019, p. 187).

Summary of Literature Review

In this literature review, I examined the flow of arts-inclusive education policy and the complexities of interpretation that affect action at each level. To delineate the interplay within and through the policy ecosystem, I explored literature identifying the sociocultural and psychological influence on policy interpretation and implementation. The examination of policy and practice could not be interrogated without reiterating the proven value of arts-inclusive education as a point of reference. Additionally, I investigated the context of bias effect and values translating to action. Understanding the direct and indirect impacts of policy perspective and position were essential in the design of the literature review in that the order of policies addressed was related to the ecosystems theory.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this convergent mixed methods study (Creswell, 2009) was to explore policy interpretation and implementation strategies of arts-inclusive education policy in a single setting and extrapolate school leaders' (all individuals at the school site with influence on the ecosystem) knowledge and understanding of whole child inclusive arts education policy on the federal, state, and school levels. The goal was to understand the influence of the broader policy context on the school site's goals and ability to operationalize policy and to identify barriers to effective implementation of a socially just arts-inclusive school environment.

I focused on a well-rounded, whole-child education in the context of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (1994,1995, 2005). Based on existing scholarship, the literature showed policy interpretation and implementation is affected by design and the individuals involved in the various phases of the policy process. For this study, each sphere of the ecosystem represented the flow of policy and the actors involved. The purpose of this study was to establish plans for future research and provide resources to support school-level buy-in, implementation, and sustainability to increase equity for all students. Though whole-child arts inclusive policy currently exists on the federal, state, and local levels, there are inconsistencies in where the arts are situated in the policies. Reviewing the federal policies, ESEA, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) gave insight into the complexities of policy development and implementation on a national scale with the nuanced elements illuminated similarly on the state and local level.

Due to the sample size of the school site, exceptional ethical care was employed to maintain the anonymity of the participants (Creswell, 2009). This chapter reviews the research questions, includes sample interview questions, and considers the context of the study participants, data collection, and analysis process.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to conduct this study:

RQ1: How is arts education policy operationalized on a school campus?

RQ2: How does the school structure support whole-child inclusive arts education?

RQ3: What is the relationship between school leaders' understanding of successful whole-child inclusive arts education and equitable access to such education?

To explore the research questions, I employed convergent mixed methods in which I collected quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and analyzed separately to determine similarities and differences (Creswell, 2009). I utilized the recursive process of the Constructivist Grounded Theory (Flick, 2014, pp. 6-9) data collection and coding along with a hybrid deductive model for the interview data, and descriptive coding was used for the quantitative data.

The Constructivist Grounded Theory (Flick, 2014) process was ongoing and occurred in three phases. In phase one, I employed a robust methodology, combining open coding to identify themes and patterns with inductive coding to incorporate codes that emerged in conversation. I used a hybrid deductive and inductive model alongside open coding to interrogate the data, providing a balance of flexibility and structure that instills confidence in the research approach. Axial coding followed, whereby the data expressed themes like gaps in detailed policy awareness

(federal, state, local) and resource disparity. Lastly, I employed selective coding to refine themes that best exemplified the study's core findings using hand coding.

The rationale for this study design was rooted in the complexity of and intersecting characteristics of the guiding theoretical framework. In devising and implementing policy, many factors contribute to its success or failure at various stages. Similarly, in Bronfenbrenner's framework (1994, 1995, 2005), each layer has influence and provides context to effectiveness at various stages. The convergent mixed-methods approach allowed for the collection and analysis of data that expressed internalized values, beliefs, and ideas juxtaposed with quantified values identifying relationships to context and ultimately provided a comprehensive perspective addressing the research inquiry. For this study, convergent mixed methods complemented the nuance of policy development and implementation and helped reveal an exhaustive story inclusive of knowledge and understanding, resource availability, and beliefs and psychological influence (Spillane, 2005) in a variety of contexts.

Setting and Sample

Research Site

The research site was a small independent charter authorized over 20 ago, serving only one grade level and adding grades as students progressed. The school site was located in central Los Angeles with an enrollment of approximately 275 students with a capacity of 500. The English Language Learners represented 42.9% of the school population with 91.6% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch. Additionally, .8% identified as African-American, .4% Filipino, and 98.5% Hispanic or Latino, and .4% White. As of 2020, the most recent charter renewal petition, 333 students were enrolled. There were 38 members of the school community, including

board members. The charter had two art-focused teachers, one visual arts and one digital media arts teacher.

The mission of the school was to prepare students for leadership in the area of arts and business. Comprehensive courses in visual and performing arts were provided and the school viewed arts as a powerful tool to engage students in academic studies and in life. Their most recent charter approval highlighted arts integration as integral by design while respecting the art forms as standalone. They also noted that external factors will have an effect on school offerings.

Contributors

With regard to the quantitative data, 31 educators were included in the quantitative phase of this study. Contributors were selected using convenience sampling (Leavy, 2022), focusing on all roles as educational leaders as representative of the school population responsible for receiving, interpreting, and implementing school policy as outlined by the state and the local school board. Because of the small sample size, I did not collect age, gender and ethnicity data were in this study. The demographic information I collected included range of years in the current role, their current title, and educational degree.

In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative section of this study included semistructured interviews (Patten & Newhart, 1996) of school alumni and educational leaders to provide a rich in-depth insight into the interpretation and understanding of whole-child arts inclusive policy as it was experienced while enrolled as a student and as an educational leader. These contributors were chosen based on accessibility, convenience sampling (Leavy, 2022), and the snowball technique. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

Alumni

- 2 contributors,
- Enrolled in the school at least 2 years,
- Graduate—class of 2022 or 2023,
- Knowledgeable of the school's arts education requirements,
- Various demographic background,
- Satisfactory academic standings at graduation, and
- Enrolled in post-secondary learning program;

Educational Leaders

- Current employee,
- Demonstrated influence/input on school curriculum, and
- Demonstrated influence/input on school climate/culture.

I interviewed educational leaders to gather a comprehensive, nuanced perspective on their understanding and interpretation of the whole-child arts inclusive education policy.

I conducted an additional qualitative analysis (Leavy, 2022) on the school budget, the bell schedule, and the active course offerings. I reviewed these documents to increase the accuracy of data analysis and ensure a deeper understanding of the structure of the school.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Instruments

I employed two data instruments in this study. First, I used questionnaires/surveys. I collected demographic data and responses to closed-ended questions using Qualtrics. Second, I conducted and recorded interviews using structured open-ended questions to encourage the

interviewee to speak freely, providing authentic responses based on experience and context within the school setting. I analyzed responses using coding by hand and via Dedoose (Dedoose software tool version 9.2.006, 2023) (see sample questions in Appendix C).

Procedures

During the first phase, I collaborated with the school administration to obtain board approval for the study. In the second phase, I presented the study to potential contributors by visiting the school site and giving the community an overview of the study, its objectives, and goals. After the introduction, I shared the survey with the school community and collected data. Simultaneously, I arranged and conducted interviews.

Data Collection

This study consisted of three phases after receiving agreement from the school site to participate and approval from the university to conduct the study: introduction of the research study to the school community; deployment of the survey and collection of data; and scheduling and conducting interviews.

For quantitative data collection, I utilized Qualtrics. I developed the survey questions with the research questions as a guide and conducted interviews via Zoom to ensure the content was captured accurately. I also took notes during the interviews to identify themes aligned with each research question.

Following the interviews, I made quick notes about the experience, including mention of the school's environment and any external happenings related to education and social justice. I used the Constructivist Grounded Theory (Flick, 2014) in three phases to identify themes highlighted in the conversation. Before beginning the coding process in Dedoose, I generated

transcripts from the semistructured interviews. I reviewed recordings to check for clarity in the text and applied assigned pseudonyms to each transcript.

After cleaning the transcripts, I uploaded the files to Dedoose to begin the first phase of coding. I completed the open and axial coding in Dedoose, and completed the final selective coding by hand to draw deeper connections to the data.

Simultaneously, I collected survey data. To address the open-ended responses collected in the survey, I extrapolated the responses and uploaded them to Dedoose to complete the qualitative coding process. To assign pseudonyms to the open-ended survey responses; I used the letter C for survey contributor along with the order in which the survey response was received (i.e., C1).

Once the survey was closed, I analyzed the responses using descriptive statistics to determine the central tendency (i.e., mean and standard deviation). I conducted additional analysis and review of the school budget, bell schedule, and active course offerings to understand the documented communication (Leavy, 2022).

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics (Leavy, 2022) to analyze the survey data to find the data set's central tendency (e.g., the mean and standard deviation). This was done to better understand the population and to gain a better understanding of their knowledge and understanding of policies at their school and on the federal and state levels.

In phase one of the qualitative data analysis, I used open coding to identify themes and patterns. This aligned with the research questions. I wanted to hear where knowledge and understanding were present, where resources surfaced (available or lacking), and how beliefs

were shared. I used a hybrid deductive and inductive model alongside open coding to interrogate the data, allowing for flexibility and structure. In this process, other themes emerged. Phase two analysis presented the opportunity to interrogate the data further, including what was learned in the first round and, where possible, what connections existed. For phase three, I conducted selective coding to fine-tune the codes that best describe the story.

Data Integration

Data integration played a significant role in identifying the study's findings. I utilized triangulation to cross-reference the qualitative and quantitative findings. Where possible, the document review offered greater details.

Limitations

This study presented several limitations. First, the sample size was small and the number of responses I would receive for qualitative and quantitative data were uncertain. As a result, I extended the data collection process beyond my original deadline to gather more responses. Secondly, obtaining feedback from alumni posed a critical challenge because graduates typically move on with their lives after high school, which affected the data collection timeline. Lastly, the simple nature of conducting a mixed methods study that required having valid quality data for cross-referencing and triangulation was a challenge due to the nature of the study.

Ethical Considerations

I followed ethical considerations and informed consent procedures for all contributors. I protected their privacy and confidentiality throughout the study. All contributors' identifiers were protected by the use of pseudonyms. I collected all survey data electronically using Qualtrics, which removed all personally identifiable information. I recorded and stored interview

data in password-protected files and only accessible to the interviewer. Additionally, preceding the data collection process, I completed Loyola Marymount University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process.

American Psychological Association (APA) (*American Psychologist Association Style*, n.d.)stated "Pronoun usage requires specificity and care on the author's part." For this study, gender was not a data set requested in the demographic information. To provide the reader with clarity and ensure readers understand whether the quotes represent the experiences of a single person or a diverse group of individuals, I used the pronouns he and she to report interview contributor quotes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter begins with a review of the study's purpose and analytical process, followed by a presentation of the qualitative and quantitative findings pertaining to the study's main research questions and the chapter's conclusion.

The purpose of this study was to extrapolate school leaders' and school alumni knowledge and understanding of whole-child inclusive arts education policy. The survey questions asked educational leaders to rate their knowledge of policy, comfort level, and resources available for implementation and about their past experience with whole child arts inclusive education and its influence on their current role. I included open-ended questions in the survey aligned with the interview questions that mirrored the survey content in long form response where contributors reflected to share specific stories and experiences. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How is arts education policy operationalized on a school campus?

RQ2: How does the school structure support whole-child inclusive arts education?

RQ3: What is the relationship between school leaders' understanding of successful whole-child inclusive arts education and equitable access to such education?

To address the research questions, I used a mixed-methods research design. To collect quantitative data, I conducted a 21-question survey, including Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions. The data collection process occurred from October 18, 2023, through January 9, 2024. I administered the survey through Qualtrics, a web-based software. Additionally, I conducted seven semistructured interviews using Zoom, a cloud-based communication platform.

The interviews were open to educational leaders and alumni. I interviewed two school alumni via Zoom to gather different contexts from educational leaders. These alumni attended the school for over three years, graduated in the past two years, participated in art classes, represented diverse backgrounds, demonstrated satisfactory academic standings at graduation, and were currently enrolled in a post-secondary learning program.

Thirty-one contributors received the Arts Education and the Whole Child Survey, and 21 responded (N = 21) using descriptive statistics (Leavy, 2022). Despite the small sample size, the survey response rate of 67.75% supported the strength and confidence of the study. I present the results of the survey, interview, and document review in this chapter. I used Grounded Theory Coding (Flicks, 2014) and a hybrid deductive model for the interview data. I used descriptive coding for the quantitative data.

Contributors

This study received participation from a wide variety of school leaders in an urban school in southern California with a racial and ethnically diverse population. Table 1 below shows the diverse representation of survey contributors. Roles represented ranged from principal to student aide reflecting a wide variety of roles, responsibilities, perspectives, and proximity to the student experience.

Table 1

Roles of Arts Education and the Whole Child

Roles	*n* (%)
Survey contributors	(*n* = 21)
Teaching and learning support	14 (66.6)
School administration	3 (14.2)
Student Support Services	4 (19)

Another factor reflecting the diversity of survey contributors was the length of time they had been working in their current role, as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Length of Time in Current Length of Time in Role

Time	n	%
1–2 years	7	33.33
3–4 years	7	33.33
5+	7	33.33

Additionally, seven of the contributors including school alumni and current employees participated in the interview process. The interview was comprised of 16 open-ended questions designed to provide structure to ensure alignment with answering research questions, while also allowing for freedom and comfort to encourage clarity and authentic expression. Table 3 provides details on the roles of interview contributors.

Table 3

Roles of Arts Education and the Whole Child

Roles	*n* (%)
Interview contributors	(*n* = 7)
Teachers	3 (42.8)
School administrators	2 (28.6)
Alumni	2 (28.6)

The diverse backgrounds of contributors were intentional to highlight the impact on policy awareness through the lens of the school's ecology. Additionally, contributors served a diverse age range and grade level of students based on the school's population.

I sought to understand if and how the contributors related to the existing whole-child inclusive arts policy. RQ1 was essential to determining policy awareness and its presence in real-time on the school campus. RQ2 investigated the actions taken by educational leaders and school structure to ensure that policy is actionable and accessible on-site. Finally, RQ3 focused on the impact of educational leaders' beliefs and past experiences on policy implementation.

To effectively address the three research questions, I employed the Constructivist Grounded Theory Coding method for the interview questions (Flick, 2014) in conjunction with a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive processes. Descriptive statistics analysis was utilized to determine the central tendency (e.g., the mean and standard deviation) from survey data (Leavy, 2022).

I began the open coding process by revisiting Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (1994, 1995, 2005) as their foundation. I wanted to understand how whole-child inclusive arts policy flowed from the outermost sphere of influence to the most influential

sphere. Before reviewing the interview responses, I entered deductive codes from the planning phase as baseline codes. These codes included themes of knowledge and understanding (federal, state, local), resources and support (budget, facilities, training), and belief systems.

In phase 1, I used open coding to identify themes and patterns. I also used inductive coding to incorporate additional codes that emerged, such as making art visible and accommodating students with different expectations. I used a hybrid deductive and inductive model alongside open coding to interrogate the data, allowing for flexibility and structure. Table 4 illustrates examples of what I observed in the first phase of coding.

Table 4

Open Coding Responses Examples

Code/Theme	Response
Knowledge and Understanding: Uncertainty about policy text	"Two kinds of components of arts education . . . designated arts electives . . . integrated arts education." "I have very limited knowledge; I know there's a state standard. CA has an arts and music framework." "I have striven to sort of incorporate art into my curriculum." "I'll admit, I'm not particularly well versed on the policy as it is written." "For state, I don't really know." "The easier it is for me to understand with the school, everything at some point circles back to a holistic view of what students are getting out of this." "It's like a holistic approach, right?"
Resources and support—Great administrative support	"Federal and state dollars to arts initiative." "We definitely want to make sure the resources are available for our art teachers to have what they need for purposeful programming." "I have support of administration." "I've never had an administrator say yes to me. As much as he said yes, it took me a while to trust it."
Conflict with resources	"Prop 28—I don't think I've been to specific training." "Making sure we have appropriate community partners." "I've talked to teachers who have been here for like five, six years, and . . . this [arts integration] has never been brought up." "We can't find a dance teacher." "There is a teacher teaching dance, but she doesn't know anything about dance." "I do think that it will be a factor . . . Funding always ties back to like also how many students we have [and that] is something that the school is struggling with." "Lack of facilities because it feels a little shoved in the corner."
Belief systems—Belief in the arts	"I think there's a huge difference between students feeling like they are working with college level or state of the art materials versus a student feeling like they are working with . . . what we can swing." "But it's [art] something that I feel like is a big necessity." "I would certainly say I think my experience in the arts helped me get this job. I performed quite a bit as a kid." I grew up as a theater kid because I was a high-energy child. And so, I only knew how to function if I felt I was seen and heard."
Adaptability	"We do the best with what we have." "I have a library in my classroom."

Axial coding followed, whereby the data expressed the abovementioned themes, such as gaps in detailed policy awareness (federal, state, local) and a disparity in resources that aligned with the accessibility of student offerings. Due to the iterative cycle of analysis (e.g., post-

interview notes, memos, and transcript review) employing the constant comparative method comparing "data with date, data with code, and code with code to find similarities and differences" (Flick, 2014) this is where acknowledgment of school programming, not specific federal, state, or local policy was offered, and it became more prevalent that school programming was the most accessible to interview contributors. In this phase, clarity of themes emerged as final categories. Additionally, I analyzed quantitative data, utilizing descriptive statistics to expand or complement the qualitative data. Table 5 presents initial coding/themes and the corresponding refined category or discrepancy based on participant responses.

Table 5

Contributors Responses: Initial Themes and Refined Categories

Initial code/Theme	Refined category/Discrepancy
Knowledge and understanding: Uncertainty about policy text	School vs. state/federal policy or programming
Resources and support: Great administrative support	Very supportive administration, strong relationships, funding to equip space with no agency
Conflict with resources; Adaptability	
Belief systems: Belief in the arts	Educational leaders, students, parents/guardians experience

Employing selective coding (Chetty, 2020), I refined the themes that best exemplified the study's core findings using hand coding. The final categories were then aligned with the research questions. Table 6 showcases the discrepancies contributors shared and the final categories that emerged from the data.

Table 6

Refined Category/Discrepancy – Axial Coding Logic and Results

Refined category/Discrepancy	Final category
School vs. state/federal policy or programming	Conceptual knowledge
	Detailed understanding
Very supportive administration, strong relationships, funding to equip space with no agency	Available resources
	Unavailable resources
Educational leaders, students, parent/guardians experience	Influence of Whole Child Inclusive Art Experience Fond Experience Not-so-fond—Experience Experience+ Experience-

RQ1: How is Arts Education Policy Operationalized on a School Campus?:

Policy Awareness

Chronosystem and Mesosystem

Conceptual Knowledge (CK)

The study's findings revealed insufficient federal and state policy awareness among educational leaders and the essential role of in-depth policy knowledge that guides program design for developing school-site whole-child inclusive arts programs.

Conceptual Knowledge (CK), as it emerged from the data, referred to theoretical knowledge and the use of policy-level language (general reference to whole child, holistic, well-being). It is understanding the overarching principles and goals of educating the whole child and a general awareness of federal and state requirements.

During the discussion on policy on the federal, state, and school levels, 1 of 5 contributors referenced multiple aspects of the instruments that make up state policy (i.e., state

standards, high school graduation requirements, arts and music framework; Spillane, 2005). Additionally, all five contributors referenced concepts and policy elements such as a holistic approach, well-roundedness, or well-being while explaining arts educational policy in the context of the whole child model.

Morgan focused on the state and federal response, first highlighting the funding opportunities, saying, "I think there are a lot of initiatives, especially coming out of the pandemic, that have given federal and state dollars to the arts initiatives." He continued by discussing the different ways of offering the arts through "designated arts . . . integrated arts education." He and Jordan spoke about student engagement and making connections to support student learning. Jordan said, "I think that people will not only get a well-rounded education, but buil[d] to have a deeper appreciation of all these disciplines because we're able to make these connections together." Casey also referred to making connections by "incorporating art into the curriculum."

Jordan offered a different perspective others had not shared: the recognition of the instruments that make up California's state policy. "I know the state requires one year of Visual and Performing Arts . . . I know that there are state standards . . . California itself, has like an arts and music framework."

Cameron and Riley offered complementary ideas related to the holistic approach, which involves seeing each student as an individual and using the arts to meet each student's developmental needs. Cameron said, "Because everything has to serve the child, and they will find a different area of excellence or specialty or interest." Riley said, "And also the idea of

exploring, like the diverse needs of students and diverse interest, especially specifically in the arts, because the arts is like a huge range of things."

The analysis of the open-ended survey responses corresponds with insufficient knowledge of state-level policy as referenced above. Table 7 below reflects the state-level policy awareness; 9 of 21 (n = 42.8%), survey contributors stated they were unaware or wrote in n/a regarding thoughts or insights on state-level whole-child inclusive arts policy.

Table 7

Survey Contributors Responses to State Whole Child Inclusive Arts Policy Inquiry

C3	"I am unaware of these [state] policies and what they encompass."
C5	"Do not know"
C7	n/a
C11	"I'm not to familiar"
C12	"I'm knew to this and wouldn't really know."
C14	"[B]ased on wording alone, I am going to assume inclusive arts means providing more cultural centric arts education, in music and/or art. I don't keep track of state policy in general, so I've no idea."
C15	"Dance is required to graduate. Electives and after school programs cannot force students to pay for entry."
C16	"I do not know much about state policy regarding whole child inclusive arts education. I would like to learn more about it."
C18	"I'm not to familiar with state policy concerning whole—child inclusive arts education."
C19	"I do not know the current state policy on whole-child inclusive arts education."
C20	"The extent to my knowledge of current state policy is simply that theres a graduation component that requires students to have taken an arts class of some sort (maybe 1 year required? as an elective) in order to graduate with a CA high school diploma."
C21	n/a

Microsystem

Detailed Understanding

Data analysis expressed significant awareness of teaching and general assessment practices and class offerings at the school site. It also stressed that the school is doing its best.

There were inconsistencies in the details of all of the classes available, with most references to music and art being made.

Detailed Understanding (DU), as it emerged from the data, referred to a practical, in-depth understanding of how policies are executed in the day-to-day running of the school where specific teaching strategies, integration practices or observations, assessment processes, curriculum design approaches that align with whole child education format or mention of students as individuals and how to address their needs, inclusivity, positive student relationships, and supportive learning environments were stated.

The expression of detailed understanding landed in the following areas: class offerings, partnerships, and teaching and assessment. Several interview contributors, 4 of 5, highlighted multiple aspects identified in detailed understanding. Most occurrences were in teaching and assessment, with one contributor stating that assessment practices are not traditionally arts focused.

Expression of School Foundation

In discussing the purpose of the school, Morgan illuminated, “The founding narrative drives our school.” He also spoke about integrating the arts, “They [the arts] are mostly character education, and, you know, developing the whole child types of lessons. Social-emotional, well-being types of things are like celebrations of community, right, like for Hispanic Heritage Month, things like that.” Collectively, Morgan, Casey, Jordan, and Riley talked about the variety of art classes available to students designed, as Morgan shared, “to have purpose and meaning in their school day” to prepare students for “pathways to careers in the entertainment” and “arts and business,” as stated by Jordan and Casey.

Jordan and Riley shared information about the required art exploration series for students. Riley shared the offered the opportunity as follows:

> [Early on] They already start, and the students have to take classes, [art exploration], and they get to explore their interests, so they get to see, okay, I like art more, or I like film, or they take like a radio class and a bunch of art.

Community and Teaching

Three interview contributors discussed community partnerships that support the school's ability to offer a variety of classes. These partnerships exist because of relationships with the school's Visual and Performing Art teachers. They are designed, as presented by Casey, "to put art at the forefront of the curriculum." Riley and Cameron talked explicitly about the exploratory aspect of the partnership offering. Cameron said the partnerships are "to make sure that their [students] educational experience includes discovery and experimentation in what calls to them instead of just regurgitating facts."

Jordan and Casey discussed the annual Visual and Performing Art showcase when considering teaching practices, assessment, and how art is presented across the school community. Jordan highlighted the "Family Fiesta . . . for the parents to see, hey, this is what your child has been working on." Casey focused on the collaborative aspect, "the collaboration that happens for the show with all of the classes in the creation of artwork and promotion of the experience." Jordan added, "We're creating murals with both the leadership and art classes." Talking about his teaching, Cameron emphasized:

> I do a thing with them that they always think they are getting away with something, where they design book covers for the texts we are reading. And they think it is a cheat. Because they just get to draw with colored pencils for a couple of days, except they have to infer, they have to figure out what is a visual representation of this 150-page novel.

Casey noted the excitement of bringing the arts into his classroom, “I love [incorporating art]. The projects I have students do in history classes often incorporate art.” Riley said, “So every time we read a book, I love doing [a]one-pager, which is basically like a bunch of artwork with writing. Also, have students do group work assignment[s] like posters.”

Jordan referred to his observation of another teacher:

> [The teacher] took a periodic table of elements, and they [the students] drew something in there as they were writing the symbols and stuff down, so we had this really big poster of all these elements, all the elements that that the students drew.

Assessment

Morgan, Jordan, and Cameron stated some assessment elements, including using the arts as an assessment tool for core subjects and assessing art skills. Morgan introduced Multiple Opportunities to Display Mastery (MODM):

> So, if a test is given, it’s one part of the midterm. Then, there can be a piece of art, a presentation, or another kind of creative outlet used to convey that same knowledge and information in a totally different way.

Morgan also referred to the VAPA department, “They have their own mechanisms for grading that are aligned to traditional mechanisms, like assignments and point values for those assignments.”

Jordan, on the other hand, spoke of an informal assessment that occurs with the VAPA showcase, where parents can see student progress:

> It does not necessarily have to be evaluated by [a grade] but for the students to take ownership of the project they did and to show that off to their friends and family. During this kind of night [VAPA showcase], I think, to me, that’s like their proper assessment for the work that they have accomplished, and for all the stuff that they’ve really put, like hard work and effort on.

Cameron shared a summative assessment approach, “I want to hear how they are being shaped. I want them to know that their voice matters in this room.” He added, “It’s a lot of listening, it’s a lot of checking in with them; I try to do that as informally as possible because as soon as I get a quiz to them, they’ll freak out.” He also uses probing questions about the artistic choices to check for understanding of the literature, such as, “Why did you pick that color? . . . that font? . . . that picture?”

Although Riley did not explicitly mention assessment, she previously spoke of using one-pagers after completing a story, a summative assessment process.

Casey was the only person who stated assessment in a broader context, “assessment tends to be broader because most of the projects they [the students] do are not strictly art projects.”

From a technical aspect, policy awareness is needed relative to the outer layers of the ecosystem that inform the school’s design. While federal and state policies show up in general terms in the data, school-level awareness presents a more cohesive direction and implementation toward the school’s foundational focus. In the next section, I will share details of the gap between the two.

The Gap

This study uncovers a pronounced gap between the in-depth understanding and comprehension of policy and familiarity with school-level information that allows a system to function. The gap amplifies a pivotal challenge in aligning policy awareness with complete absorption and capitulation to policy for maximum implementation.

The disparity unveiled in contributors emphasized the importance of incorporating the arts into education as a tool for supporting holistic learning, as it helps students develop and

supports making cross-curricular connections without the consistency of the expressed connection of knowledge of the importance of the levers of policy: state standards, high school graduation requirements, arts, and music framework. The responses did not include the context of the California Education Code (California Education Code & California County Superintendents Office, n.d.) or the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), which leads educational policy across the nation and emphasizes the arts as an essential component of a well-rounded education.

In Cameron's words, "For the state and all that, I don't really know." Casey pointed out, "I'll admit, I'm not particularly well versed in actual policy as it is written."

When referring to detailed understanding at the school site, the analyses process revealed that contributors were comfortable speaking about school offerings with limited detail. Contributors emphasized what happens or what is desired in their classrooms or at the school site; however, substantive policy integration was not identified from a technical lens as present in curriculum development, instructional planning, and assessment practices.

The survey responses also yielded a gap in substance, as detailed below. When asked to share thoughts or insights on state-level whole-child inclusive arts policy, the data reflected school awareness, generalized challenges, and advocacy for whole-child inclusive arts education. Later in the findings, I will share details about the national policy question that resulted in 5% of survey contributors identifying as very knowledgeable of national policy.

Survey contributors C1, C2, C4, C6, and C9 expressed concern about the lack of inclusive arts education that caters to the whole child. C1 believed the absence of such an education system "Turns students off from school." C2 thinks the arts "Need more attention, as

they [the arts] are definitely neglected." C4 believed the benefits of whole-child education are not linked to arts education as they should be. C6 noticed that many schools do not prioritize inclusive arts education, and C9 thought that not all schools provide the necessary funding for arts programming. C8 and C10 believed the school had a good approach to implementation, with C10 adding that the "lack of resources has not made it possible for the school to truly create a whole child inclusive arts education." C13 and C17 emphasized the importance of having an arts program in schools. C13 believed schools should allocate specific funds to the arts program, and C17 thought an arts program should be a mandatory part of any curriculum. Although the above exposes real challenges in the whole child arts education landscape, the data is unclear about their technical understanding of the whole child inclusive arts policy.

Resource Management and Accessibility

I found that educational leaders were confident about the high level of support available from their administrator, with 3 of 5 contributors emphasizing the high level of support from the school administration. Further findings revealed a significant breach in the volume of financial resources relative to the need, with 2 of 5 contributors speaking affirmingly about the budget and access to funds. Nevertheless, actionable professional development plans specifically for whole-child inclusive arts education have yet to be established but are strongly desired by multiple contributors. 2 of 5 contributors spoke about external professional development with no evidence of an internal professional development structure. I will share details supporting the above findings centered on available and unavailable resources in this section.

Available Resources

Administrative Support

Cameron passionately offered, “I told our principal when I first made it to this school I’ve never had an administrator say yes to me as much as he has said yes to me . . . The freedom to be able to say I need these things and then be supported in those things is tremendous here.” Casey responded, “I know I have the support of the administration.” An administration member reported, “We do our best to support them [art teachers].” Additionally,

> But I hope that we are in a position where, you know, when supplies are needed, whether that is a chunk of new instruments, or whether that is just more art supplies, or whether that is a new initiative to kind of get the program up and running, that we are financially ready to kind of make those investments and to support our teachers who want to create those new opportunities.

Budget and Materials

According to Morgan, “We definitely want to make sure that the resources are available for our arts teachers to have what they need to have purposeful programming, so that’s done intentionally right, as we designed the budgets for the school year.” He also discussed the importance of having the financial resources to cover tuition and fees for students wanting to take external classes. Jordan contributed, “We got a couple of grants to get a bunch of instruments; we also got a grant to get some new computers, like, really good ones I just saw come today; I was kind of shocked.”

Cameron mentioned the principal saying yes when he needed things, but nothing specific to the budget was mentioned. Casey and Riley did not acknowledge funding availability.

Professional Development

During the discussion about professional development, seeking training outside of the school was mentioned. The school encouraged staff to seek outside professional development because all training cannot happen at the school site. Jordan noted, “We encourage teachers to do some sort of professional development outside of the school. It is something that, because we cannot provide everything in-house, but for them to branch off to go to different places.” Jordan later added, “I know our teachers last year, they went on a training, I have just forgot[ten] what that was called. It dealt with CTE.”

Jordan and Morgan shared professional development experiences that they believe helped them in their roles, but neither reported a structured, current format for themselves or the school community.

Morgan described personal past experiences with professional development:

> [Q]uite some time ago, including project-based learning. I think that they helped more than anything...understand the importance of being mindful of the integration of those kinds of techniques into lessons and looking for opportunities for creative outlets for students.” He added that current professional development was focused on grant opportunities and tips for appropriate spending.

Jordan discussed opportunities to stay connected with colleagues in their higher education program. The goal of the conversations is to stay connected because “[He] sometimes doesn’t know all the answers,” and coming together allows them to bounce ideas off of each other. He believed it was a good way to keep growing.

Unavailable Resources

In the discussion about challenges, interview and survey contributors were asked to state how or if the school has addressed the challenges. Table 8 pointed out contributors’ perceptions

and experiences with needing more resources (i.e., challenges) to actualize plans. The overarching responses from 4 of 5 staff interview contributions and 12 of 21 (n = 57%) survey contributions accentuated concerns about funding, staffing, professional development, and a general decrease in resources with facilities posing a considerable barrier to the school community's ability to fully engage in the caliber of program desired by the school community.

Table 8

Unavailable Resources and Challenges

What challenges, if any, have been encountered in ensuring equitable access to arts education? Of the challenges listed above, how have they been addressed?	
Morgan	"I mean, money, to be sure is always a challenge and making sure that we have what we need." (Money)
Casey	"I think looking sort of broader, statewide, and then sort of nationwide, we've seen a very large sort of deduction in for Arts Education, we've seen a lot of arts classes being cut all across the state and all across the country." (Funding)
Jordan	"We can't find a dance teacher . . . for some reason those are super hard to come by." (Staffing)
Riley	[In response to program availability at the school] "I just think resources have, you know, kind of diminish some of the things that they want to do or that they've had [planned] in the future" (Resources)
	"And I know that for the dance program, they do tell me like we would rather you get the funding through Woodcraft just because then we could get more stuff for whatever you want to whatever club wanna." (Staffing and Funding)
C1	"Money and facilities." (Funding)
C3	"Ideas on how to implement them cross curriculum." (PD)
C4	"Facilities are not designed for arts classes. This damaged our dance program in particular but has also prevented visual arts from using a kiln, as two examples." (Staffing)
C5	"Highering [Hiring] a dance teacher." (Staffing)
C6	"Could be the language. Since we have students that are English learners." (PD)
C9	"Funding has been the largest factor in ensuring equitable access to arts education. To provide supplies, and other materials costs money." (Funding)
C10	"The lack of resources and ability to get trained staff to provide this for all students has been an issue." (Resources)
C14	"Facilities I would assume." (Facilities)
C15	"One challenge is I do not know who is in charge of this area." (Training/PD)
C16	"Lack of resources and not having our own campus" (Resources)
C17	"Funding has been one of the challenges encountered especially to find a theater teacher." (Funding)
C21	"Access to proper facilities—lack of a dedicated place with water for cleaning up artwork." (Funding)

Professional Development

Going deeper into the professional development needs, when asked about professional development and training, there was a consensus of not receiving whole child inclusive arts

professional development, and that included a lack of awareness of recently approved funding designated solely for the arts. The question was, “Have you received any professional development related to the arts education policy? If so, can you describe the training you received? Have you received any guidance on Prop 28 [2022]?”

Jordan, Casey, and Cameron shared they had not received training or guidance specific to Proposition 28 (2022) and arts education. Additionally, Morgan and Riley had not received guidance on Proposition 28 (2022). Cameron said of professional development, “Not yet. I am looking into it. It because it would be wonderful.”

The data exhibited a need for guidance to support the school with resources to mitigate the gaps in policy awareness, address staffing needs, and provide the current staff with consistent opportunities to progress toward a more robust whole-child inclusive arts integration model.

Partnerships with external parties were established to fill the gaps and address some of the challenges outlined in this section. The subsequent section addresses further details about the partnerships and collaborative efforts.

RQ1 was designed to answer how whole child inclusive arts education is operationalized at the school. The data uncovered strengths in the ecosystem and significant room for improvement.

This study highlights a significant divide between having a thorough understanding of education policies and being familiar with the details at the school level necessary for effective implementation. This gap poses a significant challenge in ensuring policy knowledge is fully absorbed and acted upon for successful execution.

I found that educational leaders were confident in the support their administrators provided. However, I also found a significant need for more resources to fully operationalize the program, including facility challenges, confidence in funding, and professional development.

RQ2: How Does the School Structure Support Whole-Child Inclusive Arts Education?

Infrastructure and Resources

The data revealed recurring challenges related to the structural program design, including limited campus access, inadequate training and access to training, and budgetary limitations for the arts. These challenges exposed a critical need for resources to fully actualize the school's focus.

A total of 3 of 5 interview contributors reflected on the impact of being a co-located facility, expressing concerns about deficient physical spaces and feeling unwelcomed, and budgetary constraints impacting arts programs. Regarding training opportunities, as mentioned in the section on unavailable professional development, structural details emerged from the data highlighting that educational leaders in designated departments, such as CTE, math, and history, have only accessed professional development. Furthermore, the opportunities within the school site are limited to two CTE teachers who support their colleagues and are responsible for the art class offerings. Quantitative data corroborates the findings.

Despite these challenges, contributors emphasized the intentional scheduling of art classes as a positive attribute, giving students multiple opportunities to participate in diverse art classes.

In addition to survey and interview data, I will share findings of budget document review, the bell schedule, and course offerings that affect the implementation of whole-child arts inclusive programming from an infrastructure perspective.

Facilities

Morgan began with, "Facilities are a huge headache for so many schools. But you know, as a co located school, we're just in particularly rocky territory at the moment." Jordan continued about moving locations and losing access to a dance studio, even though that space was not ideal, it was available. Now it is not.

Morgan elaborated on additional infrastructure issues:

> And so, like we would love, you know, a purpose-built orchestra room or more purpose-built radio room and a lot of those programs operate just out of regular classrooms or shared spaces even. And so that that can you know, we always make it work. We always want to make sure that we have that opportunity for students in whatever format we can that's best but that that can definitely be something that creates some barriers.

Casey added about the visual art classes:

> The biggest thing is like if the kids have to clean, like the paint brushes, they'll [the students] have to run up to the fourth floor to clean them in the bathroom and then come back down. But that's really not any kind of huge detriment.

Cameron stated:

> Some of it is that we're co-located [with a school] that is very open about not wanting [us] here. The other thing is, we just, we don't have resources, because we have to share it with them. We don't have a school library. And so, the lack of facilities because it it feels, it feels a little shoved in the corner. And so, the lack of facilities because it feels, it feels a little shoved in the corner.

Collaboration and Community Resources

Jordan highlighted training opportunities from this academic year and last. "The math teachers went to Palm Springs for their math conference." The history teachers will be attending

a “history summit. With this training opportunity, it is clear that community resources are available to support educator development; however, the focus on math and history only demonstrates the lack of accessibility across the school community and limited frequency of offerings.

Jordan shared a teacher’s suggestion about incorporating the arts into math for English learners. Cameron pointed out the collaboration designed to support EL students. He discussed, “[A]ll of our [department teachers] includes the EL director because a third of my students this year don’t speak English, and they need to be served.” Jordan added that the CTE teachers attended CTE-specific training the prior academic year. He expressed his personal attempt to “develop departmental time.” The goal of the departmental meetings would be to have the CTE teachers “cross-collaborate” on ideas. He expressed that this was a new idea and would take time to develop.

Casey described working with the art teacher as follows: “I’ve often spoken with the [visual art teacher] to get a better idea of what supplies would be useful in the classroom, and [the art teacher] often provided supplies when I have needed them.” Riley affirmed, “I do talk a lot to the art teacher, especially to get ideas on what I could do at home.” Riley expressed an aspect of collaboration with colleagues imperative in a whole child inclusive arts environment.

The interview contributions highlighted the beginning of peer-led professional development and collaborative efforts. Jordan believed developing ongoing departmental meetings could help ignite the collective agreement toward complete arts integration across all curricula.

I received limited responses about whole child inclusive arts professional development available to the school community. Also, basic information was available about community partnerships and the extent to which students access those opportunities.

The highlight was the desire to implement more collaborative development opportunities. Although it was discussed that the CTE, history, and math teams accessed off-site professional development, based on the majority of feedback, sentiments emerged indicating the need for structured professional development centered on arts integration and how to connect with students.

Riley said she was informed about the school's mission and goals during professional development. She emphasized the school's focus on the arts and the interests of students who share that passion. However, the professional development did not provide specific training on development related to arts education. The meetings were not subject-specific but focused on the school's overall mission. Riley said having meetings geared toward the arts with teachers in charge of those classes would be beneficial. Nonetheless, Riley understood the school's mission is essential and wanted to work toward achieving it. Focusing on the mission as a training element is essential. Taking it a step further and incorpartating art education professional development would support the continuity of offerings and the full scope of the programming available to students.

Table 9 indicates that contributors showed moderate to low agreement regarding the availability of support levers for operationalizing an environment conducive to effective inclusive arts education, taking into account facilities and training. Analysis of these two vital aspects of structure indicates a need for fundamental support. The statements addressed were,

"Professional development training supports the school's whole-child inclusive arts education mission" and "Facilities are designated and equipped to create an environment conducive to an effective inclusive arts education."

Table 9

Structural Resources

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Professional development	21	3.38	1.24	1	5
Facilities	21	3.33	1.20	1	5

Table 10 shows a low to moderate agreement with the statement, "Funding is allocated to support various aspects of the whole-child inclusive arts education focus, including materials, programs, and initiatives." The data revealed a general belief that sufficient funding is made available to provide holistic arts education needs.

Table 10

Educational Leaders Perception of Whole Child Inclusive Arts Education Funding

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Funding allocation	21	3.43	1.16	1	5

Student Access

According to the open-ended survey responses, 14 of 21 contributors (n = 66.6%) believed students have access to opportunities to participate in art classes based on the school's intentional scheduling.

Contributor 1 shared, "They [the school] do okay with the resources we have. Not having a school library or theater dramatically (lol) decreases the access and exposure students have to

the arts." Contributors 4–11 expressed their satisfaction with the school's schedule, which is designed to provide students with diverse art classes. Contributors 14–17 and 19–20 emphasized the same position of opportunity and accessibility. C13 stated, "It [the schedule] is done with fidelity over the summer." In contrast, C2, C12, C18, and C21 responded did not provide any information for this question, either answering n/a or stating, "I don't have information to provide for this question."

Document Review

The document analysis of the active course offerings, the bell schedule, and the second interim budget sheet revealed the school offers a broad range of art classes, strongly emphasizing arts education with designated time for classes based on the bell schedule. However, allocating funding and staffing (based on triangulated interview data) for these art classes still requires attention. This suggests that while the school made efforts to support arts education, financial limitations impacted the extent of this support. A follow-up call with the school administration on March 28, 2024 clarified details regarding school documents.

Per the active courses document, the school offered 14 art classes, including Dance, Animation, Visual Art, Music, and Film. Each of these offerings had different levels available to support student progression in each study area, except for the dance and animation classes. However, each class has multiple sections, except dance. Additionally, a character development class integrates the arts. The 14 designated art classes are taught by two art teachers who teach across genres, and the PE teacher currently teaches the dance class, but has no dance training or experience with teaching dance. Notably, two CTE teachers support the 13 multisection art classes, which is connected to the deficit in training development and infrastructure.

I found 73 active courses, including 14 designated art classes (n = 19 %). According to Create California (2023), compared to the 253 reporting schools across LAUSD, the school offers more art classes on average, as the average available art class offered in the district was 6.4 classes in the 2018–19 academic year, half of what is currently available at the study site. Although this does not compare similar years, it provides context relative to course availability.

The survey and interview data corroborated what the data showed in the bell schedule. An element of success in the school's structure is the intentional scheduling that supports the time needed for art class offerings. All designated art classes are run for 50 minutes on Mondays and 90 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays or Wednesdays and Fridays to give students and staff time for projects.

Additionally, based on the analysis of the 2023–24 second interim budget sheet, I found that approximately 15% of the school's salaries/benefits, 35% of books and supplies, and 1% of services and other operating expenses are allocated to the designated art classes category. This is approximately $386,919.29, which is 6.9% of the school's operating budget.

Structure from the Students' Perspective

The students' perspective was another element essential in understanding how a school structure supports policy implementation. The data revealed that students attend the school for various reasons. Some attend because it is their neighborhood school, and some attend out of interest in the arts. The two are not mutually exclusive but disrupt the instructional flow when they are. Additionally, since COVID, attendance has been a barrier to success. Another finding was that the alumni appreciated the opportunity to have a wide variety of art classes but recognized when the classes offered decreased. They uplifted the teaching and support of their

teachers and how the arts education experience impacted their learning while in school and their current career goals.

School staff interview contributors spoke of students as follows: Morgan acknowledged that some students are interested in the arts and see it as a motivational tool to progress through school. Some see future possibilities in the arts and entertainment industry. Jordan added,

> Oh, it's just like any other school at first. But then we have to get them bought in. It just gives them a place to, for them to call home, or we have students here that take quite a few buses to get here. And they're stay here till like past six o'clock because they go to the after-school program and [and attend some Saturday programs].

Casey shared a similar perspective:

> Students can see that there's an opportunity for creativity. There's an opportunity to be able to be more creative and less restrained than in some traditional schools, and I think they can see that just sort of the advantages of being able to explore the arts.

Cameron highlighted an external factor that informs how students might experience the art options:

> [S]o I think some of that also has to do with just like how stimulated they always have to be. I think they do understand that there is a level of expression here that they wouldn't get somewhere else that shows up on a fairly regular basis, whether it's students, you know, designing logos for their class in their advisory or like the school coming together to build a alter for Día de Muertos . . . we have murals in our hallways that the students painted and contributed to and so I think they do understand that there are going to be avenues of expression that they might not have elsewhere" Riley uplifted some opposing perspectives of students, "So I do have students that love art, they are in this school for that reason, but also have students that are like, I can't do this, I can't draw, I'm not interested in this. And I think when that happens, it becomes a problem because I get really low-quality work." Riley also shared about students enrolled from the neighborhood who do not believe they are good at the arts and aren't motivated, but it is their home school.

Alumnus Quinn shared that many classes, like music, inform the school structure. The classes helped keep them on the " right track [for] me toward graduat[ion] from high school." She focused on music and visual art and said she found great value in the knowledge she gained,

particularly in music. Before starting the music class, she had limited knowledge of the art form. Additionally, her growth with the guidance of the music teacher and the art teacher was significant in learning how to use a variety of tools in visual arts and instruments in music. "Learning different instruments and learning of arts as well. And I still do art till this day." In music, she "learned more skills from the teachers." She shared that learning new instruments was difficult initially, but she learned more about the instrument and other instruments throughout their classes. She reflected on the benefit of learning an instrument and how each time she performed, she felt more confident. "I learned so much not to be scared in front of a crowd."

Quinn mentioned the class size about access and the personal approach to scheduling, "so it was a small class." "In the school you can change different classes." She shared that collaborating with students in assemblies where they performed together made the school experience unique, "it just makes everything like something unique in that world that we are living in." To close the conversation, she reflected on the full experience:

> Well, from that school, I mean, it was like, I grew up from that school actually. And knowing our music, I learned so much from it. And having those classes I think, kind of boost up my my learning experience. I guess, to have having that I guess, like college because I'm in college right now. So I want to take like, you know, art or music and keep going from there. And I guess never stop learning that type of music class and art class.

In reference to class accessibility over time, Quinn noticed a decrease in class offerings, "But like back then, when I [first started at the school] we [had] theater. We had dance, we [had] cheerleading all those types of different classes. But later, I kind of [saw] those like disappearing."

Hunter, the second alumnus, described his focus on music and visual art classes while at school: " We [had] a bunch of art classes . . . music and paint." Hunter spoke about learning a

new skill, specifically, learning to play a new instrument and enjoying the process. Some students ended up playing multiple instruments. He reflected on promoting the school spirit week and school performances as an opportunity for students to work together. Additionally, he referenced the students working on the murals to make the school more inviting.

Hunter mentioned having the supplies and materials needed for the art classes. He used computers for music production: "[We] us[ed] the computer mics, as actual mics professionalized. Y[eah], we would sometimes like [use] real instruments and put them in the computer." Hunter clarified that the "professor [teacher]" would play the instrument to upload for a production track. "[The teacher] really knew what they were doing." Hunter did not recall any issues with accessing art classes while he was enrolled in the school. Taking art classes helped increase his music appreciation and how music is made, "I was really into music and getting a chance to actually make music just made me...like, enjoy music more. And how like, music [is] made." Hunter's schedule of his art classes worked in his favor because "I mostly have art at the end of my day, so was really relieved when I got to that class. I was able to get like stuff off my chest." Every day, he knew he would learn a skill, and that helped him in other subjects. Hunter also expressed wanting to pursue music and art professionally, "Maybe I just produce music for films and stuff and produce music for artists."

Staff contributors and alumni perspectives highlighted the students' experiences, the significance of arts education in a school community, and the impact of a school structure. While some students found motivation and opportunities for creativity in whole child inclusive arts programs, others found it challenging or believed they did not belong because of their creative abilities. In alumni contributions, the value of having access to creativity in the educational

journey through scheduling and diverse class offerings was emphasized, along with highlighting the skills learned and the positive impact on their confidence and career possibilities.

RQ3: What is the Relationship Between School Leaders' Understanding of Successful Whole-Child Inclusive Arts Education and Equitable Access to Such Education?

The Driver

What guides the school is the focus and commitment to the mission.

Mission Alignment

The data in this section revealed an overwhelming majority of contributors who strongly aligned with and understood the mission, believed in whole child art inclusive education, and had past experience in the arts that positively affected their lives and their current roles.

In this section, I share the findings related to educational leaders' understanding of the school mission (policy guiding the school's offerings), past experiences with whole-child inclusive arts education, and how these inform the educational leaders' current practices and beliefs in the arts. I also share the quantitative findings related to conceptual knowledge and a detailed understanding of policy and its impact on policy implementation.

Based on mission statement summaries, contributors understand the school's focus and are committed to ensuring the actualization of the mission is present for students. Each offered examples of how the arts are present in their day-to-day practices.

Morgan explained:

> I think that the mission is to prepare students for careers in business and arts, to make sure that they have those tools and those resources to pursue one of the fields that we do have a focus on here at school.

Jordan added:

> [The School] wanted to create a place where we could provide these different things that they were not able to provide in another school, such as arts [and the specific classes offered], just for them to have a chance to be able to create. When they have a diploma, there is not just a diploma. They have these other skills with them that they can take with them when they go to college or the next chapter of their lives.

Casey reiterated, "I would say that our school's mission is to prepare students, especially those living in the city, for careers in the arts, and offer them opportunities that are traditionally not offered to sort of the standard district schools." Cameron offered, "I think the mission statement of the school boils down to a holistic approach to education that builds the student's emotional and interpersonal growth as well as their academic growth."

Riley affirmed:

So the mission of my school, I think, is definitely to make sure that they are really looking into student interest [not just English, math, and science] and allowing students to know what they want to do once they either leave the school or move on to the next level.

Cameron and Riley responded to the holistic education approach, encompassing the arts. Morgan, Jordan, and Casey spoke to the practicality of the school's curricular focus. The school mission highlighted the arts, core academics, business principles, and personal development.

Experiential Influence

Morgan noted a similarity between himself and the diverse student population served at the school. He participated in band and loved it but did not see himself pursuing anything related to the band after leaving high school. His personal experience informed his beliefs: "And I think that my experiences in band and music classes growing up helped me now have an appreciation for just how important that is."

Jordan was a musician. He believed music has had a significant influence on his life: "Like, for me, I personally don't think I would have been able to graduate high school if it was not for me being a musician myself." He expressed his desire to fight to keep the arts around for students in Los Angeles and shared how the benefits his children benefit from learning through the arts.

Casey believed his experience as a performer helped him get his current job but did not express practical application to their current responsibilities. Despite the experience being connected to his current role, Casey expressed a disconnection with incorporating the arts in his classroom.

Cameron expressed a deep connection to his work in theater and its direct connection to teaching. He was explicit about connections to the inherent nature of English coming to life in theater: "I became an English teacher because words are how you claim your place. Words are how you claim your power, words are how you fight back without getting arrested." Cameron elaborated, sharing that his time in school was not good.

> I can go through every year that I was in school. I can tell you exactly which teachers saw me as a person and which teachers saw me as a name on the roll sheet. I can tell you every single one. If you see a student on a roll sheet, they know, and you've lost them forever. You'll never get them back. Nor do you deserve it. So, I bring my experience in that [to my teaching].

Riley presented a mixed response when she shared that she never took art. She was referring to not taking visual art. However, she danced throughout high school but intentionally focuses now on making visual art connections in her day-to-day roles. "I try to implement that into my teaching," she said while aspiring to teach dance outside of the classroom next year.

Of the 21 responses, 13 contributors had fond experiences with the arts, 8 had neutral or negative experiences, and 16 said their experience positively informed their belief in whole child arts inclusive education or how they approach their work. Five contributors expressed a neutral or negative impact based on their past experience. Three contributors who expressed a negative or neutral past experience shared they believed in the benefits of whole-child arts inclusive education.

- 61.9% (13 out of 21) of respondents reported having fond experiences with Whole Child Inclusive Arts Education.
- 38.1% (8 out of 21) of respondents reported having neutral or negative experiences with Whole Child Inclusive Arts Education.
- 76.2% (16 out of 21) of respondents indicated their experience positively informed their belief in whole-child inclusive arts education or influenced how they approach their work.
- 23.8% (5 out of 21) of respondents expressed a neutral or negative impact based on their past experience with Whole Child Inclusive Arts Education.

What emerged from this data affirms the connection between past experiences and current beliefs, with 76.2% of survey contributors expressing a positive response to their experience and that influence on current beliefs and practices.

The survey explored self-belief and contributors' beliefs about their colleagues, with the results showing mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum rates. The data in Table 11 reinforces interview contributors who strongly believe in whole child inclusive arts education.

The results reveal that contributors had a higher self-belief score compared to their perception of their colleagues.

Table 11

Belief in the Importance of Access to Whole Child Inclusive Arts Education

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Self-belief	21	4.10	.89	2	5
Colleague's belief	21	3.90	.85	3	5

Table 12 highlights contributors' strong consensus on the necessity of dedicating sustainable funding toward such educational programs. Analysis of various aspects of whole-child inclusive arts education reveals educational leaders' recognition of its significant value, ranging from holistic education and child development to problem-solving, positive performance, self-efficacy, and the need for equitable funding.

Table 12

Educational Leaders' Belief in Whole Child Arts Inclusive Education Benefits by Variable

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Holistic education	21	4.10	1.24	1	5
Child development	21	3.90	1.20	1	5
Problem-solving	21	3.95	1.41	1	5
Positive performance	21	4.09	1.30	1	5
Self-efficacy	21	4.09	1.41	1	5
Equitable funding	21	4.30	1.23	1	5

Table 13 displays the level of comfort and confidence educational leaders have with implementing whole-child arts inclusive education relative to the school's mission. The contributors were moderately comfortable, albeit not remarkably strong as expressed with the mean score below.

Table 13

Educational Leaders' Comfort Level with Implementation by Variable

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
School mission	21	3.40	1.11	1	5

Educational leaders' relationships to policy and implementation capacity can also be analyzed through their understanding and proximity to policy. Table 14 illustrates the lack of federal policy knowledge about whole-child inclusive arts education. It highlights the overall disparity of policy awareness and the gap between federal policy knowledge and confidence in day-to-day school-level policy.

Table 14

Educational Leaders' Understanding of Federal Policy vs. School Policy

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Federal policy	21	2.19	.928	1	4
School policy	21	3.52	1.03	1	5

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the 21-question whole child inclusive arts survey, the semi-structured interviews, and the document reviews. The findings show a strong belief in whole child inclusive arts education, with a need for more awareness of the policies guiding the school's design. This includes a deeper understanding of the school's policy for staff in various roles and them being equipped to speak on the school's offerings and structure beyond "We are an art school." Additionally, the findings show a need for more structure to support such education. The structural gaps are in the school not having a dedicated facility A committed facility would allow the school to invest in optimal usage and staffing to fulfill and maximize offerings aligned with the school's mission. Another finding was a need for professional development that supports the focus of dedicated art classes, consistent arts enhancement, and integration. Overall, resources were a challenge and while the school's arts programs face challenges related to resources and infrastructure, they play a significant role in fostering creativity, skill development, and student engagement within the school community.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of these findings, their relevance to existing research, recommendations for future research, and available tools.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

I investigated educational leaders' knowledge and understanding of the whole-child inclusive arts education policy and its impact on operationalizing such policy at the school level. The focus was on understanding school leaders' interpretation of existing policy, the intersection of those policies at the school as presented in the school structure, and how beliefs affected the educational leaders' ability to activate the policy.

The policies guiding this study were the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), *California Education Code* 51225.3(2011), 60605.1 (2001), 51220 (g) (2005), 51210 (e) (2011), 8810-8819.5 (2005), Proposition 28 (2022), *Visual and Performing Arts Standards* (*Visual & Performing Arts*, 2019), and local school policy. Previous research demonstrated challenges with policy implementation, including being affected by the flow of interpretation, either through assimilation to the existing policy and practices (Spillane, 2005) or distortion through the filter of stakeholders (Lefstein, 2004). Because of these documented implementation challenges, the proven value of a holistic education that includes the arts, and the recent passage of critical legislation providing historic funding for arts education, it was essential to conduct this study to interrogate implementation challenges of arts education policies and move toward establishing improved communication channels that support effective and sustainable implementation strategies for the benefit of the educational leaders and the students at the center of the educational ecosystem.

Notably, budget concerns emerged in two areas: policy knowledge and structure. For this study, both are relevant and related to the educational policy ecosystem. As stated in Chapter 1,

according to Tudge et al. (2009), a macro-system needs to be experienced within a microsystem for it to have any impact on a developing child. So, a cultural value such as encouraging art education must be directly felt and operationalized into a child's microsystem to influence their development. I connect this to the highlighted budget concerns. Even with the expressed value of arts education, the community has observed consistent cuts to arts funding and competing priorities for decades.

Discussion of Findings

Data from surveys and interviews highlighted multiple findings that affect policy implementation. The discussion of the findings of this study is organized by research questions as they are presented in Chapter 4:

RQ1: Insufficient policy awareness of federal and state policy, significant knowledge of teaching and general assessment practices, remarkable administrative support coupled with resource limitations.

RQ2: Challenges with structural design, prioritization of arts education despite financial challenges, students' perspective reciprocates structure.

RQ3: Alignment with mission and past experiences in arts education.

RQ1 How is Arts Education Policy Operationalized on a School Campus?

Insufficient Policy Awareness of Federal and State Policy

Educational leaders exhibited limited knowledge and understanding of state and federal policy in the qualitative and quantitative processes. References to policy language were present without a detailed explanation of how those attributes became tangible in the student experience.

I also highlighted the value and critical nature of having a detailed understanding of the policy that guides or informs an institutional framework.

To that end, policies implemented with a need for more concrete structures may have some bearing on the lack of awareness. For example, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) highlights the arts as an element of well-rounded education but does not mandate instruction (Covert, 2022). The California Education Code is the impetus for the California Arts Standards (California Department of Education, 2019) and the Arts Framework (California Department of Education, 2021), and it has required arts instruction for years. However, in high school, a foreign language is an alternative. Considering that many policies exist without attached funding or structured accountability, the value decreases (Southern California Public Radio, 2018). In this respect, an example of a policy designed to provide significant support by way of funding is Proposition 28 (2022). It is the first of its kind to provide ongoing funding for art education. Unfortunately, this great opportunity fell short on the implementation structure and the study amplified the need for structure by identifying a lack of awareness and training of the educational leaders one year after statewide approval.

Accordingly, this study's findings provide critical insights into scholarship and ongoing discussions within organizations like the Education Commission of States and the California Arts Council's Strategic Framework by highlighting the challenges and inconsistencies of arts education policy and policy implementation. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive knowledge can contribute to existing research on the systemic challenges: more specifically, the gaps between policy developers, policy implementers, and the systems in between, including the entities responsible for interpreting the technical language of policy and the value transfer.

Cantor (2021) suggested that systems inside and outside of the school designed to see each other's value in supporting students' holistic development would allow for increased awareness and practical implementation (Cantor, 2021).

To address the study's findings concerted efforts are needed to bridge the gaps with implementation of existing policies, policy developers, and contributing stakeholders at various levels of the educational ecosystem. This could occur with studies investigating policy knowledge barriers by seeking information to improve policy interpretation and implementation systems.

For school leaders, these findings present an opportunity to develop training modules focused on all factors guiding the school's focus to create a collective understanding of the ecosystem factors embodying a holistic education. Training could start by identifying what is most present and relevant to educational leaders, and those are the standards guiding instruction across all subject areas, including the arts. This training would support advocacy at the school, in the community, and, if necessary, at the federal level.

Significant Knowledge of Teaching and General Assessment Practices

In this study, I discovered notable awareness of teaching practices and general assessment methods. I emphasized the passion and commitment of educational leaders to support students' academic and creative journeys. I showcased the educators' focus on classroom dynamics, including seeing each student as an individual and their desire to incorporate the arts within their professional capacity. In contrast, there were inconsistencies about class offerings, with many references made to music and art. The general reference to art, meaning visual art,

allowed an interview contributor to state she had not taken art in school when, in reality, she had; it was a performing art (e.g.dance).

The highlight of the exploratory experience available to students early in their enrollment was notable. This element illuminated the school's goal for students to explore various art forms related to California's creative economy before committing to a designated art form or forms, depending on schedule. Exploring classes gives students insight into career opportunities, creates equitable awareness, and allows students to consider diverse career paths.

Although a connection to the classroom experience was apparent, the data lacked specificity. Survey contributors and interview contributors did not provide details about school offerings, consistent integration practices, examples of differentiation utilizing the arts, knowledge of the different levels of including the arts, such as the arts as curriculum or a designated subject of study, arts enhancement, and arts integration. The interview contributors mostly shared information related to art enhancement. The educational leaders expressed interest in arts integration, which requires collaborative planning with art and core subject teachers. The lack of details about how the arts are included in student learning could be an indicator that a primary focus remains on academic outcomes in core subjects, reinforcing previous research findings by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) that posits missed opportunities in education policy to consider other vital objectives like collaboration and critical and creative thinking, which can be achieved through the arts.

Consequently, there are multiple possibilities across the school community that could be systemic and purposeful. The findings provide information that demonstrates a need to establish training programs for educational leaders to help them deepen the impact of their classroom and

school community experiences. The goal of the training would be to ensure each staff member is aware of the school's offerings and understands the various ways of incorporating arts education in their classrooms. Training programs could start with a detailed onboarding process for new staff, which includes reviewing the school's mission, getting familiar with instructional frameworks, observing designated art teachers and core academic subject teachers, administrative check-ins, and new staff being able to present observations to colleagues. Furthermore, parental involvement in understanding the classroom environment and instructional practices could encourage a microsystem that supports holistic educational design, even in core subject classes. This might include educating parents on the benefits of arts education, the equity of having access to creative jobs based on school training, and financial benefits.

Notably, onboarding procedures for educational leaders were not addressed directly. One interview contributor shared her experience with her first training opportunity, where she was told the school was an art school, so she should expect students to have artistic interests. Hence, the recommendation is to establish a comprehensive onboarding process when welcoming new staff. This should be followed by ongoing comprehensive arts education professional development, aligned with the school's whole-child inclusive arts education plan, which is covered in detail later.

Remarkable Administrative Support Coupled with Resource Limitations

A significant highlight of this study was the confidence with which interview contributors spoke about administration support by making resources available when materials and supplies were needed.

While significant research exists on challenges with policy implementation, there is room for research evaluating implementation factors in schools with administrator support. With a highly regarded administrator committed to making resources available despite external challenges and who recognizes the distinct differences in the population, meaning every student gets to choose their path, it is worth conducting further studies to understand if policy implementation success increases with a supportive administration.

Although the administration says yes and is intentional about having resources to cover program fees and tuition to alleviate that burden on students and their families, the educational leaders still expressed a need for dedicated arts spending. This could be related to the general feeling that arts education has historically lacked funding. It could be because the school community is not aware of funding the school receives that is reserved for the arts; it could also be linked to the policy awareness gap, explicitly addressing the lack of guidance provided for Proposition 28 (2022) spending. This study upheld Woodoworth et al.'s previous research (2007), noting that California still struggles to provide consistent and equitable access to the arts as well as the Woodworth et al.'s (2022) scholarship acknowledging the inability of California schools to meet the state-mandated requirement for standards-based arts education, which was at the time 11% of schools.

Additionally, with the passage of Proposition 28 (2022), future research focused on educational leaders' perspectives on arts funding over time would provide answers on whether budget insecurities change when California has approved funding for arts education. Moreover, research on the rollout of funding to school communities would give insight into future arts education initiatives.

The school community is involved in the implications of these findings in that the administrative team can utilize the staff's existing feeling of solid support from the administration to encourage staff motivation toward initiatives and planning in other areas, including building growth-based structures discussed in the next section.

RQ2 How Does the School Structure Support Whole-Child Inclusive Arts Education?

Challenges With Structural Design

The data revealed recurring challenges related to the structural program design, including limited campus access, inadequate training and access to training, and budgetary limitations for the arts. These challenges exposed a critical need for resources to fully actualize the school's focus.

Being a colocated campus poses many challenges in the current landscape in Los Angeles. This study highlights facilities as barriers, such as a lack of proper dance space and a library. Both of these elements are essential to instruction. Dance requires a space conducive to freedom of movement, the use of music, and flooring that supports different impacts on the body when experiencing movement vocabulary. As for the library, all subject areas would benefit from a functional library to explore content and enhance their learning journeys.

From an equity lens, the findings support research from Morrison et al. (2022) regarding resources, noting that schools most affected are characterized as being in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, a high population of English learners, and underperforming students.

Professional development was another area that raised great concern from a structural standpoint. Several respondents acknowledged they had not received professional development focused on whole-child inclusive arts education. Existing research has noted a lack of

preparation for teachers in preservice training programs. Simultaneously, arts-focused professional development for arts teachers and core subject teachers also falls short. A study by

Woodworth et al. (2022) reported that only 47% of California schools provide professional development opportunities in support of arts education. This finding supports the existing research, as indicated by contributors who noted that professional development opportunities for CTE teachers was offered offsite. Furthermore, the findings support Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano's (2014) research advancing the support of adult development and its impact on school growth. Moreover, additional research connections regarding working with teaching artists to support arts integration capacity is a viable approach (Cunnington et al., 2014).

These findings affect the school community directly. There is a strong need to create a school arts plan that addresses clearly outlined goals focused on establishing the depth of arts integration that will support the school's goals. Additionally, the arts plan should include staffing goals to meet the variety of student offerings. This plan should include a complimentary budget and should be considered over multiple years. The school community needs to ask the question about how deep they wish to go with utilizing the arts in core subjects. Fullan's (2003) study highlighting individual and system change needed for change to occur and can serve as a guide for the arts planning process.

Additional recommendations for policy developers and school implementers include the following, as stated in research by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Woodworth, 2022, pp. 20, 29, 31–32):

- Ensure a diverse set of course offerings,

- Provide support to engage with professional development,
- Increase Funding for Community Partnerships through the Assistance for Arts Education Programs, and
- Increase funding for arts education through the Department of Education.

The existing scholarship on the value of arts education provides practical stepping stones for policymakers and school communities to move toward change. The change is proceeded by breaking cycles that have historically caused schools to focus on core subject assessment while missing significant opportunities to connect with students in meaningful and impactful ways.

Prioritization of Arts Education Despite Financial Challenges

The document review process illuminated the school's success in strongly emphasizing arts education. However, that emphasis is met with significant obstacles. According to the budget review, approximately $386,919.29 was allocated to the designated arts programming. For an arts school, this could be perceived as insufficient spending for a school aiming to prepare students for creative jobs in California. This amount accounts for approximately 6.9% of the school's operating budget, including two arts-focused teachers and materials and supplies.

In a database search of scholarly articles for the average percentage schools should spend on the arts with search parameters of "Arts Education Expenditures by School Design" and "Recommended Arts Spending in California Schools," no articles were found. However, Vargas (2017), initially offered by (Klein, 2016), stated that if a district received more than $30,000 dollars from the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) block grant, they would be responsible for using 20% on "at least one activity that helps students become well-rounded and another 20 percent on at least one activity that helps students be safe and healthy."

What does the ESSA funding have to do with the school-level budget and policy gaps? Everything. In the 2013–14 fiscal year, California designed a system to ensure the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) funds were used equitably. As stated in Chapter 1, this equity system was under the umbrella of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which is included in the Local Accountability Plan (LCAP), an instrument for schools to outline how they will utilize said funds. According to the California State Parent Teacher Association (CAPTA), "Arts education aligns with LCFF goals and contributes to a set of unique skills and outcomes that are shown to help students succeed in school and in life" (California State PTA, 2021). To that end, *Every Student Succeeds Act's* (2015) funds for this document analysis are accounted for in the abovementioned $386,919.29 because LCFF was acknowledged in the total revenues. Is this adequate funding for an arts school?

The active course document highlighted 14 art classes with multiple sections available to students. As noted, this is a higher average of classes, as reported in the *Create California Arts Ed Data Project* (Create California, 2023), with data reflected from the 2018-19 school year. Although this highlights the school's commitment to prioritizing the arts, the ramifications of this finding are that two teachers are responsible for these classes and carry the load of supporting the school community. This design is a change from pre-COVID, when three times as many art teachers were employed with double the enrollment.

Lastly, there is the bell schedule. As the interview contributor stated, it is designed to support the creative needs of the art forms during summer planning. Accordingly, equitable time is allocated to ensure time for projects and student collaboration. All students engage with the arts during the advisroy period. Additioanlly, a highlight is that the schedule is not based on

external factors. The school has the discretion to create the bell schedule based on the goals and objectives as long as instructional minutes are met for the school day.

Students' Perspective Reciprocates Structure

I found that students attend the school for various reasons. Some attend because it is their neighborhood school, and some attend because they are interested in the arts, but not every student attends for the arts. With the latter, not all students having an interestin the arts, it becomes a waiting game to stay put until graduation because the student has connected to the school. The alternative is for students to make a conscientious choice to go to another school, even if it is inconvenient.

This combination can be challenging when it comes to fortifying a solid arts foundation and school culture. Nonetheless, the data showed a limited number of responses indicating that students didn't want to be at the school.

In fact, based on the alumni interviews, the student experience at the school supports the school's direction. The alumni contributors expressed satisfaction with the offerings and the structure that allowed them to experience multiple art forms. They felt it benefited their learning and where they are currently with exploring college and career options. They also referenced their relationships with the teachers and their confidence in the teacher's ability to help build skills in their particular art form. This result coincides with Kozulin et al. (2003), who found that students learn best when what they bring to the classroom is honored and learning are reciprocal. These findings support the ecosystems theory grounding the study and present opportunities for ongoing research to explore with greater intention the effect of the depth of program offering relative to the supportive relationships to understand if, over time, the students uncertain about

the arts increased interest based on the relationships with the teachers and the quality of the program. An alumni noted the positive experience and highlighted the decreased class options over time. At some point in her experience, a music teacher was teaching an instrument based on her interest. However, he did not know the instrument and was learning it along with the students. This has positive and negative effects, in that the teacher's limited experience with the instrument could affect the student's advancement.

RQ3 What is the Relationship Between School Leaders' Understanding of Successful Whole-Child Inclusive Arts Education and Equitable Access to Such Education?

Alignment with Mission and Past Experiences in Arts Education

The data in this section revealed the following conclusions. Mission alignment from a policy context is a positive attribute that could lead to change. Interview contributors expressed the connection with the school's mission and their commitment to helping ensure there is open communication for administrators to survey staff to get a clearer picture of their needs and, after surveying, include them in the process of developing a plan to get the school on the path to a more in-depth, robust, holistic arts development program.

Additionally, this research demonstrates that when educational leaders can connect past experiences as positively influencing current work, there is a more significant opportunity to leverage the belief in and connection to the work to develop and implement a sustainable improvement plan. This finding can be added to scholarship by Welch (1995), who expressed that a teacher's belief in their artistic ability and the arts in general affected their capacity and desire to include the arts in their teaching. As stated in the literature review, educators must believe in the work and remove ego and self-interest to activate creativity and ownership in

simple change, with policy adoption and policy implementation context leading to belief in the possibilities of new ideas and, ultimately, change.

Future Research Suggestions

With the wealth of scholarship on the benefits of a whole-child arts inclusive education, "We are no longer in a season of validating arts education" (Grande, 2023). In California, it is not even as much of financial or budgetary concerns as it has been in the past. We are now in the season of simply adhering to policy as it has been written for decades. That adherence is contingent on clarity of text, beliefs, capacity, and resources. Without all of these elements functioning collectively within the education ecosystem, we will continue to be a society that has proof of the values of the arts and whole-child education with a system that does not express the same value in accountability, time, and resources.

To support getting to a place where progress is attainable, I recommend the following research to complement existing scholarship and explore untapped areas:

1. Explore strategies to increase educational leaders' awareness and understanding of state and federal policies related to whole-child inclusive arts education and how those policies connect to school-level policies for implementation goals.
2. Investigate the role of policy developers in interpretation and implementation systems to ensure effectiveness and consistency.
3. Examine the impact of budgetary concerns on policy implementation and highlighting ways to combat those concerns or support implementation through reallocating resources.

4. Identify communication gaps between policy developers, implementers, and other stakeholders to mitigate those gaps toward successful implementation.
5. Investigate the effectiveness of existing policies in promoting holistic education, including arts education, and identify areas for improvement to ensure the policies align with the needs of the students, the school community, and the accountability systems in place.
6. Investigate the impact of recent legislation providing funding for arts education and identifying structures of improvement to ensure proper usage of funding.

Policy Implications

To the extent possible, policymakers have an opportunity to work on making sure future whole-child inclusive arts education policy is clear, concise, and interpretable by stakeholders. School-level policy guides can work to develop policy implementation strategies for all school policies to ensure the community is aware of the policy, has an understanding of the policy, and receives training to support ongoing improvement for the benefit of all stakeholders. Most critical, policy developers must create improvement systems that allocate funding to new policies, not just text to show support.

Policy improvement, at the most fundamental level, will require a recalibration of the term social justice at each tier of the ecosystem, interwoven with the leveling of ego by developers, interpreters, and implementers. Stone (2012) said it best:

> Objectives of public policy are forged in political conflict and are constantly changing, not handed down on a stone tablet. Even if we assume a very narrow objective, such as a good book collection, that objective is subject to competing interpretations. (p. 65)

which leads to inconsistent implementation. Although the study's findings are clear in the specific school context, ecosystem clashes occur before the policy even reaches the school environment.

Policy analysis is a complex process that requires a restructuring of how policies are developed. Instead of being based on political agendas, policies should come from the stakeholders who are directly affected by them. This means that communities identified to benefit from policy should be included in the development process from establishing goals to writing the text. To push further, maybe they should not be identified, but the identification should come from within. This process of self-identification of needs requires an asset-based approach to present a picture of what is possible without devaluing what is present in the community. The inside-out development process has the potential to support more effective implementation of policies and involvement of people on the inside layers of the ecosystem.

The current arts-inclusive education policies are complex, having many holes, which mainly invloves lack of clarity with direction or aligned funding for implementation. For example, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) has multiple layers districts or states can choose to engage with, but with very little funding attached. The attached funding is left to the discretion of the state to define who receives it. Multiple layers are not entirely difficult, but they can be without adequate funding and guidance of appropriate usage. Also challenging is who defines what is appropriate. That, too, should come from the self-identified recipients. Similarly, the California Education Code requires arts education for students across grades but provides alternatives to meeting the mandate, which is perceived as not valued in California, based on the lack of accountability and assessment relative to other core subjects. Proposition 28 (2022), as

another example, had strong advocacy for solidifying the funding, but upon passage, there was public uncertainty about the how and when of the policy and the implementation protocol.

To provide more context, when this study began, approximately 1 year after the legislation was adopted, the interview contributors had not received any guidance on how to access or utilize the funds. Upon completing the study, advocates were approaching legal action against multiple districts for misuse of funds (Blume, 2024). This could be attributed to the missing accountability system upon approval. It allowed districts to ask for exceptions before the rules and accountability systems were defined.

I focus on this policy because it is the most recent arts education policy that has the potential to fill many gaps. Now, litigation could delay the maximum effect of increasing whole-child inclusive arts access to students across California.

To address this complexity, clear objectives, accountability systems, and guidelines are necessary. To arrive at something new, the following must be considered for future policy planning:

- Ensure all communities are aware of arts education resources from an individual and collective community standpoint.
- Demystify the policy development process by bringing school communities in at the ideation phase.
- Keep community stakeholders engaged at every level of development.
- Ensure the goals and objectives of policy are clear to all stakeholders.
- Develop the accountability system with the goals and objectives.
- Consider all loopholes based on available resources and make previsions.

- Establish and communicate timelines effectively to ensure equitable access.
- Ensure all resources are available upon rollout to mitigate inequities for all stakeholders.

To support this concept, at the time of this study, the below resources were available to schools and districts:

- Arts Education Planning Guide: https://cacountyarts.org/arts-education-learning-resources/,
- Create CA Resource Library: https://createca.org/resource-library/,
- Technology Education and Learning (TEAL): https://tealsel.org/teal-project, and
- The California Arts Project: https://tcap.net/resources/proposition-28-arts-and-music-in-schools-funding-guarantee-and-accountability-act/.

Conclusion

I designed this study to investigate educational leaders' knowledge and understanding of the whole-child inclusive arts education policy and its impact on operationalizing such policy at the school level. The focus was on understanding school leaders' interpretation of existing policy, the intersection of those policies at the school as presented in the school structure, and how beliefs affected the educational leaders' ability to activate the policy. The study supports and confirms the basis of the grounding theoretical framework and the secondary framework.

The innermost layer of the ecosystem, the microsystem, encompasses interactions within immediate environments. Bronfenbrenner (1994) stated that microsystems facilitate engagement in various interactions and activities within the immediate environment. With inclusive arts education, microsystem-level interactions include holistic art-related engagements between

students, parents, and teachers in the home, school, and immediate community settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Additionally, Jagers et al. (2021) noted in reference to family-school-partnership,

> The family context can function as a safe and open environment where children and youth can be themselves while practicing social and emotional norms, cues, and skills needed to effectively navigate and contribute to a range of social interactions and settings.

The element of family in the ecosystem is a vital component in a policy context of successful implementation and community transformation.

The mesosystem serves as a sphere where interconnected microsystems influence one another, supporting the interactions between microsystems and the exosystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). In the spaces closest to students and their immediate communities, all stakeholders must work together for the benefit of students and the school communties to interpret and implement whole child inclusive arts education plans and delivery models. The level of support and encouragement for holistic, inclusive arts education exerted by entities in the exosystem, such as school boards and local governmental agencies, impacts beliefs, attitudes, and perceived importance of arts education on micro and meso levels (Guy-Evans, 2020).

At the intersection of any system, the convergence of information is influenced by beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, with effects dependent on roles and proximity. The outermost level of the ecosystem, the macrosystem, encompasses cultural groups sharing common values or belief systems, which are influenced by and influence all other systems (Tudge et al., 2009). For any cultural value to influence a child's development, it must be experienced within the child's microsystem (Tudge et al., 2009). Thus, operationalizing cultural values, such as embracing and encouraging art education, directly impacts a child's development within their microsystem.

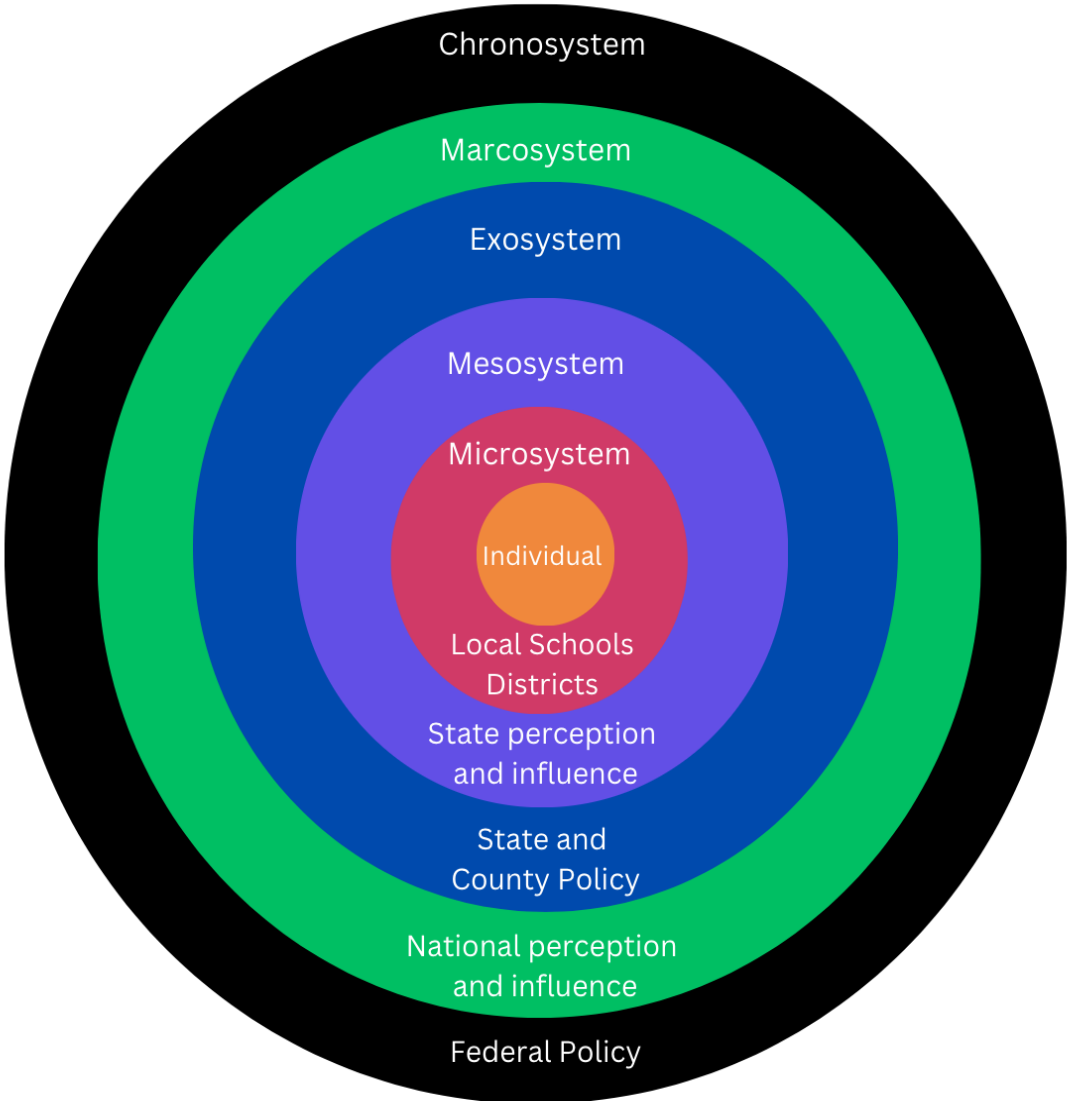
Finally, time is a crucial aspect of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (1994, 1995, 2005). We must consider time as a crucial element in the impact of policy awareness, understanding, and implementation. In addition to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework (1994, 1995, 2005), Transformational SEL was critical in the ecological analysis for this study. Jagers et al. (2021) stated,

> The family context can function as a safe and open environment where children and youth can be themselves while practicing social and emotional norms, cues, and skills needed to effectively navigate and contribute to a range of social interactions and settings. (p. 16)

Policy development and implementation gaps can lead to substantial disconnections between intent and outcome. The value of policy decreases without the mechanisms in place to support implementation. Steps must be taken to close the gaps so students gain the ultimate goal of holistic education, positively affect self-efficacy, and develop critical skills needed to continuously explore transformational experiences throughout a lifetime.

APPENDIX A

POLICY ECOSYSTEM MODEL



APPENDIX B

FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL POLICY OVERVIEW RESPECTIVE TO WHOLE-CHILD CONTEXT

Policy*	Year	Overview	Arts (Whole child/Well-rounded)	Funding
Elementary and Secondary Education Act	1965	Focused on equal access to close achievement gaps with the use of high standards and accountability. Funds were allocated to professional development, instructional materials, and increased parent involvement. It was the first attempt at inserting federal mandates to work toward racial equality.	Generally stated	Title I
No Child Left Behind Act	2001	*"No Child Left Behind* is based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (United Stated Department of Education)."	Arts identified as a core subject in Title IX, Part A Section 9101	Funding as a core subject (contingent on state definition)
Every Student Succeeds Act	2015	Includes courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, *arts*, history, geography, computer science, music, *career and technical education*, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience	Arts and Music as distinct offerings Included in a well rounded education	Flexibility in Title I; Title II—Teacher Preparation; Title IV, Part A
California Education Code section		51225.3 States visual or performing arts or a foreign language as a graduation requirement. Section 60605.1 required the State Board of Education to adopt visual and performing arts content standards.		

		Section 51220 (g) mandates offering students in grades 7 to 12 Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Section 51210(e) requires VAPA to be included in the school curriculum for all students in grades one to six. Section 8811 "defines the "arts" to include the four disciplines of dance, drama and theatre, music, and visual arts as set forth in the state's adopted curriculum framework for visual and performing arts." Section 8810-8819.5 acknowledges the necessity to include the arts to improve the quality of education.		
Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)	2018	"three-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priorities (United States Department of Education)."	Aligns with well-rounded as indicated in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015)	Covered in LCAP Addendum under Title IV, Part A: Activities and Programs Section 4107
Prop 28, Arts and Music In Schools Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act Initiative	2022	"require an annual source of funding for K-12 public schools for arts and music education equal to, at minimum, 1% of the total state and local revenues that local education agencies receive under Proposition 98 (1988); distribute a portion of the additional funding based on a local education agency's share of economically disadvantaged students; and require schools with 500 or more students to use 80% of the funding for employing teachers and 20% to training and materials	Explicitly stated arts	Ongoing funding in state budget

APPENDIX C

CONTENT MATRIX MODEL

Research Questions	Themes/Categories		
	Knowledge and understand of federal policy; Knowledge and understanding of school policy	Resources and support relative to policy	Past experience with whole-child arts-inclusive policy and the relationship to comfort and willingness to implement policy
How is arts education policy operationalized on a school campus?	Rate the extent to which specific policies at your school site address or prioritize whole-child inclusive arts education policy. The school's mission and commitment to whole-child inclusive arts education are evident in the visibility and accessibility of resources to all students. Please describe the key elements of your school's arts education policy/program. What challenges have you faced in implementing the arts education policy, and how have you addressed those challenges?	Professional development training supports the school's whole-child inclusive arts education mission. Art education programs and activities are implemented effectively at your school site. Over the past two years, the school team met at least twice to review action plans for the school's whole-child inclusive arts education focus. Have any initiatives or strategies been implemented at your school site to promote equitable access to arts education for the past two years, and if so, can you describe them? A specific and equitable portion of instructional time is devoted to an effective inclusive arts education, allowing students to engage in creative and expressive activities. Staffing ensures qualified professionals are dedicated to facilitating/teaching	How did you experience the arts at your school?

		inclusive arts education programs. Facilities are designated and equipped to create an environment conducive to an effective inclusive arts education. How does your school's class scheduling and curriculum design facilitate arts education for all students? Funding is allocated to support various aspects of the whole-child inclusive arts education focus, including materials, programs, and initiatives. There are teachers available for each of the designated art forms offered at your school.
	*How does the arts education policy align with your school's overall educational goals or mission?	
How does the school structure support whole-child inclusive arts education?	How do you incorporate the arts education policy into your teaching practice? How do you assess student learning in the arts and ensure that it aligns with the objectives of the arts education policy and the mission of the school?	How do you collaborate with other educators to implement the arts education policy? Have you received any professional development related to the arts education policy? If so, can you describe the training you received? Have you received any guidance on Prop 28? How do you feel the facility's challenge affects your school community? What resources are available to you to support the

	implementation of the arts education policy?
	How often did you take your art classes?
	What resources were available to you to support your arts education goals?
	Was your teacher a specialist in your art form?
	Did you receive multiple opportunities to participate in art classes?
	How did your teachers assess your learning in the arts to ensure that it aligned with the objectives of the arts education policy or school mission?
	In what ways did students collaborate in the arts?
	In what ways did your teachers collaborate with other educators to implement arts education policy?
	What challenges, if any, did you face with accessing arts education classes, and how did you address those challenges?
	What does the word whole child mean to you as it relates to your educations? How would you describe whole child related to arts education?
	What challenges have you faced in implementing the arts education policy, and how have you addressed those challenges?

		Of the challenges listed above, how have they been addressed?	
What is the relationship between school leaders' understanding of successful whole-child inclusive arts education and equitable access to such education?	Rate your knowledge of the national whole-child inclusive arts education policy. Please share your thoughts or any insights you might have about the current state policy on whole-child inclusive arts education. *How do you understand the arts education policy in your school district/state/country? *Can you describe the key components of the arts education policy? *What are the specific goals and objectives of the arts education policy? How would you describe arts education policy in the context of the whole-child model? What do you believe is the students' perspective of attending an arts-focused school?		Please indicate your comfort level with implementing whole-child inclusive arts education instruction that aligns with your school's policy and mission. For yourself: The importance of equitable access to whole-child arts-inclusive education? How would you rate the level of understanding . . . Among your colleagues: The importance of equitable access to whole-child arts-inclusive education? The arts are a vital component to a holistic education. Including the arts in education is important for the holistic development of a child. Including the arts in education is important for the holistic development of a child. Including the arts in education is important for the holistic development of a child.

	Participating in the arts helps children become better problem-solvers.
	Engaging in the arts in schools positively affects a student's overall performance in school.
	Participation in the arts increases a student's belief in themselves and life possibilities.
	Schools should allocate sustainable resources and time to arts education to support holistic development.
	Please describe your experiences with the arts during your childhood?
	How has the above shaped your beliefs and values regarding the importance of the arts in a child's life?
	How has your previous art experience informed your current role and focus?
	What do you believe is the students' perspective of attending an arts-focused school?

How did taking art classes affect you in school and in your other academic classes?

How do you feel taking art classes has informed who you are right now?

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