

# OKLAHOMA A+ SCHOOLS



## RESEARCH REPORT YEAR ONE: 2002-2003

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## ***PREFACE***

Oklahoma A+ Schools is a comprehensive, integrated approach to teaching and learning, encompassing the idea of a whole-school curriculum. Schools participating in the Oklahoma A+ Network combine interdisciplinary teaching and regular arts instruction for all students including dance, drama, literary arts, music, and visual arts. This large-scale collaborative project involves the DaVinci Institute (a consortium of higher education institutions throughout Oklahoma) and other constituencies from the private and non-profit sector.

Professional development is an essential component of the Oklahoma A+ Schools initiative. Prior to implementation, introductory seminars, on-site visitations, and a five-day summer residential training institute are conducted for the entire school staff. During implementation, school-based workshops, on-site visits, and seminars continue the process. Areas of emphasis include curriculum management, multiple intelligences, collaboration, enriched assessment, experiential learning, infrastructure, school climate, and arts integration.

Comprehensive, university-based research has been an important component throughout the A+ development and implementation process. A collaborative team at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University is conducting ongoing research and evaluation of the program and has developed a six-year research plan. This document summarizes research findings from the first year of the Oklahoma A+ Schools. These interim results provide initial responses to the research questions (see p. 10) and suggest themes for further study. Subsequent yearly interim reports will capture the continuing process of implementation and will lead to summative reports in the fourth and sixth years of the program.

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## ***PROJECT BACKGROUND***

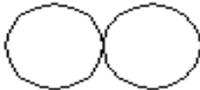
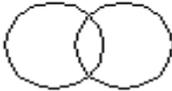
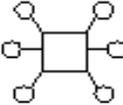
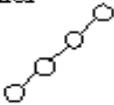
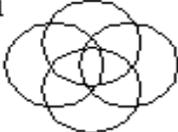
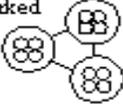
### **Brief Literature Review**

In North Carolina, the A+ Program was implemented as a statewide strategy for whole-school reform. A+ has been shown to succeed in encouraging schools to develop integrated, holistic curriculum while at the same time allowing most schools to meet their achievement goals (Corbett et al, 2001). Further research is needed on how schools maintain instruction in non-tested areas such as the arts and avoid the curricular constriction associated with “teaching to the test. “

An effective interdisciplinary curriculum creates connections among different subjects while also acknowledging the unique contributions of each discipline (Jacobs, 1989). But this kind of comprehensive curriculum is not easily achieved. Strong commitment from teachers and solid administrative support are essential to success. Drake (1993) identified three elements for success: (a) time for teachers to plan as a team, (b) strong leadership and team stability, (c) funding for in-service training, materials, and artists-in-residence. Fogarty (1991) identified ten different levels of integration, ranging from a fragmented curriculum to a comprehensive, completely networked curriculum. (See Figure 1.)

Successful programs such as A+, SUAVE, CAPE and TETAC attest to positive outcomes of an arts infused curriculum. The A+ Program combines interdisciplinary teaching with daily arts instruction. SUAVE is an arts-based partnership program between California State University San Marcos, the California Center for the Arts, Escondido, and four school districts designed to help teachers in multicultural and multilingual classrooms teach the content areas of mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies. CAPE (Chicago Arts Partnership in Education) was founded in 1992 to revive arts programs in the Chicago schools through partnerships with teachers of all grade levels (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999).

**Figure 1: Ten Levels of Integration**

Name	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	
Fragmented		Separate and distinct disciplines	Clear and discrete view of a discipline	Connections are not made clear for students; less transfer of learning
Connected		Topics within a discipline are connected	Key concepts are connected, leading to the review, reconceptualization and assimilation of ideas within a discipline	Disciplines are not related; content focus remains within the discipline
Nested		Social, thinking, and content skills are targeted within a subject area	Gives attention to several areas at once, leading to enriched and enhanced learning	Students may be confused and lose sight of the main concepts of the activity or lesson
Sequenced		Similar ideas are taught in concert, although subjects are separate	Facilitates transfer of learning across content areas	Requires ongoing collaboration and flexibility, as teachers have less autonomy in sequencing curricula
Shared		Team planning and/or teaching that involves two disciplines focuses on shared concepts, skills or attitudes	Shared instructional experiences; with two teachers on a team it is less difficult to collaborate	Requires time, flexibility, commitment and compromise
Webbed		Thematic teaching, using a theme as a base for instruction in many disciplines	Motivating for students, helps students see connections between ideas	Theme must be carefully and thoughtfully selected to be meaningful, with relevant and rigorous content
Threaded		Thinking skills, social skills, multiple intelligences, and study skills are "threaded" throughout the disciplines	Students learn how they are learning, facilitating future transfer of learning	Disciplines remain separate
Integrated		Priorities that overlap multiple disciplines are examined for common skills, concepts, and attitudes.	Encourages students to see interconnectedness and interrelationships among disciplines, students are motivated as they see these connections	Requires interdepartmental teams with common planning and teaching time
Inmersed		Learner integrates by viewing all learning through the perspective of one area of interest	Integration takes place within the learner	May narrow the focus of the learner
Networked		Learner directs the integration process through selection of a network of experts and resources	Pro-active, with learner stimulated by new information, skills or concepts	Learner can be spread too thin, efforts become ineffective

TETAC (Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge) was initiated by the National Arts Education Consortium to integrate comprehensive approaches to arts education

with other elements of whole-school reform to demonstrate the value of the arts as part of the core curriculum and to quantify student achievement in the arts.

Teachers who have been trained in traditional instructional methods cannot be expected to suddenly change their entire approach to teaching. Studies of the A+ program suggest that this type of change must occur gradually over time (Corbett, Wilson, Noblit, & McKinney, 2001). Teachers need time to gain confidence in planning and teaching integrated units. Adequate professional development opportunities and collaborative planning time are important to facilitate this process of gradual school-wide change. In addition to team planning among classroom teachers, the A+ program has found that "establishing new communications channels between classroom teachers and arts teachers is particularly crucial" (North Carolina Education and Law Project, 1996, p. 125).

Arts integration is a controversial topic among arts educators who may fear that the arts (and arts teachers) will be placed in a "subservient" role to other subjects. Indeed, research indicates that without benefit of training, the most prevalent style of arts integration employed by classroom teachers involves activities at a low cognitive level that do not develop specific artistic skills or encourage aesthetic growth (for example, having children sing a song about dinosaurs as part of a science unit) (Bresler, 1995). However, research also indicates that once teachers have had training and experience in teaching through the arts, they become more interested in the arts as separate disciplines (Jacobs, 1989).

While short-term arts integration workshops can have limited benefits, substantive change requires long-term projects which allow for personal development and attitudinal change (Barry, 1998). Workshops in which participants collaborate on curriculum (such as A+, SUAVE, and CAPE) promote professional development in an atmosphere of mutual respect. On the other hand, workshops in which pre-planned curriculum is presented by teaching artists may only serve to reinforce teachers' feelings of inadequacy. In a study of

teachers participating in their school district's arts partnership program, McKean (2000) found that teachers were intimidated by the artist presenters. "I can't teach what I can't do. If I had the talent to do it, I would" (p. 6). McKean identified four elements for successful workshops: (a) collaboration; (b) identify specific roles for the classroom teachers and outside professionals; (c) ensure that the values, goals, and objectives of the partners are consistent; and (d) maintain a reciprocal relationship between all participants.

## **Project History**

In 1998, the Kirkpatrick Foundation in Oklahoma City invited Oklahoma educators from private and public colleges and universities to begin discussing the opportunities and resources available for improving K-12 education. The DaVinci Institute was officially recognized in 2001 (receiving 501(c)3 status) as a result of these meetings, reflecting a belief in the importance of interrelationships between learning, the arts, sciences, and other core curriculum. A joint research team from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University was formed to identify the most successful education reform models in the United States, especially those with a strong arts integration emphasis. The North Carolina A+ Schools Program, an initiative of the Kenan Institute for the Arts, was identified as the most appropriate model for implementation in Oklahoma.

## **Project Timeline (2001 - 2003)**

### **Fall, 2001**

- Executive Director and Program Coordinator were hired.
- Brochures were developed and sent to every public school in Oklahoma.
- Administrative Secretary was hired.
- Regional information meetings were held for public schools in Ardmore, Bartlesville, Norman, Tulsa, and Woodward.
- Meetings were held for the purpose of collaboration and sharing information with other educational programs (Core Knowledge, Great Expectations, OSU Science Center, Payne Reading Institute, etc.).
- Applications to become a member of the Oklahoma A+ Network were sent to every public school in Oklahoma.

- Research team collected data for project evaluation and curriculum development at the formative planning meetings.
- Research team continued the review of related research literature and development of research methods and procedures.

### **Winter-Spring, 2001-2002**

- Applications were received from Oklahoma public schools signifying their interest in becoming part of the A+ School network.
- A selection committee consisting of representatives from a variety of groups was brought together to set guidelines for and to select the initial A+ schools.
- Researchers documented baseline data in the selected schools and planned further research with A+ Schools.
- Future mentor teachers (Faculty and Fellows) for Oklahoma A+ Schools applied for selection. Fifty-seven teachers and professional artists applied from which 20 were selected.
- New Coordinator of Programs and Professional Development was hired.
- Administrative Secretary's title was changed to Project Coordinator.
- Two, three and ½ day retreats were held to train Oklahoma mentor teachers.
- Two, one-day pre-institutes were held for the leadership from each of the selected A+ schools.
- All Oklahoma A+ Schools were visited to answer questions from faculty and administration and to provide in-service training.
- Budgets from February 2002 through June 2002 and July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003 were presented and accepted by the Da Vinci Institute.
- Presentations and packets of information were provided for legislators and possible funders (including the Reynolds Foundation).
- Invitations for the opening ceremony (May, 22, 2002 from 4:00-5:00 p.m. at the second floor Capitol Rotunda) were sent to Oklahoma A+ Schools, government officials, Da Vinci Institute, media, representatives of other educational movements in Oklahoma, current and future funders, etc. Supt. Garrett and Gov. Keating spoke.
- Research team developed a database with school demographic information. Data collection process continued.

### **Summer, 2002**

- Summer Institutes were held June 10 through June 28 at the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics. In addition to the 15 schools, Oklahoma Faculty, North Carolina Fellows, and the A+ Research Team, there were several visitors including Don Betz, Chris Markwood, Roberta Sloan, Susan McCalmont, Marvin Lamb, Phil Moss, Kurt Snodgrass, Liz Eickman, reporter from Edmond Sun & Daily Oklahoman, Floyd Coppidge, Gail Steelman, Patrick Riley, Brad Benson, Paul Hammond, Ron Manning, Ralph Morris, Brian Jackson, Teresa Brecke, video and interview team from OETA.
- A+ Schools leaders met with the following potential funding organizations: Reynolds Foundation, Kirkpatrick Foundation, Sarkeys Foundation, Sonic Corporation, Windgate

Charitable Foundation, Oklahoma Arts Council, Oklahoma State Department of Education.

- Oklahoma Faculty and Fellows were named, and subsequent orientation and planning meetings were held.
- A+ Schools leaders were presented to Oklahoma State Department of Education summer curriculum meetings.
- Research team collected extensive data documenting events of summer institutes and participant perceptions before, during, and after each Summer Institute.
- Institutional Review Boards at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University approved protocols for the A+ research project.
- Research team continued to meet to plan research and analyze data.

### **Fall 2002**

- Mini-Institute, site coordinators and principals' retreat was held September 24-25 in Edmond at Ramada Plaza Hotel
- Reynolds Foundation granted \$175,000 to Oklahoma A+ Schools
- Oklahoma Fellows workshop was held November 8-10 in OKC at Hilton Inn.
- Continued support was established from Kirkpatrick Foundation (\$250,000) and Windgate Charitable Foundation (\$70,000).
- Oklahoma A+ Foundation board was formed as a part of the Da Vinci Institute.
- The same process of recruiting new schools as implemented in previous years was continued, with regional information meetings and school applications.
- Regional meetings were held to recruit new A+ Faculty and future A+ Fellows. Invitations were sent to 353 teachers who had been selected for state Teacher of the Year, the Milken Award, the Medal of Excellence, or National Board Certification.
- "Job alike" meetings were held for Oklahoma A+ Schools network.
- Oklahoma A+ Staff initiated regular informational meetings.
- Research team continued to collect data through site visits to schools, faculty retreats and workshops, and other A+ meetings.
- Research team continued to develop procedures (including data collection instruments) for Oklahoma A+ research and evaluation.

### **Winter-Spring, 2002-2003**

- Applications of new schools were processed, and a selection committee of representatives from agencies and organizations in the state approved five new schools to be part of the Oklahoma A+ Network.
- The Tri-State A+ Network (Arkansas, North Carolina and Oklahoma) met for the first time in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and for a second time in Oklahoma City.
- Pre-Institutes were initiated for the new schools.
- Training continued for new Faculty and Fellows.
- Grants were written to Reynolds Foundation, Kirkpatrick, Sonic Corporation, Windgate Charitable Foundation, and Sarkeys Foundation.

- Partnerships were developed with Business Circle for the Arts, Oklahoma Arts Council, Alliance for Arts Education, Very Special Arts, Oklahoma City Arts Council, and Oklahoma Arts Institute.
- Oklahoma A+ Foundation continued monthly meetings to guide the Oklahoma A+ process.
- Financial statements were approved by Oklahoma A+ Foundation.
- Research team continued on-site school visits and other data collection.
- Process of research instrument development continued.
- Oklahoma A+ researchers completed first full year of gathering data and completed initial report.

### **Summer, 2003**

- Summer Institutes are scheduled for June 9 through July 9 at the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics with 14 schools participating in 3-day "refresher" conferences, and the 5 new schools participating in the full 5-day Summer Institutes.
- Members of the research team are scheduled to participate in all Summer Institute activities, collecting extensive data throughout these events.

## ***RESEARCH METHOD***

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the research component of this project is to describe and evaluate the implementation of the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program. The research team identifies the effects of the program on the educational experiences of students, the instructional and curricular practices of teachers, and the involvement of the school with community partners. Particular attention is given to how schools adopt and adapt the program to their local needs and goals and how the program itself develops to serve students in Oklahoma public schools.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this project over the next six years:

- How do schools with different characteristics (magnet, year-round, charter, new; urban, suburban, rural) adapt what they learn about the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program into their educational philosophies and teaching practices?*
- How do schools participating in the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program improve the educational experiences of their students?*
- How will schools network to support each other? What creative collaborations will emerge?*

- (d) How will schools use professional development to implement the program?*
- (e) To what extent does the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program encourage creativity in teachers and students?*
- (f) What forms of creative teaching will schools participating in the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program develop?*
- (g) What effects will the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program have upon arts education and arts integration in Oklahoma schools?*
- (h) What barriers will the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program encounter in its efforts to expand arts education and promote arts integration in schools?*
- (i) What particular challenges will schools in rural communities face when implementing the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program? How will these schools respond to these challenges?*
- (j) How will schools with multiple initiatives already in place in their schools incorporate the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program into their educational philosophies and teaching practices?*

The evaluation of the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Qualitative research methods allow the research team to develop in-depth descriptions of how schools interpret and implement the program. Data from in-depth interviews of teachers, administrators, school staff, students, parents, artists, and community partners capture the processes that schools undergo for adapting the program to diverse settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002). Participant observation and document analysis complement and triangulate interview data, giving researchers a fuller understanding of individual contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of quantitative measures, such as test scores and demographic data, enables the research team to use descriptive statistics and more complex statistical analyses to chart the progress of the schools more broadly. Data collected in areas such as attendance, parental involvement, student performance on tests, and the attitudes and perceptions of all participants across all schools adds breadth to the depth of the qualitative data.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Fourteen schools were actively involved in the initial (2002-2003) implementation of the A+ process in Oklahoma. (See Table 1 for a Demographic Summary of these schools.)

All statistics in this section of the report are based on data available as of 6/4/03. Some individual school information is unavailable at this time, therefore, summary statistics in Tables will be updated in subsequent reports.

**Table 1: A+ School Demographics**

SCHOOL ID CODE	Number of Teachers (FTE)		Number of Arts Teachers (FTE)		Number of **Other Teachers (FTE)		Number of Students		Percent on Free/Reduced Lunch	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2001-2002	2002-2003	2001-2002	2002-2003	2001-2002	2002-2003	2001-2002	2002-2003
1	36	38	2	2	2	0	586	623	17%	19%
2	14	14	1	1	20	20	301	292	39.5%	*
3	10	10	0	0	1	1	159	155	33%	38%
4	NA	16	NA	1	NA	.3	NA	295	NA	44.9%
5	*	*	*	*	*	*	300	253	*	*
6	16	16	3	3	3	3	364	356	16.7%	14%
7	17.5	16	2	2	2.5	6	272	275	64%	69%
8	23	22	1	1	6	6	351	317	46%	58%
9	12	13	.5	2	3	2.2	248	265	94.1%	94.7%
10	13	13	2.1	3.5	3.5	3.5	226	265	96%	99%
11	28	28	2	2	2	2	383	398	33%	44%
12	11	11	.3	.3	2	2	246	246	5%	2%
13	19	19	2	2	12	12	420	407	60.5%	70.3%
14	25	26	4	4	0	0	352	310	85.1%	88.9%

\*Information is not available at this time.

\*\*Additional non-arts full or part-time certified teaching staff

### Test Data

Tests administered at participating A+ Schools vary as administrators select the most appropriate instruments to measure specific objectives. The measures available most

consistently across different schools are the Academic Performance Index (API), the Stanford Nine, and the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT).

*Academic Performance Index (API)*

The API, defined in Oklahoma state law under Title 70 O.S. § 3-150 and 3-151, is a numeric score (from 0-1500) indicating school performance based upon state-mandated tests and other factors contributing to a school’s educational success. The seven educational indicators in the API formula are:

1. Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) scores,
2. Attendance rates,
3. Dropout rates,
4. Advanced Placement participation and performance (secondary schools),
5. Graduation rates (secondary schools),
6. ACT average scores (secondary schools), and
7. College remediation rates (secondary schools).

The purpose of the API is to measure success and initiate growth in school and district performance in Oklahoma. It is important to remember that because of vast differences in size, location, demographics, etc. among Oklahoma schools, the State Department of Education (SDE) urges caution in comparing the score of one school or district to that of another (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2003).

At this time, API scores are only available for the 2001-2002 academic year. (See Table 2 for range of API scores.)

**Table 2: API Scores for Oklahoma A+ Schools**

	2001-2002 Range		2002-2003 Range
	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	
*Baseline	807	1300	<i>available 11/1/03</i>
**Regular	553	1300	<i>available 11/1/03</i>
Male	579	1371	<i>available 11/1/03</i>
Female	547	1311	<i>available 11/1/03</i>
Economically Disadvantaged	538	1092	<i>available 11/1/03</i>
All	392	1242	<i>available 11/1/03</i>

\*Baseline is a predicted target for school growth based upon a formula developed each year by the Oklahoma State Dept. of Education. There are different baselines for every subgroup and not all subgroups are reported in the state's baseline.

\*\*Regular student scores (does not include special education students and English language learners)

*Stanford Nine*

The Stanford Nine is administered at the 3rd grade level and is designed to measure students' school achievement in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social science. The Ninth Edition of the Stanford battery (Stanford 9) provides updated content designed to reflect current trends in curriculum and education in the United States. (See Table 3 for Stanford Nine percentile ranges.)

National percentile ranks indicate the relative standing of a student in comparison with other students in the same grade in the norm (reference) group who took the test at a comparable time. Percentile ranks range from a low of 1 to a high of 99, 50 denoting average performance for the grade. The percentile rank corresponding to a given score indicates the percentage of students in the same grade obtaining scores equal to or less than that score. Percentile ranks are useful for comparing a student's performance on a test to that of other students.

**Table 3: Stanford Nine Percentile Ranges for Oklahoma A+ Schools**

	2001-2002 Range		2002-2003 Range	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Total Reading	30	78	30	97
Vocabulary	29	80	33	91
Reading Comp	33	79	30	91
Total Math	28	72	29	85
Problem Solving	29	80	31	80
Procedures	21	71	22	85
Language	35	76	31	88
Spelling	41	75	39	79
Listening	26	66	30	77
Three Rs	32	74	33	79

### *Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)*

During the 1993-94 school year, committees of Oklahoma educators established Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) as the set of academic skills and knowledge that public school students are expected to master at each grade level. All PASS clusters and skills are measured by multiple-choice items, except writing. The PASS writing skills are measured by a direct writing assessment.

As mandated by Oklahoma state law (Title 70 O.S. 1210.508) the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCTs) were developed to sample the skills and content specified in the PASS standards. Student performance on the OCCTs is classified into one of two (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory), or one of four performance levels (Advanced, Satisfactory, Limited Knowledge, and Unsatisfactory).

When interpreting and using OCCT results, it is important to understand the specific knowledge and skills that a student must be able to demonstrate at each performance level. A level of knowledge that one district has regarded as Satisfactory may only meet the state's definition of Limited Knowledge. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2002, p. 25)

**Table 4: Percentage Range of A+ Students Scoring Satisfactory or Higher on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (5th Grade)**

	2001-2002		2002-2003	
	Minimum %	Maximum %	Minimum %	Maximum %
Arts	36	90	61	97
Geography	23	93	24	92
Math	41	100	37	97
Reading	48	100	43	94
Science	32	100	62	97
Social Studies	14	97	43	95
Writing	50	98	61	100

Five additional schools have been selected to participate during the second year of project implementation. Baseline information is currently being collected at these schools.

## Emerging Themes

Emergent interpretations about the first year of the Oklahoma A+ Schools Program are framed here into four main themes: **engagement with A+**, **curriculum planning**, **infrastructure**, and **community building**. These themes reflect how personnel at the school have understood and interpreted the program for their individual contexts, the financial and other resources devoted to the program, formal and informal structures put into place, and attempts to adapt to unforeseen challenges. The first of the themes, engagement with A+, is an overarching frame for understanding the A+ Schools' participation in the program as an ongoing learning process. The other main themes are specific topics which the research team views as the salient issues that the schools have engaged during the first year of their involvement in the program.

The 14 A+ Schools are diverse in their student demographics, their geographic locations, and their curricular focuses prior to the A+ Program. The diversity of settings, arrangements for A+, and interpretations of the program have continued. In this section, the research team identifies its cumulative attempt to capture the diversity from qualitative data collection at the 14 schools during the Summer Institutes and the first year of the program. These themes reflect careful, reiterative analysis of the extensive data, but the conclusions should be seen as interpretive, formative, and tentative. Grounded in a cultural perspective of school reform as essentially a process of extended, long-term cultural change and development, these interpretations are under continual review and refinement as schools continue to learn about the A+ Program and respond to the challenges that they have encountered.

Oklahoma public schools faced many challenges in the 2002-2003 school year. Budget shortfalls at the state level led to budget cuts in schools and uncertainty about the

continuance of more than 2000 teaching positions across the state after the Summer of 2003 (Cooper, 2003, May 25). Budget cuts had a direct impact on resources for field trips, materials, and visiting artists during the school year. Uncertainty for the following school year, particularly the possible loss of positions and programs, was expressed at the A+ Schools throughout the 2002-2003 school year, with many funding decisions unresolved prior to the second summer institutes. At the same time, Oklahoma remolded its public school accountability system to comply with federal mandates instituted by No Child Left Behind legislation. As part of that system, baseline Academic Performance Index (API) scores were released during the school year, assigning each school a numeric value based upon test scores and other measures of school success. Schools spoke frequently of test score performance and the increased importance of individual schools' API ratings.

### Engagement with A+

After the end of the first year of the program, the research team has reviewed how and to what extent the A+ schools have engaged with the A+ Program and its many ideas surrounding the program, such as the eight A+ essentials presented at the summer institute – arts integration, collaboration, climate, infrastructure, curriculum, multiple intelligences, experiential learning, and enriched assessment. The term “engagement” is used as an alternative to a term heard more often in schools, “buy-in,” a term with a more dualistic connotation. We use “engagement” as a more general and open-ended term for the schools' processes of learning and adapting the program to individual contexts. Engagement serves as an overarching theme and centers the progressive and tentative nature of school's involvement with the A+ Program.

During the first year of the A+ Program, the 14 Oklahoma A+ Schools have engaged the program and its many aspects with varying depth and complexity. Three intervals of

engagement have emerged: **allegiance, language adoption, and internal engagement.**

These intervals are progressive in their depth, and schools see varying intervals operating at various times and with various personnel and partners at the school. The challenge for the A+ Schools is to move beyond allegiance and language adoption, which seem to be necessary parts of the process of engaging A+, and toward internal engagement. There are also implications for the research team in its progress toward a deeper understanding of the schools' experiences.

**Allegiance.** The first interval, allegiance, refers to the continued interest of the schools in the A+ Program. At each A+ School, researchers have identified enduring enthusiasm and optimism about the A+ Program, despite in some places there being multiple challenges to implementation of the program. By itself, this enthusiasm suggests an attraction to the ideas associated with the A+ Program and continued interest in understanding how teachers may incorporate these ideas into their curriculum and instruction.

Allegiance is prominent particularly among teachers who were able to attend the first summer institute and in schools who have formal leadership in the form of the principal or informal leadership in some other arrangement wherein allegiance is encouraged or rewarded. In a limited number of schools, the enthusiasm for the program seems limited to a small number of school personnel who are having limited success implementing the program within a narrow sphere of influence. In these locations, it is not clear that school personnel's interest in the program was very strong at the beginning of the program. Particularly for teachers who did not attend the institutes, allegiance to A+ is tenuous. Disillusionment with past initiatives may contribute to this tenuousness. Efforts to expand teacher involvement in the second summer institute are likely to have an impact on that allegiance.

**Language adoption.** As a second interval, language adoption is evident in schools that have taken into their schools the various lexicons associated with the A+ Program and used them as rationales for existing program. It also signals tentative application of ideas as a first step toward incorporating new ideas. This is evident most noticeably in how schools have adopted the language of multiple intelligences theory. Using the language of multiple intelligences and explaining its metaphorical value for expanding traditional, limited notions of children's abilities has proven beneficial for support of the arts and integration among teachers, parents, and other community partners.

This adoption of language represents a "trying out" of the A+ Program. A potential danger, of course, is of adopting language and new rationales solely and stopping the process of growth. For instance, in the case of multiple intelligences, the theoretical and curricular implications are rather complex. Schools are not likely to develop robust implementation of the full possibilities of multiple intelligences in just one year, and schools will need to decide as they progress how much of this idea (as well as the others) that they are able to accomplish.

**Internal engagement.** The third interval, internal engagement, is noticed at times in several schools. Schools work at this interval of engagement when they tie together several A+ essentials and actively create curricula that apply to rich conceptual goals. This level of engagement provides the strongest evidence of openness to growth and adaptation of ideas. The eight A+ essentials identified by the North Carolina program, and upon which the professional development for the Oklahoma A+ Program is based, are rich, complex, and subject to multiple and creative interpretations. These essentials have deep links to pedagogical and curricular theory, and there is much room for interpretation and adaptation to school settings. Tasks such as curriculum mapping contribute to the process of

engagement, but this interval of engagement is essentially a creative process with widespread involvement.

**Deeper engagement.** Engagement may be evident even in places where this common refrain is heard: “A+ is what we’ve always done before.” We suspect that this comment has multiple, uncommon meanings, depending on the intent of its speaker and the school’s context. It may signal one or more of the following more specific attitudes toward the A+ Program: (a) ownership of A+ or its essential ideas, (b) some degree of prior engagement with aspects of the A+ Program, (c) the acquisition of language for existing predispositions consistent with A+, or (d) as resistance to deeper engagement with A+. By itself the comment does not mean limited engagement with A+, although if it is an expression of resistance to deeper engagement with the program, this resistance may constrain a school or individual to the interval of language adoption.

A statement from a fifth grade teacher captures how schools are spanning the three intervals of allegiance, language adoption, and internal engagement: “A+ gave us more affirmation [that] what we were doing was right and asking [us] to do more of it” (5th grade teacher, Spring 2003). This statement can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the benefits of allegiance to A+ (expressed here as affirmation and elsewhere by other teachers as enthusiasm or confirmation), language adoption (in other settings similar sentiments took the form of giving language to what schools were already doing), and internal engagement (doing more).

Schools and individuals who have moved toward deeper engagement more quickly seem to have done so because of existing conditions at the school or existing predispositions. Deep engagement at schools seems to depend to a great degree on the level of commitment and understanding of the principal and A+ coordinator. Engagement by

individual teachers appears to depend on the level of comfort with and commitment to the arts in education and/or other aspects of the eight essentials.

**Implications for research methods.** Engagement with A+ ideas also has direct implications for the ongoing research at the A+ Schools. Continued contact with members of the research team should encourage the schools participating in the program to become even more honest about their engagement with A+ beyond the level of allegiance and language adoption. As schools continue in their processes, the research team should be able to develop a more sophisticated, nuanced, and time-sensitive understanding of schools' engagement with A+.

### Curriculum and Planning Challenges

The A+ Schools have discovered that implementing the various aspects of the program is challenging, and many of the challenges are associated with working as a whole school to plan for instruction that is collaborative and thematic and which reflects two-way integration. During research team visits to schools, these four themes are evident in relation to curriculum and planning challenges: **varied definitions of integration, time together, methods for collaboration, and multiple programs and curricula.** Together, these themes reflect the salient planning issues that have arisen in the A+ Schools as they have engaged A+.

**Varied definitions of integration.** A fundamental issue associated with the challenges of planning is that there are many different definitions of integration in the 14 schools. The variation in definitions of integration also occurs within buildings. The two-way integration discussed at the summer institute is indicated by mutual sharing of curriculum objectives among all subjects, including the arts, and includes the incorporation of curriculum objectives in the art forms into instruction by grade-level teachers. This latter aspect of

integration is the most challenging and most elusive to the A+ schools, and there are many reasons for this. Few grade-level teachers have efficacy (comfort, experience, and knowledge) with the arts curricula, and as the other three themes in this section suggest, there are many aspects of the process to build efficacy in these areas.

As a result, one-way integration is most prevalent. Arts specialists are frequently engaging the grade-level curricula in their instruction and making connections to curriculum topics. In more developed integration, the connections that arts specialists are making are on the level of concept. Working at this level takes time, however, and a developed culture of collaboration and knowledge about the extent of curricula.

The integration of the arts by classroom teachers varies, mostly depending upon prior efficacy with the arts, willingness to try new ideas, and compatibility with existing curricula. In most classrooms, teachers are doing at least some limited form of incorporation of the arts, such as playing music for students during reading time, or incorporating more “hands-on” activities into the instructional day. These efforts can be interpreted as first steps toward making teaching practices more integrative of the content of the arts. The challenge for A+ schools is to encourage teachers to continue to build upon these practices and collaborate for more two-way, integrated instruction.

**Time together.** Starting as it did with a week-long summer institute, the A+ Program has engaged the teachers at the 14 schools by bringing them together for moments of “time together,” a phrase heard in schools that reflects multiple meanings about the program. During the summer institute, time together meant a significant commitment to sticking with the process, despite some initial resistance. Schools are typically structured so that teachers do not have an opportunity to get to know each other, much less what they are teaching. Formal and informal time together seemed to be beneficial to the schools.

Maintaining opportunities for time together became highly significant for the schools during the school year. Some of the activities, particularly curriculum mapping, that required time together, were very difficult to accomplish. Time together has been particularly relevant for sustained collaborative planning with arts specialists. Those schools with opportunities for cross-team planning were able to integrate more deeply and more effectively.

**Methods for collaboration.** Structures for planning have varied across the schools as well. Few schools have regularly scheduled planning meetings for specialists and classroom teachers with time sufficient for effective two-way integration. Without formal structures, integration seems to be less systematic, although some collaboration may not be as readily apparent and evident, since these are ongoing processes. Schools have found that curriculum mapping itself can be part of a method for planning but that communicating only on paper is limited, particularly for the goal of promoting two-way integration. Teachers have found that collaboration requires more than communicating information about topics, and the more time they have together, the richer and more creative the planning process can become. At this point, less well understood by the research team are the ways in which informal systems of planning have worked, particularly at small schools.

There have been widely varying degrees of success in the completion of the mapping process. Those schools that did complete the maps seemed to do so before school started or shortly after the start of school, often with the principal pushing the process. Some schools were never able to complete the mapping process and expressed frustration and confusion with the process. Further, those who did not complete their curriculum maps found it more difficult to integrate and collaborate. Many schools are going into the second summer institutes with concerns about improving this process, believing that they need time to finish it

and figure out what it would mean to their planning. “Not knowing how to do it” (Spring, 2003) was a concern expressed at one school.

**Multiple programs and curricula.** Insofar as schools in Oklahoma are expected to adopt state PASS objectives, and many schools have district curricula to follow, along with programs such as Saxon Phonics, Great Expectations, and Core Knowledge, schools have multiple raw materials to integrate into their curricula. For some schools, these curricula have served as organizers for curriculum planning. Core Knowledge is a popular basis for curriculum integration in several A+ Schools, for example, because it provides topical material integrated mostly through the social studies and provides suggestions for activities in the arts. For other schools, some of these additional programs serve as stand-alone programs, and in some cases, the school would benefit from integrating those programs more fully.

The research team is particularly interested in how schools will choose to grow in their participation with the A+ Program and negotiate any tensions that emerge between the various sources of curricula. These tensions are likely to emerge with the implementation of Oklahoma’s public school accountability system and the increasing importance that federal mandates have granted to standardized tests, another source of curriculum material.

**Mapping as a focus.** Much attention during the first summer institutes focused on curriculum mapping, a process that stalled in some schools while greatly facilitating the process of others. Curriculum maps are one of the few identifiable “products” at this early stage in the implementation of the A+ Program. Significant for the research team are the ways in which curriculum mapping will be used in the future for promoting deeper engagement with A+ ideas and how concerns about the process of curriculum mapping will enable schools to reflect and develop their overall planning processes.

## Infrastructure

The research team has found in the first year that significant differences in infrastructure alter the possibilities for implementation of A+. Particular aspects of infrastructure appear to facilitate implementation of the program. Most notable is the **presence of arts specialists** on the school staff, and others are **clear leadership roles** and **community resources**.

**Presence of arts specialists.** The few schools implementing the A+ Program without arts specialists have a more difficult time integrating the arts. The level of integration possible is less from the start, engagement with A+ to move beyond allegiance with A+ is more difficult, and students' opportunities are limited. Principals in these schools see the lack of specialists as the greatest obstacle to overcome, since teachers are not able to plan with specialists and specialists are not available as resources in the building.

Schools that have part-time arts specialists have similar challenges, since the possibilities for integration are less, there is less opportunity for allegiance with A+, planning faces greater obstacles, and the leadership challenges are greater. These barriers are difficult to overcome, and schools have been seeking alternatives.

There is noticeable variation also in how well the arts specialists are incorporated into faculties. This incorporation, a whole-school planning approach, has greatly facilitated moves toward two-way integration. Further, strong arts specialists with knowledge of arts integration are a helpful resource for schools' implementation efforts.

Very few schools have drama specialists of any kind, and the only dance specialists are those who combine dance and physical education. Schools that rely solely on grade-level teachers to integrate one or multiple art forms will need to develop creative strategies to  
Some of the schools have brought in visiting artists to compensate for the lack of specialization in these areas. Artists-in-residence programs whose work is incorporated into

teachers' thematic work provide promising opportunities for schools to complement their existing arts instruction, particularly when the artist-in-residence arrangement is coupled with professional development to build teachers' expertise and knowledge of the art form.

**Clear leadership roles.** In many schools, strong leadership appears to be essential for successful implementation of A+. Their enthusiasm and understanding of the program are key factors. It also seems evident to the research team that principal networking has emerged as significant. The A+ principals, who have now experienced the implementation and first year of the program, are communicating with each other about their leadership roles at their schools and are developing ties with each other to begin building a network. This network may take on added importance as new principals are hired in the A+ schools. Principals also are now in a position to select new personnel based on A+ needs and priorities.

The role of the A+ coordinator continues to be developed at most schools. In some, the coordinator is an arts specialist and in others a classroom teacher. Some teachers have assumed an informal coordinator role, while some formal coordinators have been marginalized. The relationship between the coordinator and the principal also varies. While sometimes the principal is the leader and advocate for A+ with the teachers, in other contexts the coordinator fulfills that role. In a few schools, neither exercises leadership with the A+ Program, and in these settings, implementation has been the most limited.

At some schools, informal leadership comes from teachers who are A+ Faculty and A+ Fellows. Their involvement in the statewide A+ Program and training programs means that these teachers are nourished more consistently in A+ essentials and processes of engagement. Their enthusiasm and engagement with A+ seem to provide additional sources

of leadership. There is evidence that their presence in these schools has contributed to the schools' resilience in light of challenges they have experienced.

**Community resources.** Differential community resources seem to have an impact on the kinds of opportunities that schools have incorporated into their A+ implementation. The availability of outside money seems to make a difference. A few schools are skilled at being entrepreneurial, and some metropolitan schools have benefited from foundation support. Resources for activities, materials, and field trips also come from smaller private donations and from fundraising from parent/teacher organizations.

Cultural resources are also widely varied, both in their availability and their incorporation into the curriculum. Artists-in-residence, community arts agencies, corporate partners, and parents are included as community resources. These efforts will continue to be of interest to the research team as schools look for creative ways to maintain their participation in the A+ Program during times of financial strain in the public sector. Resources for professional development are also of interest to the research team, including the use of A+ Fellows, specialists in the A+ essentials from North Carolina and Oklahoma, and their incorporation into schools' professional development programs.

### Community Building

As mentioned above, the research study has taken a cultural approach to studying school reform through the A+ Schools Program. A significant part of the culture of school reform is building community. In the context of the A+ Schools, there are multiple communities that are part of that community building process. Building community within schools is important, as is the making of connections to communities outside schools. A further community of significance for the A+ Program is the network of A+ Schools in Oklahoma, part also of a developing tri-state community of schools, educators, and reformers

in Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Arkansas. Each of these will be part of the focus of this section.

**Community in schools.** Teachers at the A+ Schools have told the research team that the first Summer Institute was a significant community building (or “bonding”) experience for their schools. As suggested previously, sustaining allegiance in the A+ Program was helped by the common experience, evidenced by large interest in the number of school personnel returning for the second summer institutes, even at schools that found implementing the A+ Program to be particularly challenging. Collaboration for integrated instruction seems to be greatly facilitated by community building and vice versa. Building community is both facilitated and hindered in smaller schools, where there are smaller groups, but fewer common teachers at the same grade level for regular collaboration.

**Schools in communities.** Schools have found effective, artistic ways to use “informances” to communicate to parents and other community members about the role of A+ in student learning. Several schools have posted information about the A+ Program on their schools’ web sites, and principals have written to parents through newsletters about the program. Some schools have greater parental involvement than others, some benefiting from concerted efforts to reach and involve parents.

**Communities of A+.** At the close of the first year of the program, it is notable how much that the establishment of networks has contributed to the A+ Program. Weekly “job-alike” meetings organized by the A+ Program office has fostered collaboration and provided a forum for questions and concerns. On an informal basis, teachers have made visits to other schools in the program, four metropolitan schools have collaborated and communicated on a regular basis, and the addition of new A+ Schools in Summer 2003 nearby existing schools has the potential for building communities within the network of Oklahoma A+ Schools.

Networking between the Oklahoma A+ Program and the North Carolina A+ Network has at this point occurred mostly between program directors and fellows in the two states. The partnership and mutual learning process has developed progressively over the course of a rather short time period. Preparations for the first summer institutes, conducted on a limited time frame, resulted in productive and successful institutes for the participating schools but at the same time produced tensions in ownership and direction of the program that through time and continued cooperation seemed to be ameliorated.

Collaboration among fellows is the first source of collaboration between states, and of continued interest are the multiple layers of possible collaboration in the future between teachers, principals, and students. Just as electronic mail communication has facilitated contact between Oklahoma and North Carolina fellows, tri-state network connections with Arkansas A+ Schools through technology may facilitate this process.

## ***FUTURE PLANS***

### **Deeper Engagement with Schools**

The value of qualitative research is greatly enhanced through the process of spending time in settings and getting to know participants, so that data and interpretations become more sophisticated and sensitive to the contexts that are studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research team has appreciated the diversity of the 14 A+ Schools and through continued and extended time collecting data in schools will be attuned to individual contextual differences as schools grow with the program. More time in schools by the research team should provide more opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their experiences and to explain how they are engaging A+.

The second year of data collection will also be devoted to team-building of the two-campus research team, which will be better able to communicate on a regular basis.

Continuing to train graduate assistants to conduct research and capitalizing on the diversity of our experiences (similar to the collaborative team ethnography process described in Gerstl-Pepin & Gunzenhauser, 2002) should enable richer interpretations.

Interpretations developed for this report will be tested and re-analyzed as the program continues, so that findings will be richer and more representative of the diversity of schools' experiences. Additional data collection in the form of community partner interviews, parent interviews, student interviews, student surveys, and teacher surveys will complement the first-year design of teacher interviews, classroom observations, professional development observations, and demographic, testing, and attendance data. This expanded information base will provide complementary and comprehensive data as the program proceeds. Development of new instruments is nearly complete for implementing during the summer institutes in June 2003 and at the beginning of the school year.

### **Deeper, Maintained Engagement with A+**

The greater time spent in schools should mirror schools' deeper engagement with the ideas of A+ in the second year of the program, as teachers come together to assess their progress in the summer and establish goals and priorities. Attention will be devoted to ways in which schools maintain engagement with A+ in light of changes and the passage of time, such as teacher and administrative turnover, changes in district policies and curricula, budgetary constraints, and mandates as a result of the state's public school accountability system. Of particular interest for A+ are the effects that potential reduced resources for arts specialists will have on schools' ability to collaborate and integrate.

Emphasis on each of the eight A+ essentials and the extent to which the Oklahoma A+ Schools engage them are central to the team's future efforts. For example, one of these, enriched assessment, has been identified by the principals as an area for further elaboration

and development. This particular theme is likely to become even more significant and more complex with the impending full implementation of the state's accountability system and its reliance upon standard measures of success.

### **Role of Professional Development**

As mentioned previously, many of the schools have identified the need for further work on the process and use of curriculum mapping. Other needs of professional development, such as in two-way integration have also been identified. The research team is interested in how the program and the participating schools will identify appropriate subjects for professional development and how teachers will use those professional development experiences to engage the A+ Program more deeply. Of related interest is the emerging role of the growing group of Oklahoma A+ Faculty and Fellows within the culture of the schools and the A+ Program.

### **Role of Networking and Community Building**

As a growing statewide program, the A+ Program's networking aspects are of ongoing interest to the research team. The interactions between existing and new schools are of research interest, particularly since Oklahoma's expansion follows a different model from the North Carolina program. Collaborations, such as the consortium of metropolitan schools, the charter school, and the partner elementary schools in a rural county, present new departures for the A+ Program and new opportunities for interpreting the program in particular settings. The research team plans to include the 5 new A+ Schools as full partners in its research and evaluation.

Networking initiatives such as the coordinator and principal meetings, job-alike sessions, as well as electronic communications for idea sharing, are of interest to the research team for promoting engagement with A+. The multiple challenges that schools face

in implementing the program suggest the need for sharing creative solutions among schools with similar needs.

As mentioned previously, community building is an area of great variation among the schools. Attention to the multiple communities within schools and between schools and outside communities should have significant impact on schools' engagement with A+. Opportunities for enhancing arts integration through developing community (on all levels) are of interest to the research team.

### **RESEARCH PERSONNEL**

A collaborative team of researchers with diverse backgrounds from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University will direct the evaluation and research, analyze data, and write reports. A team of graduate students enrolled in masters and doctoral programs at these institutions will also participate in the research.

#### ***OU Researchers:***

*Nancy H. Barry* is Professor, Chair and Graduate Coordinator of Music Education in the School of Music at the University of Oklahoma. She earned the Master's degree and PhD in music education and certificates in Electronic Music and Computers in Music from Florida State University. Barry has numerous research publications in such journals as *Arts and Learning*, *Psychology of Music*, *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *Contributions to Music Education*, *UPDATE*, and *Bulletin of Research in Music Education*, among others. She co-authored a book for the Music Educators National Conference entitled: *Music and Students at Risk: Creative Solutions for a National Dilemma* and recently coauthored the chapter on *Practice* in The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning (2002, New York: Oxford University Press). Professor Barry is a frequent presenter at national and international professional conferences. Barry supervises

the team of doctoral students at OU working on the A+ Research and Evaluation -- Edgar Cajas, Carla Maltas, Susan Schons, and Angela Barker -- all experienced educators currently in the PhD program in Music Education.

*Michael A. Raiber* is Assistant professor of Music Education and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in music education and instrumental conducting at the University of Oklahoma. Raiber received a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Music Education from the University of Tulsa and a PhD in Music Education from the University of Oklahoma. Prior to his appointment at OU, he had thirteen years of public school experience teaching in Missouri and Oklahoma and three years as Associate Director of Bands at Oklahoma State University. Raiber has presented research and clinics at MENC national conference, OMEA state conference, North Carolina Music Educators state conference, Desert Skies Symposium on Instrumental Music Education and the Arizona Symposium on Learning and the Arts. He is an active writer and researcher who has articles published in state and national journals. His primary research interests are in the areas of teacher reflection, teacher collaboration/integration, and music teacher education. Raiber's professional affiliations include, the National Association for Music Education (MENC), OMEA, Phi Beta Mu, Tau Beta Sigma, Kappa Kappa Psi, Pi Kappa Lambda, Oklahoma Bandmaster's Association, and College Band Directors National Association.

***OSU Researchers:***

*Michael G. Gunzenhauser* is assistant professor of educational studies in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University. He teaches in the areas of social foundations of education, the foundations of inquiry, and qualitative research methodology. In 1999, Gunzenhauser earned his PhD in Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where his specialization was philosophy of education. At Chapel Hill, for four years he was on the research team that evaluated the pilot phase of the North Carolina A+ Schools

Program, and he co-authored, with George W. Noblit, one of the final reports for that study, *Reforming With the Arts: Creativity in A+ Classrooms and Schools*. In addition, he has published articles in *Philosophy of Education*, *Theory Into Practice*, *Educational Foundations*, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, and the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Prior to becoming a faculty member, he was a residential counselor for the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics and was coordinator for pre-college programs at Duke University. Gunzenhauser supervises the team of doctoral students at OSU working on the A+ Research and Evaluation -- Diane Knapp, Mark Malaby, and Sibongile Mtshali-Dlamini -- all experienced educators and currently in the PhD program in Curriculum and Social Foundations.

*Diane Montgomery* is a Professor in Educational Psychology in the School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology, College of Education at Oklahoma State University. She directs the graduate programs in gifted education and talent development and conducts research in talent development, Native American Indian studies, creativity, and gender issues. She is a member of board of directors for The Association for the Gifted of the Council for Exceptional Children and Oklahoma Association for Gifted, Creative, and Talented. She serves on several editorial boards and has conducted evaluation reviews of several federal and state programs on talent development.

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