

One City, Many Voices: Arts Integration and School Reform

A Work in Progress

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Background

In November 2001, after a devastating forty years of decline in their public schools, the voters of Oklahoma City approved a combined bond and tax referendum in the amount of \$700 million for school construction and re-formation. When completed later this decade, every student will be in a new or completely renovated facility, educational programming within the schools will be dramatically changed, and every student will be exposed to the arts through a fully integrated arts curriculum. On a per pupil basis this is believed to be the largest public school initiative in U.S. history. Commitment to the arts in the education facilities and in the educational programs in each school in the district is a significant part of this initiative and a major source of the energy driving the process.

In interviews for a background paper* distributed in advance of the 2002 GIA conference community leaders identified three factors that together made possible this seismic change. Several likened what occurred to a three-legged stool that would never have stayed upright without each of the legs firmly in place. They identified the three legs as:

- The support for arts education from key staff within the school district management's inner circle.
- Strong and committed leaders throughout the community and the gradually growing involvement of thousands of citizens.
- A governing body in the school board that placed arts education firmly on the district's agenda and insisted that it be discussed and supported.

Why and how this dramatic turn-around came about is a complex and politically sophisticated story, going back – in the short version – at least ten years. The story was the subject of the following key note session, presented on Tuesday, October 29, 2002.

Vincent Marron

Conference Introduction

This session on the connections between the arts and education reform takes the form of a moderated dialogue about major changes in the public schools in Oklahoma City that have been under way for almost ten years. With us are three of the central players. William Weitzel is the CEO and superintendent of the Oklahoma City Schools. Ron Bogle is a former chair of the City Board of Education, who has recently moved to Washington, DC to become the CEO of the American Architectural Foundation. Susan McCalmont is president of the Kirkpatrick Foundation in Oklahoma City and a member of GIA. Without further ado, Susan McCalmont will moderate this conversation about the educational reform movement in Oklahoma City that has the arts at its center. My thanks to our panel. [Applause].

Amina Dickerson

McCalmont

This is a story of a journey that was begun about ten years ago by a number of visionary leaders living in the heartland of our country.

These leaders were singularly inspired to make a difference. They dreamed that their run-down school buildings could be beautiful, inviting environments for learning. They believed that creativity and intellectual curiosity should be an integral part of every child's education. And they believed in cultivating unlikely partnerships, serving in school governments, and coming together with parents, elected officials, arts organizations, and private funders.

Imagine each one of these visionary leaders as a thread of creative thought, determination, and positive influence that, one by one, joined other threads in disparate parts of our community and that were bound together in a common vision as a strong cord was formed. This strong cord eventually became a tightly-woven tapestry of diverse thought, creative solutions, and partnerships that provides the impetus for a most exciting education reform initiative in common education.

You are probably all wondering what this has to do with the arts. And as an arts funder I can appreciate that. Let me answer by describing briefly how I think the community has been profoundly changed by this ten-year journey.

Ten years ago our small family foundation simply hoped to have the opportunity to fund a few art projects in the

public schools, or perhaps influence administrators to hire a few new art teachers for the elementary schools, or perhaps influence a handful of schools to become excellent centers for arts education.

Ten years later – through steady, proactive engagement with the Oklahoma City Public School District administrators along with elected officials, parents, educators, and arts organizations – our small foundation has witnessed partnerships and creative connections that will ensure that all the children of the Oklahoma City Public School District have access to arts instruction and that every school site will become a center of creativity and intellectual curiosity for students and teachers alike.

Ten years ago I was knocking at the District's door looking for opportunities to advocate on behalf of arts education. Today the District leadership is providing the directive for arts as core curriculum and for each school site to become a creative center for learning. And now I play a very different role as a supporter and encourager, and an accountable partner for change.

Ten years ago the foundation facilitated a community group that came together with arts organizations and parents and educators. We initiated the District's first ever strategic plan for arts education. Today this group continues to meet monthly; it has met monthly since 1993. The District's plan for education reform, known as "Maps for Kids," has arts at the center and not at the periphery. And it is setting the pace statewide for education reform.

Ron came on the school board in 1993 when a strategic plan for arts education was unanimously passed by the board but then remained unfunded. I would like Ron to tell us a little bit about what the environment was like in Oklahoma City public schools ten years ago.

Bogle

In 1993 I was a citizen of Oklahoma City, I graduated from the Oklahoma City schools and, after being away for a number of years, my wife and children and I returned to the city to find a much-changed community. We had the same circumstances most urban centers had. Our school district had lost most of its political and community support. The tax base had been in years of decline. The buildings also had been in decline because the community was unwilling to support bond issues for facility repair and improvement. It was a pretty dismal situation.

But my wife and I made a decision that we wanted our children to be in the public school system of Oklahoma City. And so, almost out of self-interest, I chose to run for the school board to see if I couldn't improve the circumstances for our children, as well as for the children of the community. And I had a certain sense of wanting to give back to my home community.

So I was invited to a little discussion where I was recruited formally to run for the school board. Like Miss Lily (Yeh, see page 42), I heard a voice down deep inside. A quiet voice that said "Run for the door!" [Laughter] But unlike Miss Lily I didn't listen to my voice and I pursued this activity that actually gave me an opportunity to discover one of my two passions.

I had no idea that I would find my passion in public education, in the intense issues of dealing with urban situations in an American city. Our city's not unlike any other. We have many of the same problems.

Upon being elected to the board, I found a fairly dysfunctional governance structure. I found a set of agendas that was not particularly aligned with improving and making a great urban school district. One of the things I also found was a faint voice off in the hallway tapping at the window saying, "Let us in." This was the arts community. They were probably where most arts communities in this country are, tapping on the window, asking permission to be invited to the party.

What I discovered is that the bureaucracy in school systems is very good at not letting people in whom they don't want to let in. So they kept the arts community at a very safe distance, sort of encouraging them in ways that made them feel that they were being attended to, but not really. For example, receiving the proposal for an arts plan with enthusiasm, but not funding it – a classic way for bureaucracies to appear to be encouraging, but not really.

So the conclusion I reached at a point later on was that, in order for the arts to become a part of our program, we were going to have to get people who were supportive of the arts – who shared these values – to the table. This means you either convert the people who are already at the table, or you change which people are there. We chose to change the people.

Today we'll have a chance to talk about a political solution where you get people who share your values into key positions in community leadership, in city leadership, in school district leadership. And then you find ways to create and fund certain key positions in the district's administration. If one of the key pieces is missing, then you're really at a disadvantage in terms of creating a district where the arts are built-in, not added-on.

McCalmont

Ron, can you tell us how Bill came to the table as superintendent?

Bogle

Well, there was a moment of awakening when we discovered some things about the arts in our district. In

1994-95 someone made a rough calculation of how much we spent for the arts. The total budget came to nineteen cents per student per year. Now that's hardly adequate funding, most of you would agree. This was one of two discoveries that set us on a course that would last for several years and that eventually led to the need to identify and appoint a superintendent who would be willing not just to invest in the arts but actually to create a place for the arts as an integral part of the district.

McCalmont

Yes, and Bill had been a seasoned superintendent, correct?

Bogle

No, as a matter of fact, not. We really felt that, to change... I don't know how many of you have dealt with public education, but it's pretty well structured to protect the status quo. So we really needed to bring in an executive who was willing to look at doing things differently.

Dr. Weitzel's background is not as a superintendent, although he has academic credentials and was a university faculty member. He also spent many years in business, working as a consultant for major corporations engaged in turnaround efforts. That's exactly what we were involved in, a turnaround effort. As a result, he brought with him a progressive attitude not just about the arts, but about governance, systems, and structures that we felt would be critical for the Oklahoma City Schools as we began to put the pieces back in place.

McCalmont

Bill tell us a little bit about the environment you found as you entered the scene in Oklahoma City.

Weitzel

Well, you talked very nicely about building a tapestry, a tapestry of change. And we could probably use another metaphor, we could talk about building a symphonic sound from the many voices – initially discordant voices – that eventually we brought together as one sound. That was part of what had to be done.

But another part of what you have to do is to face what the situation is and what it is not. Call it for what you see it to be and what you see it not to be.

And you know, change requires two things to be successful. It requires confrontation; I know of no change that occurs without confrontation. And I know of no successful change that has confrontation without compassion. You've got to weld these two things together. You've got to confront the problem and you've got to be compassionate. At the same time you've got to follow through.

So that's what we did. And we changed five things.

- We looked for strong leadership throughout the organization. If it was not present, we removed leaders and brought new ones in.
- We looked for a commitment to a common vision for the urban situation, the urban ideal. By urban ideal I mean, "A safe enriching environment that fosters growth and enjoyment." We didn't have that. One of the critical components necessary to build an urban ideal is a strong common educational institution that focuses on the fundamentals that are there.
- The missing ingredient in the Oklahoma City schools was an understanding of the importance of the role of the arts. The arts had been one of the earliest casualties when the institution's budgets were cut. So we had to try to create a sense of why the arts are important. Ron talked about "tapping on the window" and looking at things from the outside. That's a good metaphor.
- I think there's another way of thinking about this too. How do you take the arts and make it one of the fundamental components at the heart of the changes that you want? From the point of view of the urban ideal (that is, a safe environment that's enriching and enjoyable), what we had done was cut the heart out of education. And our task was to bring it back in.
- And there's another piece in the change process. Too many times people focus on problems and "fixes," instead of asking, "What do we wish to be? And what do we wish to become?" At issue is, "What is this educational institution to be?"

Instead of just adding a piece [adding the arts], let's recreate the whole. Let's recreate it from within. And that, I think, is the role of the arts. Four things are important to this.

First of all, the arts have to be integrated. And that's what we tried to do. We brought them in and made them a fundamental part of the curriculum. Fortunately the state of Oklahoma has also seen fit to make it part of the core curriculum.

Secondly, the arts play an energizing role. One of the things that you may or may not know about common education is that teachers don't talk to one another. They go off into their classrooms and they rarely work together. And so you have to bring them together. One of the ways of doing this is to get them together through curriculum planning about the arts, because the arts are essentially very involving.

Thirdly, there's the whole issue of enrichment. You know, if you take out of education what is beautiful, what is orderly, what is harmonious, what is innovative, you don't have an awful lot left, do you? You've got facts and occasional tests. What we had to do was re-infuse those values from the arts. If you think about what is going to successfully reform a system, it takes the same values that are fundamental to the arts. And we wanted to bring these values into the change process.

Really what the arts do is bring us back in touch with the creative and with innovation, and we so desperately need this in our society – in our cities, in our neighborhoods, in our country, and in our approaches to problems. And it is these values, I think, that the arts provide.

Lastly, the arts are a vehicle around which we can reestablish community. Ron referred to the breakdown of community in the '70s that occurred in most urban settings. And this happened in Oklahoma City as well. But it's through bringing the heart back into the school system that we are going to rebuild our sense of community. It's around these things that people seem to coalesce. It's kind of hard to be attracted together around algebra, but it's very, very, very simple to be attracted around things of beauty, things of harmony, things of order.

McCalmont

Ron, I'd like you to address some of the practical steps that were taken to build the creative connections and partnerships that led to one of the major tax and bond referendums for public school reform.

Bogle

I will, but first I just have to reflect on being able to sit here and listen to the superintendent of Oklahoma City public schools talk about this kind of thing. Because it wasn't always this way.

There are some things you ought to know about the Southwest if you're not from there. First of all in the Southwest, 75 percent of the school superintendents are former football coaches. [Laughter] And actually that's good news, it used to be ninety-five percent. [Laughter] So we have this classic struggle between the arts and athletics. First of all the arts get treated like an extra-curricular activity. But there's this classic struggle at the budget point where if somebody gets cut it's usually not the football program. And when the superintendent thinks about the arts, it's about the marching band. Now I like marching bands, but we wanted to have a little more complex idea about what the arts are. It is performing arts, but it's also arts integration, it's the A+ schools that the Kenan Institute has brought to Oklahoma City.

But it wasn't always this way. When I went on the board, not only were the arts not on the agenda, they weren't really on the radar screen, not even part of the discussion.

How do you move a district from where it was, and maybe where many districts still are today, to the point where we're able to have this kind of conversation? I mentioned a minute ago about the nineteen cents per student. That's pretty stark and gets people's attention.

Something else that gets people's attention is the disrespect that the arts leaders were shown when they tried to get in the door, when they tried to be invited into the room, so to speak. Treated disrespectfully, treated without regard because the arts just weren't of any importance to the people who were at the table. So we had to create the connections. This concept describes precisely what we did in Oklahoma City, and also what Miss Lily was talking about.

We didn't appoint a "Blue Ribbon Committee," or have some panel from the Chamber of Commerce. It was a very – you've used the word, we've used the word – *organic* process. When we started this we didn't know where it was going, we didn't know how it was going to end up.

It was a very organic process. When we started this we didn't know where it was going, we didn't know how it was going to end up.

Another little bit of information that we discovered along the way had a profound impact, just as strong as the "nineteen cents" issue. One night we discovered that not only were we a failing institution as a school district, but, under the fiscal circumstances in which we operated, it would be impossible ever to change that. Here's why:

We were allowed a maximum number of dollars for repair of buildings. It happens to be \$110 million and is based on a formula. We did a study that showed we had \$300 million worth of deferred maintenance. Now this is not building art studios, this is just repairing floors and windows and doors. It would have taken us seventeen years of bond issues to reach 1998 building standards, 2016-17, something like that. That's a formula for failure as an institution.

This is really where we faced a decision. Under our existing circumstances, a rational person either had to start shutting down or had to figure out some new and innovative, creative approach. It was out of that moment of reality, that realization, that our community coalition was born, this collaboration that we called, "Maps for Kids." But it didn't happen overnight. It meant building constituencies in key places. And it was a very long and painstaking process.

What we found was that the people who had been tapping on the window about the arts are people who had a multitude of interests, and not just about the arts. These were people who had a family of values that gave real energy to a whole reformation process in the school district. We were able to tap the leadership of people who value the arts, and we used that as a driving force to reform the entire district. That leadership is what led to “Maps for Kids.”

“Maps for Kids” was a tax initiative. On a per pupil basis, this is believed to be the most significant tax for school reform in American history. At the end of seven years, eight maybe, we will spend \$500 million to do what no urban district has ever done, and that is rebuild or renovate every school in the entire district.

But it’s not just about buildings, although – I’ll put on my American Architectural Foundation hat – I don’t differentiate between architecture and art. Some say that architecture is the inescapable art. [Laughter] You can choose not to go to a symphony or maybe not to drop by the museum, but folks, we live in architecture. Winston Churchill said “First we shape our buildings, and then they shape us.” So architecture is the place where art shapes our lives. This is how I found my passion for the architectural solution to transform our schools. We put students in environments that enhance creativity. We put teachers in environments that are wonderful to work in, and good comes from it, as opposed to putting them in buildings that are decrepit and falling down.

So we built a coalition, a coalition in the community that not only builds schools, but also reforms what goes on inside the schools. This is a remake, a total remake of our programs.

One of the driving philosophies was that arts are not added on, arts are built in. So every building through its architectural program has spaces for arts and places for arts. And the buildings themselves become an expression of arts and of the impact that architecture and art can have in transforming the community.

There are lots of details and some very practical issues of politics. First you have to recruit board members – and it’s a long and laborious process – recruit and get board members elected to your local boards of education. If you don’t have a board that is supportive of your notion, then you’re going to find it a continual frustration to get your programs built into the infrastructure of the district.

The arts community can and should be involved in helping recruit and support board members who share these values. The arts community should support hiring superintendents that bring the perspective and the values that a person like Bill does, and it should support funding

for arts staffing in the district. That’s how you build a permanent infrastructure for the arts rather than art always being the first thing dropped when the budget cuts occur.

So we spent seven years. You have to be patient. You have to be persistent. And you have to be dogged in doing this. But those are years well spent. Now arts programming is well on its way of having permanence in our school district.

McCalmont

Bill, we’ve talked about the buildings, but what changes do you actually see occurring in the classroom in terms of creative environments and arts learning?

Weitzel

Well, when you’re making systemic change you have to choose either pushing the change through the whole system or creating “pull” by getting people to want it. Now I don’t know what your success has been in pushing changes. Mine has been dismal. Most people who push things don’t get them to go very far. But when you create something that everyone wants, that’s the key.

First of all, what we’ve done is integrated into our core curriculum some fundamental arts concerns, both in terms of content, and in terms of appreciation. That’s one part of it.

But the second thing we did was to use the A+ schools program. We’ve created five of these in our district. Some principals are committed to it. These are going to be demonstration projects. The interesting thing is that even before the program started, teachers were lining up wanting to be a part of it, essentially because it has brought life and interest, has brought joy back into teaching.

So we are creating within these five schools a catalyst for changing the rest of the district. By working on five schools we can be sure we provide the support necessary to demonstrate the impact that this has on the success of the children. Also we can show the impact on the community and on the parents. The net result is we begin to recreate a sense of community around the school.

We lost community schools when we went through integration. We’re reestablishing community schools now because our city is basically an integrated city. And reestablishing community schools gives us a chance to get back to the school we all knew when we were growing up.

Bogle

This is important for our community, but it’s also important for the nation. We need to find models for how cities can work better. Many now observe that the governance, operation, and quality of the school district is tied very closely to the ability of an urban center to be successful. We believe that Oklahoma City provides a model for how

you can use arts to energize total system reform and engage people who believe in the arts but who have other values as well – people who can be leaders in a process, not just for school reform, but for the re-creation of our inner cities.

A couple of other little pieces are important to our model. One of them is the desire not just to rebuild our schools, but also to improve the involvement of citizens in making decisions about the community. During preparations for “Maps for Kids” – not the campaign, but developing what the program for our schools was going to be – we had, how many meetings Bill?

Weitzel

Forty-four committee meetings.

Bogle

He knows because he went to every one of them. We engaged nearly four thousand citizens, not in a show-and-tell but in a real engagement process where, in a structured way, we extracted their ideas about what our schools should be. And actually the program for the schools came out of those meetings. Again it wasn't some retreat among elite leaders in the community or a “blue ribbon” panel. It was real community engagement, community building. And it built the infrastructure in our community for future engagement as well.

We believe that this engagement was a very important part of the whole program philosophically. You would have been pleased to hear, meeting after meeting, parents and teachers and community leaders, neighborhood leaders talk about their desire to see the arts back in the schools. It was an affirmation for us that this wasn't some view we held that was not held commonly, but was widespread through every quarter of the community: We need our arts back in our schools.

Finally our work might be a model for other cities as a possible solution for their urban problems, if arts leaders or arts funders can see themselves in a broader context. Through this reform effort we created a place at the table for the arts. But at the same time we reversed a thirty year negative downward trend in our community. Urban living in Oklahoma City should be a better thing in the future. The arts can play a significant role in ways that maybe aren't apparent on first pass.

The last piece of this that is important is a willingness to let the process discover itself, and to be disciplined enough not to take it over when it doesn't seem to be going well. By allowing the organic nature of it to occur, we found the path that we needed to find, one that was based on a sort of a confidence in our own ability to be creative, to be intuitive, to be opportunistic. We didn't go looking for Bill, he just sort of was there one day, and we said “Hey, this is the guy!”

So, it's a different way for communities to approach problem-solving. We had to redefine the rules. We had to change legislation. We had to create new structures between the city government and the school government. It was very much a process driven by a willingness to be creative and to trust that whatever the outcome was going to be, we could get there by working together.

Through this reform effort we created a place at the table for the arts. But at the same time we reversed a thirty year negative downward trend in our community.

One of the agreements we made at the very beginning was: We're going to set aside the differences that we bring with us, and we're going to concentrate on the common objectives that we all share. That was one of the strategies that really paid off in the greatest way.

McCalmont

How important has the role of private funders been in the education reform process in the arts?

Weitzel

Well [laughs], that's a very sensitive part right now. Our district has just had \$16 million lopped off our budget. So funding is an important issue.

But if we're not careful we'll allow money to be the driver. And I think that's a mistake. What we want to do is have the ideas be the driver. And then you look for an opportunity to bring the resources to it.

The second thing is that private sources provide seed money that lets us try things out. Their money gives us an opportunity to take risks, to try something that we probably couldn't try with our normal pool of resources. This is something that the private funder does. The touchstone question is, “If we take money from the private funder and it works, can we sustain it?” We don't want a series of experiments that will not have follow-through. That would lead to disfunctionality, and to a chaotic situation.

So the role of private funding is pivotal in helping the group to focus its energy on sustainable, positive, ongoing programs that fit with everything else the funded group is doing.

Bogle

I would add to that. Despite the fact that we have enormous budget cuts, the best source of big money is going to be public money. Seven hundred million dollars in a single city...no private funder can be expected to underwrite costs like that. Any private gift would be

dwarfed. This means that the private gift becomes a strategic investment.

In our case, private support did two things. One was the private foundation as spark plug, as an instigator, as a leader – Susan and others, and there were others as time went on. These funding organizations brought as much leadership to the process as money, maybe in some cases it was more about leadership than it was about funding.

The other thing that the private dollars did was fund a constructive process. How do we pay for these forty-four community meetings, bringing in facilitators? We couldn't do that from the public sector perspective. Relatively speaking it wasn't nearly as much money as the \$700 million; it was far, far less. But without it, we couldn't have achieved the outcome.

The funders acted as leaders who participated in formulating the process we used, and then in funding that process so that it was constructive and well thought-out, and so that it suggested an outcome that might be positive and implementable.

McCalmont

And also in helping to recruit senior management. You might want to address that, Bill.

Weitzel

Absolutely, yes. Staying with the theme of leadership and thinking from the point of view of stakeholders, in Oklahoma City we had allowed the relationship between the district and the people in the community to totally atrophy. There was no relationship to speak of except in little pockets. Leadership was required to recreate a relationship, and that's a difficult process.

Another important role of a leader is to get beyond what has always been done. In our case we had to find a new arts director. Susan was very instrumental in the process of finding a leader, someone who would think about things in entirely different ways, not just in the usual ways. This has generated a lot of interest and brought a lot of teachers back into the fold.

Bogle

There's one other way that leaders in this organization [i.e. GIA members] might choose to become involved, and that is to consider serving on the school board. And if you hear a little voice in the back of your head... [Laughter]

A friend of mine said that his granddaddy told him three things: One, never try to climb a fence that is leaning towards you. Two: Never try to kiss a girl who's leaning away from you. And three: Never run for school board. [laughter]

But as long as we're on the outside trying to get in, we're always going to be on the outside trying to get in. The only way that you can get on the inside is by getting on the inside. And that means either you need to step up to the challenge yourself, use it as a wonderful bully pulpit – and it's a fantastic community pulpit for advancing an agenda – or you need to seek people who are like-minded and get them elected to the school board. It may sound like a tangential issue, but if you're involved with arts education and you work with urban systems or school systems, that's the way to begin to have an enormous impact on what happens in your community. And I can see people right now who are jotting notes: "Run for school board." [laughter]

McCalmont

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the partnerships that evolved over this ten-year period and about the fact that these individuals have built relationships of trust and they stay together.

Our little Arts Education Advisory Committee, which was formed about ten years ago, is still together. All the directors of the major arts organizations are represented. Business leaders from throughout the community, educators, some parents. They've stayed together for ten years.

As long as we're on the outside trying to get in, we're always going to be on the outside trying to get in. The only way that you can get on the inside is by getting on the inside.

Even though two strategic plans for arts education were presented to and adopted by the school board and were unfunded, we stayed with it. Together we had a collective vision for what could be.

The other partnerships that developed in parallel with the arts education one – partnerships for greater education reform – are partnerships for life and none of us are going to walk away from the table. It's not a pilot program, it's not just helping with a little project here or there. It's reform and arts for all children in our district.

Do either of you want to talk about the partnerships and the connections that have evolved, especially with the mayor of our city?

Weitzel

One of the amazing things to me was the fact that the city council and the mayor chose to become involved in this process. That's not what typically happens. The mayor is often called on as a last resort, "Come in and take this thing over and fix it!" Instead the mayor joined hands

with the school board, gave up a piece of the revenue that normally goes to the City, and earmarked it for this renovation project. That was a leadership act of extraordinary proportions. I think it has led to some fundamental changes in the way our city continues to grow.

Our city is in a renaissance period, and that's a wonderful thing. We've been rebuilding the downtown area. We're going in to a third and a fourth stage of it that will reclaim the city and reverse urban sprawl.

You know, if you think about it, failing to face the problems of the urban situation led to the disintegration of what we have in urban America. We're stepping up now and confronting those problems.

The city council agreed to support this. The school board and the city council came together and built a trust into which the newly collected funds would be placed and then managed. Having this trust helped citizens who were still fearful of the school board's actions begin to believe again. Citizens had lost faith in the school board. We are trying to rebuild trust on the part of the citizens. Institutional leaders from some of the major foundations in Oklahoma City have joined in this process.

It's been a reclaiming and a refocusing process around a common vision. With that common vision, I've recruited some outstanding people to come into this school district. They join to fix a system. I didn't join to fix a system. We all joined to make it better for 40,000 of God's precious gifts who were failing. The common vision to help children reaches out and grabs your heart. That's the thing around which we can build. That's the basis for commitment. It's a vision about rebuilding things that is important for the long-term.

Think of a child who grows up not understanding the fundamental role of appreciating beauty and harmony and order and the wonder of the world in which they live. When you think about children who grow up that way you think about children who grow up benighted. But if you think about building a community around beauty and harmony and wonder and order – that's the kind of community in which we all want to live. That's part of my dream for the urban situation. I think that dream becomes a reality when we bring folks together. Then we all can see, we all can have that common vision. And what's the old saying? "Where there is no vision, the people perish." I think there's a lot of truth to that.

McCalmont

Ron, do you have closing comments?

Bogle

Well, I would just close by saying that at the heart of

this whole process was a community of people who were motivated to not allow this city to fail. And at their heart was a strong desire for arts in our schools.

The role the arts can play, not just in Oklahoma City but in other cities, is really quite profound. In the same way that we redefined ourselves and the way we needed to approach our problems, perhaps other arts leaders can redefine their role as instigators, advocates, leaders, sparkplugs, promoters of broader ideas. Ultimately by doing so, perhaps not only can they make our cities more livable places, provide a better environment for children in urban centers with especially difficult challenges, but also they can create at the center of the community a place for the arts in a much more permanent and sustainable way. If our story can be a story that benefits others, then we hope it will be the message that you take with you.

McCalmont

This truly has been an organic process that evolved over a ten-year period of time, and is a very different picture of arts funders as they develop creative connections with unlikely partners, such as the mayor. Many unlikely partnerships have evolved and many unlikely creative connections. Today we are excited that it is now a common belief that the arts can provide the vehicle for creativity and intellectual discovery in all of our schools.

Thank you.

Ron Bogle is president and CEO of the American Architectural Foundation in Washington D.C. For the previous decade, he was an executive in higher education in Oklahoma City, his hometown. Bogle is a ten-year veteran of the Oklahoma City Board of Education, serving for several years as president.

Vincent Marron is executive director of the North Carolina A+ Schools Program, Thomas S. Kenan Institute for the Arts, and was the principal organizer of this session along with committee members Amina Dickerson (director, Corporate Contributions, Kraft Foods, Inc.) and Judith Réyni (president, the NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education.).

Susan McCalmont is president of the Kirkpatrick Foundation. Previously McCalmont held positions as director of the Historic Houses Association of America and director of the Center for Historic Houses at the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. She serves on the board of directors of several organizations including the Oklahoma Arts Council, the Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation, and the Cultural Development Corporation of Central Oklahoma

William Weitzel, Ph.D., is CEO and superintendent of Oklahoma City Public Schools. With his training in industrial psychology, Dr. Weitzel has served as a trainer and consulted with over 200 companies and government agencies in the United States and Western Europe. He has published many research papers in professional journals and is the coauthor of Leadership: Magic, Myth or Method?

* The background paper distributed in advance of the conference is available from Grantmakers in the Arts. (206) 624-2312, gia@giarts.org.