



Making IT Happen Gazette

Pearson Foundation Addresses Key 21st-Century Learning Needs Digital Arts Alliance for Hispanic Leaders Gets Results

Submitted by Pearson

Educators at all levels recognize that young people today learn and express themselves differently because of media and technology. Schools and teachers face a considerable challenge in keeping pace with the rate of change in student behavior while also staying focused on core skills and instruction. This is why the Pearson Foundation founded the Digital Arts Alliance, a consortium of public and private organizations committed to providing educational experiences that meet the challenges of our new century.

The Digital Arts Alliance is a philanthropic initiative that delivers innovative educational experiences to students and their teachers, providing fully-funded and fully-equipped digital arts programs to middle schools, high schools, and community centers across the United States. This is 21st-century literacy that students and educators can use immediately in their lives. Working together to design, develop, and complete digital projects tied to their classroom objectives, students and educators integrate core subject knowledge with learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; and essential life and career skills. More than 15,000 people internationally will benefit from these programs this year alone.

The Pearson Foundation's Partnership with the Pearson Education Hispanic Leadership Council

In 2007, the Pearson Foundation reached out to Pearson Education's Hispanic Leadership Council to participate in intensive three-day digital arts workshops for educators from eight districts represented by the Council. The workshops included a review of digital movies created by other Digital Arts Alliance partner programs, followed by hands-on learning sessions instructing students to make their own digital movies.

Following the educator workshops, the Pearson Foundation worked with each district to establish weeklong, digital-arts residencies with students and teachers in the classroom.

The eight school districts participating were: Clark County School District, Nev.; Kansas City, Missouri School District, Mo.; Lawrence Public Schools, Mass.; Los Angeles County Office of Education, Calif.; Orange County Public Schools, Fla.; San Antonio ISD, Texas; Tucson USD, Ariz.; and Ysleta ISD, Texas.

Digital Arts in San Antonio, Clark County, and Tucson

The positive outcomes experienced in all of the participating school districts are exemplified in three videos produced onsite during the San Antonio, Tucson, and Clark County programs. They are available at <http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/pg4.8.html>. To sum up:

San Antonio: Preparing for the Work World

In San Antonio Independent School District, home to the 2008 NECC conference, Superintendent Robert Duron was very involved in the Digital Arts Residency, which took place at Thomas Jefferson High School. Duron visited with the students several times during the weeklong residency to hear about their experiences. What he found was a curriculum-rich filmmaking process that incorporates writing, editing, and collaboration among students. "Students' organizational

skills are really tested as they have to put all the pieces of the project together: audio, video, still images, narrative, and interviews," he said. Furthermore, he recognizes that teamwork, planning, peer critiques, and constructive criticism – which he calls "skills that we cannot test but are necessary for today's jobs" – are all part of the process. Duron also notes that the film artifacts are great resume builders for his students. The films are tangible experiences that participants can include in a resume as they enter the working world or apply for advanced education. Duron concludes that this digital arts experience "truly emulates what a job is like."

Students in San Antonio echoed his positive comments as they eagerly participated in the project. Several students commented on how the project challenged their abilities and made them want to work really hard, "because we want people to view our films and be surprised when they learn that the films were produced by high school students." One student stated, "Having to share this film with my classmates and other classes really drove me to make it perfect."

Clark County: Making Technology Accessible for 21st Century Learners

William E. Orr Junior High School is located in the East Region of Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nev. Like much of the East Region, Orr Junior High has a large Hispanic population, with a majority of the students falling under the free/reduced lunch category. Principal George Leavens explains, "Our biggest challenge is to provide our kids with exposure to technology. A lot of our kids don't have technology in their homes, so when they come here, we feel it is our duty to provide them that exposure to be able to compete at the next level."

Students in the Pearson Foundation's Digital Arts Residency quickly learned that collaboration was the key to creating their films. Their assignment was to create a film about their life experiences that will be viewed by their peers as well as other classes at the school. Rapidly, they were immersed into the world of a real-life filmmaker, where they were responsible for filming their materials, writing narratives, and editing throughout the process. As the Orr Junior High students worked in teams, they shared the diverse tasks of film creation by adding voice, choosing background music, and undertaking other critical tasks of filmmaking.

Principal Leavens had been part of the district's three-person team who traveled to New Orleans for the Digital Arts Workshops. After going through the training and then subsequently working with the students, he observed, "This is pretty powerful, to see this process through their eyes." He also added, "Their movies will be presented to the whole class and other classes, which is a great example of "21st-century skills in action."

The other teachers noted how the students were unusually engaged in this process – a hands-on, real-life experience with an end product. The students were inspired to do their best because they were sharing their work with their peers and receiving feedback from their peers.

Principal Leavens said that the experience had been very positive and declared, "If we do not continuously expose our kids to new technologies, we are going to leave them behind. We're not just competing with other kids in Las Vegas or the

U.S., but in China and India; it is a global world, so we owe it to our kids to continuously seek the newest technology and to provide the learning experiences those kids are going to need to compete in their lifetime."

Tucson: Creating Higher Expectations

Apollo Middle School serves mostly Hispanic students in south Tucson. Before the 2007–2008 school year, Apollo was underperforming and struggling with a broken school culture. New principal Ray Chavez is working to change that and hopes the Digital Arts Residency will play an important role to spur change and encourage enthusiasm for learning.

According to Principal Chavez, his biggest challenge is "moving our kids from a generational mentality that was aimed toward working in the labor force to a mentality that is aiming toward secondary education and beyond."

Tucson superintendent Manuel Isquierdo believes that "schools have to change." He said, "We have to teach them differently and we have to give them opportunities to learn differently. That is the only way we are going to improve opportunities for children and [to improve] graduation and drop-out rates."

According to Chavez, the Digital Arts Residency is one way to answer the challenge, because in the residencies students are not idly reading about something; they are actually "doing." One of the teachers involved in the workshops and residency noted that filmmaking is a hands-on process where students are engaged in reading about the subject, then enthusiastically write about it, and ultimately get actively involved in putting it all together to make a film. The educator said that once students go through that process, they are much more likely to retain and understand the information they studied and remember it long after they've left the program.

Chavez said he hopes these experiences will inspire his students to prepare for secondary education. He feels these are the types of experiences that will make students realize they can dream big for themselves, and that it will become common for his students to attend to Ivy League universities and other secondary schools.

Digital Arts: Utilizing Technology to Inspire Real Change for Students

Leadership districts, such as San Antonio, Clark County and Tucson, demonstrate that digital arts programs are an effective way to provide a 21st-century learning experience that is inspiring and relevant to students' lives and also sympathetic with the goals of classroom instruction.

Since 2005, the Digital Arts Alliance has grown to include a number of innovative public and private program partners that share the Pearson Foundation's commitment to removing barriers to 21st-century learning, including Adobe, American Red Cross, Facing History & Ourselves, ISTE, the Jane Goodall Institute, the National Academy Foundation, Peachpit, Pearson Education and Phi Delta Kappa.

To learn more about the Pearson Foundation's Digital Arts Alliance, please visit www.pearsonfoundation.org/pg4.0.html. To view videos about Digital Arts Residencies, please visit www.mobiledigitalarts.com/VideoProjects.htm.

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