



# Arts for Opportunity through Opportunities in Art

Owen R. Rice<sup>1</sup>, and Erin Angell<sup>2</sup>

Palo Alto High School, Palo Alto Unified School District



## INTRO

Year by year, school by school, challenges, growth, and opportunities present themselves. As I reflect on my time as a student, my best experiences have always been my many arts classes spanning from beginner spectra art, to photography, all the way to advanced painting and drawing. These classes gave me a chance to not only learn through a designed curriculum, but learn and experiment with design and creativity in my own forum. They gave me opportunities to create, learn, have fun, experiment, and ultimately be excited to come back for more the next day. In our society, education and the opportunities it provides are highly valued and viewed as a natural right to all. However, in the world of education, we fail to acknowledge that this “right” to learn, is merely based upon the broken structures of an unequal system. Standardized programs are already underfunded in low income schools and are at an even greater risk of being cut. These programs have proven beneficial to brain development, spatial/visual/temporal processing, improving memory and attention, physical coordination, personal discipline and teamwork (O’Brien 2013). A loss of art programs in schools that are so clearly in need of them would not only be detrimental to the development of students k-12, but would deny them the opportunity to learn, create, and artistically express themselves through the exposure these programs would give them.

## DATA & FINDINGS

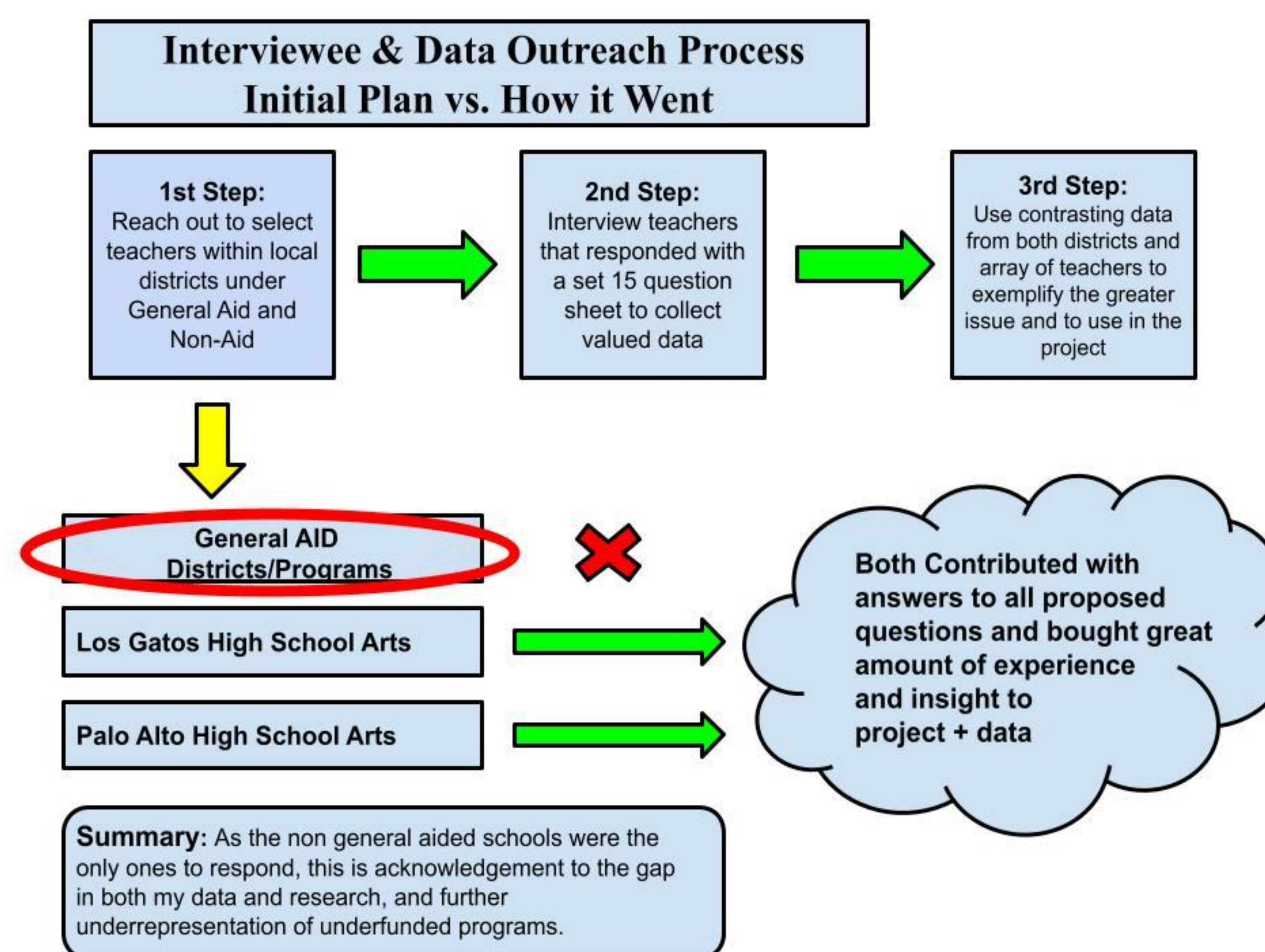
Through my outreach of teachers to interview, the teachers who work at the local and well funded schools responded to the proposed questions. Because of this, only about half of the demographic I hoped to research was represented and therefore, my data is limited. I was hopeful for a more diverse perspective. I was able to work through a revision of the process itself.

Although I was unable to get a hold of the teachers I had reached out to in the Ravenswood School District, the amazing responses from Tracey Atkinson of Palo Alto High school and Augustina Matsui of Los Gatos High school served as my base for research on the problem of arts representation in schools. Both Atkinson, teaching the arts for 15 years and Matsui, having taught the arts for 22 years now, spoke in detail of the many benefits and lessons simply participating in art classes has taught them as well as inspired them to further teach their students. Matsui describes her class and classes similar to hers as a “mental “release” that students get from shifting from a single solution/answer core class like math/science/social studies, etc., to a creative class where problem solving is still present, but freedom of expression and creativity is fundamental.” Atkinson similarly speaks on this saying, “The arts encourage students to take creative risks, learn more ways of communicating, and that problems can have more than one solution.”

## METHODOLOGIES

When researching a subject that heavily relies on the experience and the effects a subject like art would have on students ranging from Kindergarten to 12th grade, it is important that the research is accurate and realistic data is obtained. Ideally, interviewing students from a variety of grades, schools, and programs would be the most accurate and beneficial information for my research. Unfortunately because of requirements and circumstances of the participation of minors, it was a source I could not pursue. For this reason, different perspectives were researched through the voices and thoughts of teachers.

By interviewing a variety of art teachers both in the PAUSD district as well as in the neighboring Ravenswood School District, the interviews and designed questions were able to gather the valued opinions, thoughts, and data shared by these teachers. It gave us insight into the programs and classroom experiences, as well as their perception and observations of how art has impacted their students. This data was collected through a series of interviews, both through narrative and correlational methods. This data was summarized to both direct the flow and outcome of the project and help narrow down research, as well as gain insight to the overall question.



## CONCLUSION & ANALYSIS

Are there ways in which programs with better funding can help support programs with less access to materials? Benefits for students include lessons of greater life, self expression and empowerment, as well as into the full circle of education. However, as described by Augustina Matsui, “It is not just an equality issue, but an equity issue.” This puts the burden on the teachers themselves to solve and provide for under funded programs. When it comes to the opportunity and access students have to well funded, well directed and plentifully resourced art classes, the scope of who gets these opportunities narrows.

## IMPLICATIONS & NEXT STEPS

As more and more schools shed away their arts programs, the need to speak out on the importance of them becomes more urgent. Being a less researched and prioritized topic within the media, schools/districts, and in communities, my findings and research go to further reiterate the importance of the few existing studies out there right now. In terms of next steps, of course, speaking out on and speaking up for certain programs will be something we should all advocate for.

On a more individual level, I would have loved to conduct an arts drive, using my findings in this project to further help support certain programs with less access to materials. Things like this can be helpful on local and larger levels throughout the area and even the world. My steps in acquiring data and information throughout this project were limited and there are many gaps in my research. A more diverse opinion and perspective would be very valuable in exemplifying the struggles of under funded programs in our area. A huge part of the problem is knowing that many schools and programs do not have an outlet to seek support through, making research like this so much more important and valuable.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & REFERENCES

Big thanks to Ms. Matsui, Ms. Atkinson, and Ms. Angell for the help and contributions to this project and my research!

O'Brien, Anne. "How to Close the Achievement Gap: Arts Education." *EduTopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, 11 Sept. 2013.  
[www.edutopia.org/blog/art-education-closing-achievement-gap-anne-obrien](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/art-education-closing-achievement-gap-anne-obrien).  
mac6866. Written by. "Let Me Learn!" *Let Me Learn*, 12 Apr. 2017, sites.psu.edu/californiacivicsissues/2017/04/12/39/.  
<https://sites.psu.edu/californiacivicsissues/2017/04/12/39/>