

El Sistema Goes to School

By Dalouge Smith, President & CEO of San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory

Schools manage the greatest concentration of resources we invest in children, yet the dynamic between North America's El Sistema inspired programs and schools has been only scantily examined.

The Needs Assessment survey of U.S. El Sistema programs conducted by the Sistema Fellows during the autumn of 2011 found that 71% of El Sistema inspired programs take place at school sites.

However, analyzing the variety and potential of these partnerships fell outside the focus of the survey.

El Sistema programs at schools are commonly during after-school hours. The [Youth Orchestra of Salinas](#) (California) meets after school with limited connection to in-school activities, though it has strong support and ties to the district superintendent. [Allentown \(PA\) Symphony's El Sistema Lehigh Valley](#) is also after school, but aligns its program with the school site's rewards structure and performs a joint concert with students from the nine-week in-school music program.

Bridges between in-school and after-school music instruction often develop as an El Sistema program demonstrates itself to be value added to school day music and not in competition. [Harmony Program](#) in New York City brings resources to partner schools that increase the effectiveness of the in-school music program – including enough instruments for a full ensemble. The students work with their school music teacher during the day and Harmony Program's teaching artists after-school.

[Baltimore Symphony's ORCHKids](#) mixes in- and after-school music for all elementary grades by funding teaching artists during both times of day. Teaching artists work alongside highly qualified school music teachers already in place during the day, and then stay on campus to provide additional after-school music instruction. ORCHKids' presence on school campuses fosters increased investment from the principals in music education and music teachers.

[Sistema NB](#), run by New Brunswick Youth Orchestra in Canada, has also seen its after-school programs increase investment in school music. Along with running four after-school sites in four different communities, it is piloting Sistema-inspired school day 4th grade music for one of those school districts. [San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory's](#)



Superintendent Francisco Escobedo of Chula Vista CA gets his first "Each One Teach One" lesson from a Community Opus Project student.
Photo: Dalouge Smith

[Community Opus Project](#) is also piloting 3rd grade music during the school day at six of its district schools, following two years of after-school success. While examples similar to those above can be found in public, private, and charter schools, sites that embed music in all aspects of the school day are usually charter schools. [Conservatory Lab Charter School](#) in Boston is "a public school for learning through music," teaching kindergarten through 6th grades. Its El Sistema-inspired program, in combination with school-wide music appreciation instruction and music-centered project-based learning, ensures that music is connected to all aspects of instruction at every grade for every child. While the strengths of this model are clear, it is not easily replicable in schools with district oversight.

However, some school districts are beginning to be motivated by the benefits they see for students. [El Sistema Colorado's](#) partner Denver Public Schools is hiring a full-time conductor/teaching artist to launch in-school and after-school El Sistema at a pair of middle and high schools. Palm Beach County School District is now hiring a full-time "Expert in Field" El Sistema position to lead expansion of its in-school El Sistema program from one school to four. Chula Vista Elementary School District, California's largest elementary district, has asked San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory to provide music specialist expertise as it begins hiring music teachers and returning school-day music instruction to every child at every school, following a fifteen-year absence.

We are only just beginning to realize the strength and long-term potential the El Sistema movement gains through its close connection to schools. As these partnerships continue to mature, they may quickly lead to serving more students and achieving long-term sustainability for El Sistema efforts.

FROM THE EDITOR

There's an elephant in the room of the international El Sistema movement.

At last week's El Sistema Festival in Gothenburg, Sweden, the final panel discussion – chaired by Marshall Marcus, leader of the Sistema Europe network – was devoted to that proposition. As the festival proceeded in the beautiful city where Dudamel spent six winter seasons leading Sweden's national orchestra, I noted the provocative name of the last panel and wondered what the elephant in our room might be. Do you have a guess?

Marshall's topic, it turned out, was the undeniable but sometimes unspoken fact that in the U.S., in Europe and elsewhere in the world, El Sistema-inspired programs coexist with a multiplicity of music education programs and traditions – some of which have long aspired to goals and values resonant with those of El Sistema. As the newcomers to the field, we don't always give adequate acknowledgement to these programs and traditions, nor treat them as respected colleagues. The result can be that established players in the music education ecosystem begin to feel resentful of and threatened by El Sistema.

In the U.S., school music programs are perhaps the most important example. As Dalouge Smith points out in this month's feature article, most U.S. El Sistema-inspired initiatives happen as after-school programs in schools. And the relationship between El Sistema programs and in-school programs can be a sensitive and complicated matter.

We tend to differentiate ourselves from traditional music educators: they are training adept musicians, while we are creating citizens and communities. But as your memories from your own school music experience probably attest, school music teachers at their best can be inspired agents for creating musical community, equalizing access to musical opportunity, and developing character.

Just as we live by the axiom that "every child is an asset," we need to respect the value in every authentic music education effort. What better message could we give our students than that we are all part of a larger community that cherishes the transformational potential at the heart of music teaching and learning?

Tricia Tunstall

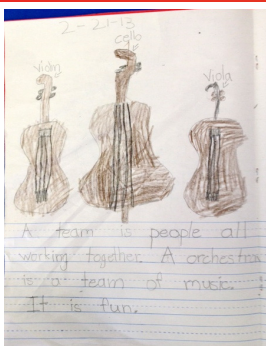
**"Art implies a sense of perfection, therefore of excellence – a road to excellence."
– José Antonio Abreu**

News Notes

Valley Vibes Orchestras (VIVO) is a new El Sistema-inspired program in northern California. VIVO launched in late February with twenty-seven K-4th graders at an elementary school in the El Verano neighborhood of the Sonoma Valley. Children learn the violin, viola, or cello and participate in orchestra, percussion, and small-group instruction for two hours on weekdays. VIVO's recent concert supported community organizing efforts; the orchestra welcomed the community to a meeting regarding health care. An upcoming concert will feature a combined parent-student ensemble. VIVO is a program of the Sonoma Valley Education Foundation; for more information, please contact VIVO director Anne Case (annecase@Ymail.com) or visit online at <https://www.facebook.com/ValleyVibesOrchestras>.

Sistema Global has commissioned a Literature Review of Projects inspired by El Sistema. A distinguished international team of music education researchers led by Dr. Andrea Creech of the Institute of Education, University of London, with colleagues at McGill University in Canada and the Autonomous University of Chihuahua in Mexico, will review academic journal articles, evaluation reports, dissertations, policy documents and program descriptions that have been produced on Sistema programs outside Venezuela in recent years. Since this is **the first global research project**, we need all programs to submit materials to: andrea.creech@ioe.ac.uk Please send published and unpublished research, evaluation reports and evaluation instruments, and media articles that report findings. The project will include an overview of *all* programs, including those without evaluation data but with documentation, goals, and program details. Please support this research by sending your material *now*, and urging others to do so too. For more: <http://tinyurl.com/aqerwoa>

Several San Francisco area sites are collaborating to create a **regional coordinator position** to support the cooperation and growth of local El Sistema-inspired programs. The position will advance teacher training, grant applications, evaluation, public relations, and actual teaching. If interested in this first position of



One day after VIVO launched, an El Verano Elementary first-grade teacher captured this description about teams.

its kind in the U.S./Canada, contact Seth Mausner, Director, Music Team San Francisco: seth2m@sbcglobal.net, 415/584-5946, musicteamsf.org

May 10th and 11th are the dates, and Newport News, VA is the place for an **East Coast Seminar**. Hosted by Soundscapes, delegations from at least six programs will be there, from as far away as Connecticut: www.eastcoastseminario.org

On March 26th, six Boston area El Sistema-inspired programs convened at the New England Conservatory for

an afternoon of music making. Planned and led by NEC's Sistema Fellows, this was the first time that so many Boston area programs have come together. The following morning's convening focused on collaboration and relationship building between local nuclei and other like-minded organizations in Boston. <http://sistemafellows.typepad.com/my-blog/2013/04/march-symposium-report.html>

On June 1, eight Boston programs will join with the Boston Youth Philharmonic Orchestra in an information-sharing/performance festival. For more information: csoriano@conservatorylab.org

Resources

In keeping with the theme of this issue, Eric Booth has completed a **new essay**, **The Generous Laboratory**, about the relationship – past, present, and essential future – between El Sistema-inspired programs and the rest of the music education ecosystem. <http://ericbooth.net/the-generous-laboratory>

El Sistema: Challenging Norms through Music is a university political science paper by Ciera DeSilva, a member of the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra and a volunteer at the Sistema New Brunswick program. She presents El Sistema in a local and global context, exploring 'glocalization' and its implications. Available at (click on link at the top of page): <http://cierasdesilva.wordpress.com/things-ive-written>

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website has a useful digest of research-affirmed **principles of child development and learning** that inform good teaching practice. <http://oldweb.naeyc.org/about/positions/dap3.asp>

A Superintendent's Perspective

Dr. Francisco Escobedo, Superintendent, Chula Vista Elementary School District, California

[Chula Vista Elementary School District serves 28,000 students in grades K-6 at 44 schools; 50% of students qualify for federal lunch programs, and 22 schools are Title I. Chula Vista is San Diego County's second largest city, five miles from the Mexican border.]

Music is a unifying medium that solidifies knowledge and the quest for knowledge. I find music to be a way students open up their understanding of math in a conceptual way and their ability to be creative. They learn not only to play an instrument but also to work as a team. Kids create intense relationships with one another as they practice and perform together.

Another important benefit is improved attendance. Kids who play music don't want to miss school. This creates the important feeling that school is much more than learning the basics. Because of the uniqueness of what music has to offer, a good program can cross the various lines of a school's culture. That is what the Opus Project provides, quality music instruction that creates relevancy for many children.

My former district had a music program, but it wasn't at the scale of the Community Opus Project. It was for a select few, those who had the propensity or parental backing to pursue music. We had 4 or 5 students per school in the music program.

With the Opus Project, we're talking about a significant number of students not only playing an instrument but also regularly graduating to higher levels. We have whole grade levels participating. When you take this to scale, you are systemically influencing not only the minds of our young people but their future potential as well. This is an amazing structure because it isn't just music for the sake of music, but music expanding to become part of the fabric of the district. I think this is critical. It can't be just a magnet program. Every student should have some exposure to music.

Parent participation has been an amazing plus as a result of the Opus Project. The greater the parent participation, the healthier the school, and the higher likelihood that children will go on to college.

The Opus Project is also a definite plus in terms of community relations. The children have played for the Chamber of Commerce and at the city's Centennial Celebration. It paints the picture that there is life and vibrancy in the elementary school district.

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"We didn't displace the music program at Garden Place – conversely, the music teacher was expanded from half- to full-time to help us teach. We think of her as part of our staff, just as our lead teaching artist is like a school staff member." – Monika Vischer, El Sistema Colorado Board Chair