

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. & CANADIAN EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

## Partnering With Schools

By Shannon McCue, Program Manager, *Alabama Blues Project*

So you want to start an El Sistema program in your community, but do not know where to begin. Where do you go first? How do you recruit students? Often, a likely answer lies in the public school system. In many school districts, as resources are poured into things like standardized test preparation, funding for in-school and after-school arts programs is reduced and sometimes completely cut. As El Sistema programs continue to launch around the country, there are ripe opportunities for school districts to team up with these programs and start or re-start music instruction where there has been none.

In many cases, the key to success in working with schools is forming partnerships. This article explores some examples of the ways Sistema-inspired programs in the U.S. have successfully partnered with school districts. Even if the philosophies of traditional music programs may not completely align with the El Sistema vision, the goal of offering more children access to music is shared by all.

The Youth Orchestra of St. Luke's (YOSL) is comprised of after-school programs at three schools and one community center, and an after-school program for middle school students. In the initial planning stage, a key move of the OSL Education Department was to contact the in-school general music teacher at one of the schools, who had been a supporter of OSL for many years, to enlist her help in recruiting students.

She attended parent interest meetings and spoke on OSL's behalf at parent-teacher conferences and more casually around the neighborhood. She also helped convince the principal that an instrumental music program would be beneficial to the overall culture of PS 51. After getting the administration on board (the school pays a yearly fee that covers instrument costs and other expenses), OSL approached the existing after-school program to form a partnership. OSL agreed to provide instruments and teachers twice a week, and the after-school program provides music students with snack and homework assistance.

At the Juneau Alaska Music Matters (JAMM) program, founder/director Lorrie Heagy was already an experienced certified general music teacher in the Juneau district when she started the program. Before

approaching the district about starting a Sistema program, she studied its strategic plan, and noticed that the term "school readiness" appeared over and over again. So she presented her plan to district administrators as an "intervention for school readiness." Lorrie also understood the importance of having a positive relationship with classroom teachers. When JAMM began with kindergartners from one school, grant money was used to pay classroom teachers to be present at every music class, so they could learn the program's benefits firsthand. JAMM has grown to serve 600 students at four schools in the school district.

The upstate New York Sistema-inspired program CHIME (Creating Harmony, Invigorating Music Education) is sponsored by the Empire State Youth Orchestra (ESYO). It provides daily after-school string ensemble classes to elementary students and weekly private lessons to middle school students. CHIME has found an uncommon fiscal way to partner with



Teacher Rachel Gawell with students in the YOSL program at PS. 51 in 2016. Photo: Shannon McCue

its school district. New York State allocates reimbursement funds every year to support arts-in-education programs in schools. However, these funds began to go unused by struggling schools that could not pay up front for the services. ESYO found a way to tap into the funds by directing donor money for CHIME to the school district, which then uses those funds to "purchase" CHIME and be eligible for reimbursement from the state.

CHIME's creative sustainability model is another way that an El Sistema program can partner with a school district to bring music back into the schools. ESYO executive director Rebecca Calos says that the school had the benefit of an "institutional memory" of what the arts could do for a struggling community.

In all of these examples, program leaders found thoughtful and ingenious ways of partnering with school districts. Cultivating the support of school administrators, in-school music teachers, and classroom teachers is paramount in forming positive relationships between El Sistema programs and schools. During this challenging time for the arts in the United States, working together – in whatever way works best for your program and school district – may offer us the best chance of reaching more students through our music programs.

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

How much should teaching artists in El Sistema-inspired programs be paid?

It's a fool's mission to come up with a hard number, because there are too many variables and particularities to factor in. But I can bring some hard-number research to bear on the question.

I often say that El Sistema is in the intrinsic motivation business. If we want life-transformative learning to happen in Sistema programs, we have to focus our priorities on nurturing our learners' hunger for ambitious musical accomplishment – it's the number one requirement to help them. We can only create a hothouse of intrinsic motivation for students if the teachers themselves are intrinsically motivated to create such an environment. If you don't have intrinsically-motivated teachers, you don't have intrinsically-motivated learners – and you don't achieve your Sistema-inspired goals.

And here is where the research slams in. To the question raised above, the inarguable answer from research is...you have to pay enough. Enough that the issue of money becomes irrelevant. Many studies have shown that there is an income level subjects often describe as "enough" – the point at which money ceases to be an issue. That's how much our teaching artists should be paid.

What is that in actual dollars in each local setting? That's up to program leaders to determine. But I see hard evidence that our teaching artists are not paid enough. I see too much turnover. I see teaching artists expending so much energy on getting other work that they can't commit to the full motivation a Sistema program requires. Sometimes ancillary perks are added to the remuneration package, but I have not seen a program in the U.S. where underpaid faculty are sustainably motivated by the ancillary perks.

I have talked with many Sistema administrators about raising their faculty pay, and I grasp the difficulties. And...why pay more than you have to?

Because you have to if you want to achieve extraordinary results. Which is what Sistema-inspired programs are in the business of accomplishing. How much? The answer is quite probably: more than you currently pay, to become "enough."

For a fuller version of this article, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/y7omu39>

Eric Booth

**"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults."  
- Frederick Douglass**

## News Notes

Working with Sistema-inspired programs in 15 countries, Ismar Poric, founder of Superar Srebrenica (in Bosnia) has launched [the first-ever worldwide Sistema creative project](#). Choruses around the world sing the catchy anthem *Love People*, edited into one five-minute film. (El Sistema Lehigh Valley represents the U.S.) Please share this link with your students and families, and share on social media using hashtags #lovepeople and #elsistema – this is a rare chance to extend the visibility of Sistema programs to a huge public online. Video: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=IWcHNBnuErl>. Please participate in the [Action For The Month](#) – see below.

[Classics for Kids Foundation](#) (CFKF) is expanding its matching stringed instrument grant program to string programs in all 50 states during 2017. To date, CFKF has given grants to string programs in 43 states; CFKF also wishes to expand its presence in states where it has only a modest presence. CFKF's matching grant program helps programs acquire high-quality new stringed instruments for their students, offering up to a 50% match for grant projects approved by its board. CFKF's primary mission supports at-risk and disadvantaged youth, and rural programs in smaller communities. Applicant organizations must have nonprofit status or a nonprofit umbrella organization. Interested string programs are welcome to learn more about CFKF, and to submit a grant request (considered quarterly) through CFKF's website: [www.classicsforkids.org](http://www.classicsforkids.org). Applicants may also contact CFKF's Executive Director Michael Reynolds at [info@classicsforkids.org](mailto:info@classicsforkids.org) with questions about CFKF's matching stringed instrument grant program.

## Resources

[The Walmart Foundation State Giving Program](#) awards grants to nonprofit organizations throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico for programs that give individuals access to a better life. There are three funding cycles per year; the first two target specific states. In the final funding cycle of the year, requests

are invited from organizations nationwide; this includes in the category of Community Engagement, supporting programs that focus on the needs of underserved low-income populations, including education needs. Grants range from \$25,000 to \$250,000; the average grant size is \$40,000. Applications for the final funding cycle will be accepted from August 7th through 11th, 2017. To learn more, visit <http://tinyurl.com/hpt7uur>.

Speaking of funding – here is some big thinking about [emerging ways that foundations are thinking about supporting social change initiatives](#). The Stanford Social Innovation Review looks at the ways foundations are rethinking their role in social change movements, and five new practices they have embraced. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/systems\\_change\\_in\\_a\\_polarized\\_country](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/systems_change_in_a_polarized_country)

There are many challenges to building and [leading a social justice organization](#) dedicated to the practice of developing youth leaders, supporting their artistic voices, and facilitating political learning. In this archived video conversation, Khary Lazarre-White will share insights from his 20+ years at the helm of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol and facilitate a discussion focusing on strategies for advancement of the work of social justice practitioners through effective management, program development, organizing, policy, and leadership development. Free for members of The National Guild for Community Arts Education, and \$35 for non-members. [https://www.tfaforms.com/437637?tfa\\_9=701360000006Zpr](https://www.tfaforms.com/437637?tfa_9=701360000006Zpr)

Adrian Holovaty, founder of [SoundSlice](#), is a legend among computer coders and creators and is also a serious musician with a passion for developing tech to support music learning. SoundSlice is just getting started, but it has great potential. Check it out: [www.soundslice.com](http://www.soundslice.com)

## Apprenticeships that Work

*by Laura Jekel, Founder/Teaching Artist and Eddy Kwon, Director of MYCincinnati*

The Youth Apprentice Program grew directly out of a need expressed by high school-aged students at [MYCincinnati](#), an El Sistema-inspired program now entering its seventh year. They wanted to continue playing music at MYCincinnati, but they felt pressure to gain meaningful work experience, support their families, and begin a path toward financial independence. This new program provides meaningful employment, job training, and work experience for current MYCincinnati students.

The five Youth Apprentices hired in the pilot year have taken on leadership roles as teachers, teaching assistants, site coordinators, and staff assistants. These roles, supplemented by regular training and feedback sessions, have empowered the Youth Apprentices to take initiative, stay organized, collaborate with their peers, communicate concerns in a respectful way, and plan for their future.

This innovative youth employment program was made possible by a partnership between MYCincinnati and ArtWorks, a local arts nonprofit that has been employing Cincinnati youth for over 20 years. ArtWorks took care of hiring, payroll, and training. MYCincinnati provided the overall program design, the venue, oversight, and on-the-job training by professional teaching artists.

Ziyad, a MYCincinnati double bassist who will participate in the 2017 National Take A Stand Festival, has loved his first year as a Youth Apprentice. Ziyad was the Teaching Assistant in MYCincinnati's intermediate orchestra, leading rehearsals and conducting the ensemble. His year as an Apprentice culminated in conducting a side-by-side concert featuring the intermediate MYCincinnati Orchestra and the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra. Ziyad plans to attend college for engineering, and has been preparing for his exams and applications with the help of MYCincinnati staff.

The Youth Apprentice Program has had an enormous impact on MYCincinnati. It is a way for long-time students to use the skills they have acquired to give back to the program, act as role models, and support MYCincinnati staff, all while gaining valuable skills that will help them in their next steps in life.

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### **ACTION FOR THE MONTH:** Help the first global Sistema creative project go viral!

*We all struggle to inspire people about the size and power of the El Sistema-inspired movement. The "Love People" video project (described above in the News) is a rare chance to reach far outside of our existing networks to a gigantic virtual audience. Join the young Bosnian activists who created this peace anthem, and ask everyone connected to your program to share on social media using hashtags*

*#lovepeople and #elsistema: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=IWcHNBnuErl> Read more about this Action [here](#).*