

From the Directors' Desks

In our last three letters from the directors' desk, we focused on the doom and gloom of the budget cuts and their significance to the students and teachers. In this newsletter, we are highlighting how we and the schools are coping with the challenge. We interviewed several principals to find out what strategies they are using in order to inform others in the field.

LeAp never gives up. The reduced budgets have necessitated that we dig deeper to find solutions in order to continue to serve the students in New York City's schools. Our grants department has been working overtime looking for additional funding, and we are truly fortunate that many of our dedicated foundations have continued to support us in our efforts to help students succeed.

It is vital that we continue our efforts to help New York City's students. Results from the past three years indicate that our strategies are particularly effective at increasing literacy skills in English Language Learners (ELLs) as well as students who have been held over or have learning disabilities. Astoundingly, we found that many of the open-ended strategies we had used with our at-risk students also encouraged the truly gifted to far excel over other gifted students who were not participating in LeAp's programs. The implication of these findings means that in heterogeneously grouped classrooms and inclusion classes (classes that combine special needs and general education students) all students can excel. Differentiated instruction (teaching

to the individual student's needs) is built into a wide range of LeAp programs. In times of limited funding, this means that the dollars spent on LeAp type programs actually help students develop the thinking skills that they need to excel not only on their tests, but in all aspects of learning. These problem solving and intellectual inquiry skills are embedded into all LeAp projects and residencies. We are, therefore, fully committed to serving as many students each year as possible.

To accomplish this goal, we plan to reach out to several new funding sources. We are applying for grants that will allow us to serve both elementary and middle school students and are looking for funding that will specifically serve ELLs, hold-overs, and students with learning disabilities. We are also spreading our research net to search for funding for gifted students that are often overlooked. They can easily become the problem in the classroom when the curriculum fails to provide the challenges that will stimulate them to want to learn for intellectual satisfaction, not just the high score. Over the years, we have found, hidden in every classroom, gifted and talented students that have never been given the chance to excel because their strengths have not been a part of the standard curriculum. LeAp's differentiated instruction allows these hidden students to shine.

We are here to help and we will continue to help as many students as possible reach their full potential.

Best Wishes,

Ila Lane Gross
Executive Director

Alice Krieger
Associate Executive Director

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Coping with the Budget Cuts

LeAp Interviews Three Principals

Due to the series of budget cuts that all New York City public schools have experienced since 2008, LeAp reached out to see how they were dealing with the drastic reduction in funding. We selected three principals with very different school profiles to find out how the cuts impacted their schools and what they're doing to cope with the reduction in funding.

Ms. Mary Pree is the principal of PS/MS 188M in Manhattan. PS/MS 188M is a pre-K - 8 school housed in an old school 1890's school building on the Lower East Side. Students come largely from the nearby public housing projects as well as local shelters. The school has two classes per grade and is an "A" school rich in resources: violin classes for every student in 3rd grade and above, a beautiful new library, a computer room, and more. In contrast to PS/MS 188M, Mr. Josh Solomon's The Business of Sports School (BOSS) opened in 2009, and is a new small high school on Manhattan's West Side sponsored by ESPN. BOSS has four classes of 9th graders, as well as Collaborative Team Teaching and ESL classes. It located near Midtown, inside the High School of Graphic Communication Arts building, which was constructed in 1959. Ms. Penny Grinage is the principal of PS 135K in Brooklyn, another "A" school, which is located in a high poverty area and receives additional Title 1 money. PS 135K has pre-K through 5th grade with up to six classes per grade. PS 135K's early childhood center is located in a modern, nearby annex and grades 2 through 5 are located in the main building, a structure erected in the early 1900s. The school received a brand new library in 2009.

We started by asking each principal how the cuts have been impacting their schools. Ms. Pree said she's had to eliminate staff positions, and reduce professional development and consultant services. "This reduction in teacher training and outside consultant services makes it difficult to provide additional differentiated instructional support for the students," said Ms. Pree. She feels sorry that students who have a hard time learning through traditional methods will not be able to receive tailored instruction from outside consultants who present alternative, effective teaching strategies. Even with the cuts she has managed to find funding for LeAp's Active Learning Leads to Literacy program, as it has proven to help her K-2 students increase their literacy skills in the past. Due to the loss of cluster teachers, PS/MS 188M will need to break up classes when teachers are absent, something they never did before.

In BOSS, Mr. Solomon is facing similar concerns. "We will have to address the budget cuts with cutting substitute teachers," said Principal Solomon. Cutting substitute teachers will make it dif-

ficult for teachers to take off when they are sick. What's more, he explained that new schools are also subject to limited hiring ability, a major concern for the school and what Solomon believes is the reason why charter schools often have an advantage over regular public schools in recruiting new students.

According to Ms. Grinage at PS 135K, even the additional Title 1 money hasn't been enough to help offset the cuts. Because of the loss of tax-levy funding, she has had to cancel many programs. "I could offset some of the damage by using Title 1 money, but we still don't have the same level of services and programs that we would've had, especially in the arts, had I not received that tremendous budget cut," said Ms. Grinage. Another concern is the loss of teachers. "The fact that I'm in a high-poverty area has brought in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money. These funds were given to schools that already had Title 1 to offset the loss of teaching positions. And I'm not talking about just fringe teaching; I'm talking about regular classroom teachers," said Ms. Grinage.

These principals have developed strategies to cope with the changes they're facing. Mr. Solomon said, "We're trying to use afterschool money strategically and really set up programs that a lot of students will attend." These programs will include leadership, sports, graphic arts, and tutoring programs. Since schools with more students receive more funding, a common tactic is to increase enrollment. Mr. Solomon said, "We're really trying to go out to the middle schools and publicize our school." Mr. Solomon and Ms. Pree are also applying for grants, which they hope will fill in some of the gaps caused by the cuts.

All three principals agree that when it comes to cutting programs, the first to go are unessential ones. Programs that are deemed "unessential" are generally ones that don't increase reading and math skills and scores. However, that does not necessarily mean cutting the arts. "We have a pretty decent arts program and I've been able to maintain that." The arts bring enrichment to children, she added. "Children are receiving additional background knowledge and exposure, which is what these standardized tests also test. Children can tap into that knowledge in a testing situation," said Ms. Grinage.

Prior to the additional 1% cut announced in early January, these principals had already started employing these strategies. In response to this, LeAp is seeking money to help schools bridge this gap. Throughout this month's newsletter, you'll find many ways in which LeAp can help schools stretch their dollars and bring our programs into their classrooms.

Contact LeAp! Call 212-769-4160 or email info@leapnyc.org. Visit www.leapnyc.org

How LeAp is Helping the Schools

Corporate Partnerships Help LeAp Provide Eventful Programs

With the generous help of corporate support, LeAp is able to extend exciting opportunities to even more NYC public school students.

Fidelity Investments and LeAp are teaming up for a fourth year to bring Fidelity FutureStage to 600 junior and senior high school students in ten New York City schools. Students from each school are writing ten-minute original plays and learn acting, directing, and production techniques and skills from LeAp teaching artists. Broadway professionals will read over 350 student plays and select ten for the final Fidelity FutureStage performances both at the Imperial Theatre on Broadway and at the Tony Bennett Concert Hall at Frank Sinatra School of the Arts. The students are seeing *Billy Elliot the Musical* and another Broadway play as well meet with Broadway luminaries. “[Fidelity FutureStage] has become a vital piece to the puzzle of my experiences,” said a middle school student from JSH 231. “To be able to go to Broadway and watch such a marvelous play has been something I do not want to forget.”

HSBC Bank USA, N.A. is helping LeAp bring a unique visual arts program to schools with its very generous support of LeAp’s Public Art. In a partnership with NYC



Students in Fidelity FutureStage program



competition between four second grade *Active Learning Leads to Literacy (ALLL K-2)* classes. For Earth Day in April, LeAp and Disney are collaborating again for the release of Disney Nature’s *Oceans*, a documentary focusing on underwater life. LeAp is developing exciting activities for LeAp’s science residencies that deal with aquatic life and animal diversity.

Disney representative hands out prizes at PS 188M for LeAp’s “Gumbo Off” competition

Foundations and Corporations Support LeAp in the Schools

Generous grants from foundations and corporations are making it possible for LeAp to provide residencies to many New York City schools.

LeAp is able to provide “Murals” residencies for three schools thanks to a grant from the Robert Lehman Foundation. In these 14 week residencies, students will create four permanent murals focusing on social studies themes ranging from American History to communities around the world. By the end of the year, school hallways will be decorated with lively works of art and students will have acquired new art skills while strengthening their social studies knowledge and improving their vocabulary, English language skills, and research strategies. A celebration and unveiling of the works will take place at the end of the residencies.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of the New York Tri-State Area Chapter have also awarded LeAp with a grant to bring the “Murals” residency to hospital schools. Through this project, students will decorate the walls to create an environment that is con-

ducive to learning and healing.

Bay and Paul Foundations awarded LeAp a grant to bring our Water Ecology program to five middle schools in Brooklyn and Queens. Students will study life cycles and water environments, and conduct independent research projects on water, testing everything from pollution to salinity. As part of this program, teachers will attend professional development workshops at Hudson River Park Trust. At the end of the residency, students will participate in a Water Ecology conference and share their research on a website dedicated to the program.

LeAp’s Active Learning Leads to Literacy program (ALLL K-2) is a proven-effective literacy program that utilizes games, visual arts, cooking, music, dancing, and yoga to teach reading and writing skills to students in grades K through 2. This program is made possible thanks to generous grants from Barker Welfare Foundation, Richard Davoud Donchian Foundation, Bernard F. and Alva B. Gimbel Foundation, Laura J. Niles Foundation, Leon Lowenstein Foundation, and New York Community Trust.

Undaunted, LeAp Forges Ahead

Citigroup Hosts Young Artists

Over 80 student artists from PS 120K and PS 135K came to the Citigroup Tower atrium in Long Island City on October 20 to view their work displayed in LeAp's Annual Art Exhibition. From Native American quilts and Animal masks to Warhol-inspired prints and nature photography, the work created in LeAp programs ran the gamut of visual arts.

"Everyone worked so hard on it and enjoyed the project," said one student from PS 135K who was involved in the creation of a large Coney Island diorama.

LeAp's executive directors, Citigroup's arts administrators, and LeAp teaching artists presented awards to the young artists and their teachers. Citigroup generously supports LeAp by hosting this exhibition and reception each year. Students enjoyed milk and cookies as they toured the work they had created with LeAp teaching artists.



Citigroup Arts Administrators Ellen Quinn and Teri Lehner giving out milk and cookies to students attending the reception.

LeAp Afterschool Crosses the Williamsburg Bridge

Thanks to a three-year 21st Century Grant, LeAp is providing hands-on afterschool programs to two new schools in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and serve over 300 students and family members. PS 84K's afterschool program has been up and running since this fall. Students have been participating in engaging, fun programs including dance, cartooning, yoga, and puppetry. In addition, they've created rainforest murals, chess boards and game pieces, and traditional Brazilian food. Students in PS 19K's afterschool program have been actively engaged in visual arts, music, theater, poetry, and dance programs. With programs including "Cooking with Math" and "Poetry and the Visual Image," both of these afterschool programs are providing activities that link the arts to academics. Parent workshops will also be provided at these sites with workshops such as ELL, GED, literacy, stress management, and more.

August Wilson Comp. Expands

With more schools and new cities participating, this year's August Wilson Monologue Competition is bigger than ever. In its second year, students in the program, which is now in five NYC high schools, study August Wilson's *Century Cycle* plays and learn monologue techniques from LeAp teaching artists. After months of preparing, the students perform their monologues in an in-school competition. The winners of the in-school competition then go on to the New York City competition, which will be judged by Broadway professionals who have worked with August Wilson. The NYC finalists will then participate in a national competition at August Wilson Theatre along with finalists from Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Chicago on May 3, 2010.

Disney Sponsors "Gumbo Off"

In collaboration with Disney, young culinary upstarts put their chef hats on and their cooking skills to the test in LeAp's "Gumbo Off" competition between four classes. Students from PS 135K, PS 188M, and Voice Charter School went head to head in this test of culinary wits that ties into *Active Learning Leads to Literacy (ALLL K - 2)*, LeAp's proven-effective literacy initiative that uses cooking, visual arts, dancing, and storytelling to teach literacy skills.

Wielding plastic knives, students chopped away at okra, potatoes, peppers, and onions and measured their ingredients to perfect their spicy concoctions. While the gumbo simmered, students worked on literacy-linked arts activities to accompany the meal. All the students received generous prizes from Disney, but the winner of the competition – Ms. Chin's class at Voice Charter School – received sneak preview tickets to see Disney's new animated feature *The Princess and the Frog*, where the main character, Tiana, has aspirations of opening her own gumbo restaurant.



Winning "Gumbo Off" students at Ms. Chin's class Voice Charter School chop away at their gumbo ingredients.

with the Support of Many

USDOE Funds Teacher Training of Elem. and Middle Schools

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, LeAp is collaborating with Columbia University's History Department and the Carl C. Icahn Charter School on a five-year grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History program as part of LeAp's American History Comes Alive program. All twenty-seven teachers involved in the project have come to the first three workshops. This is an indication of the usefulness of these lectures, as they always take place at 4:30 on Fridays, not the best time to get teachers to stay late.

Professor Evan Haefeli gave the first two lectures. His area of expertise is Native Americans and colonial America. Following his

first lecture, the teachers had the opportunity to become archaeologists as they explored how to use archaeology to teach history to their students. Haefeli's second lecture focused on why New York was unique amongst all of the American colonies. It seems that New York was originally settled as a mercantile venture with no political or religious agenda. This workshop was followed by a hands-on workshop on how to have students create board games as a way of researching historical events and times as well as an enjoyable way to review what they had learned. The third lecture by Professor Natasha Lightfoot focused on the Southern colonies and was followed by a hands-on workshop on how to use political cartoons and other visual primary source material.

Consortium Spreads Limited Funds to More Schools

LeAp's long-term partnership with Bronx Lighthouse Charter School has resulted in a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish a Charter School Consortium dedicated to the arts. The aim of the Arts are Vital Three-Year Professional Development Grant, now in its second year, is to create a group of charter schools dedicated to integrating all the arts

into the core curriculum and trains teachers in new ways to inspire students and engage them in learning. The consortium includes Bronx Charter School For Children, Carl C. Icahn Charter School, Family Life Academy Charter School, Bronx Lighthouse Charter School, UFT Elementary Charter School, and Grand Concourse Academy Charter School.



Charter school student creating her own book in the style of Eric Carle.

“This grant is a great opportunity for the Charter School Consortium,” said Ila Lane Gross, LeAp's Executive Director and curriculum developer. “By the end, the entire faculty of each school will be able to use the arts as a strategy to teach academics.” The twice-weekly program is running in six charter schools from October to June. Arts are Vital's unique approach integrates visual art, music, dance, and drama into all areas of literacy and social studies.

Public Grants Keep LeAp Alive

Thanks to several Federal grants from the U.S. Department of Education as well as new state and city grants LeAp is alive and well in its efforts to support New York City's public schools.

The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs is contributing to LeAp's Public Art program as well as 10 visual art residencies focusing on book illustration and literacy instruction. Three new 21st Century grants are helping provide academic enrichment programs along with youth development opportunities to students in LeAp's after-school programs at PS 84K and PS 19K in Brooklyn and PS182Q in Queens. *Arts Learning Leads to Literacy (ALLL 3-5)*, LeAp's literacy program for grades 3 through 5, is made possible thanks to the Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Because of the significant cuts, LeAp is busy writing even more grant applications in order to ensure that LeAp can continue to provide services to NYC public schools. If any school would like to collaborate with LeAp on a grant application, please contact us at ila@leapnyc.org.

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**In response to the budget cuts, LeAp is offering a
SIGNIFICANT SCHOOL DISCOUNT**

**Six-Day
Residency for
Four Classes
Only \$2,000**

Offer Expires: February 12, 2010

This is a difficult year for all of us, and LeAp understands how devastating the recent 1% cut has been for NYC schools. We are committed to helping your students succeed and, therefore, we have significantly reduced the cost of our in-school residencies.

LeAp is offering each six-day residency for four classes at the low cost of \$2,000

LeAp residencies use proven, effective, hands-on, arts-based strategies to help students improve their English, math, social studies, and science skills.

Contact LeAp at (212) 769-4160

LeAp's mission is to improve the quality of public education through a hands-on, integrated arts approach to learning. LeAp empowers students to reach their full potential.