

How Utah's Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program Leverages Partnerships for Educational Impact

Mary Dell'Erba and Matt Weyer

The [Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program](#) (BTS Arts) began with the founding of [Art Works for Kids](#), a nonprofit founded in **Utah** in 1995. Initially, Art Works for Kids provided grants to local school districts to support arts integration in elementary schools across the state. The BTS Arts program officially launched in 2008 as a block grant model funded by the state Legislature. Now in its 15th year, the organization receives an annual appropriation and reaches nearly 500 elementary schools statewide.

Who's Involved

BTS Arts is a [collaborative and comprehensive program](#) that engages the following groups and entities:

- The Utah State Board of Education and state superintendent.
- School districts and individual schools (and in some cases, a collection of schools).
- Elementary school teachers and BTS Arts integration teachers.
- University partners (across seven endowed universities).
- Nonprofits, including Art Works for Kids.
- The Utah State Legislature.

How It's Funded

Originating solely with philanthropic donations, BTS Arts is now a public-private partnership provided with an annual legislative appropriation. The state most recently appropriated \$22M in 2023, which includes an average cost of \$68 per student but varies based on the district's implementation model.

Districts reapply annually to remain in the program. Districts are also required to match 20% of the BTS Arts integration teacher's salary and benefits. Districts can form a consortium to employ arts educators appropriate to the number of students served and can support rural districts via stipends for artists-in-residence.

How It Works

At the highest level, Utah's State Board of Education and state superintendent [govern and evaluate](#) BTS Arts. Grants are applied for, reviewed and awarded directly to school districts, who in turn support programming at select elementary schools by hiring qualified arts professionals who are paid on the district's licensed teacher salary schedule.

Generally, the education elementary teacher works alongside a BTS Arts integration teacher (who must hold an educator license and arts endorsement in dance, music, theatre and visual art) to collaboratively deliver the program. The program centers on developing and implementing lesson plans that integrate the arts with language arts, science, social studies and math. Instructional models include side-by-side instruction, collaborative co-teaching and collaborative integration.

School administrators are responsible for evaluating the program and the BTS Arts integration teacher. When applicable, an arts program coordinator supports at the district level.

Universities also receive grants (no more than 10% of appropriated grant funds) to deliver high-quality pre-service training and professional development to participating districts, design and complete research related to the program and provide the public with elementary arts resources. Friends of BTS Arts provides advocacy and lobbying support.

Interviews With Program Leaders

Through an interview with Lisa Cluff, executive director of Art Works for Kids and Friends of Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program, a few key themes and ideas emerged, including:

- Leveraging partnerships to improve STEAM education outcomes.
- Naming challenges and working on solutions.
- Building capacity through various role groups.
- Using evaluation data for continuous improvement.

Leveraging Partnerships to Improve STEAM Education Outcomes

BTS Arts is part of a broader statewide cultural education ecosystem which reaches students at every level of development. This ecosystem includes seven universities across Utah with BTS Arts endowed chairs, partnerships with hands-on science organizations, professional arts organizations, the state arts council, the Utah Cultural Alliance and numerous family foundations. Additionally, the Utah State Board of Education is creating an [Integration Crosswalk](#) to connect all elementary core standards.

Naming Challenges and Working on Solutions

Despite BTS Arts' annual appropriation and serving just over 213,000 students in kindergarten through sixth grade (46%), there is not enough funding to reach all elementary schools in Utah. Providing teacher salary increases and adjusting for inflation has also been a challenge. Funding has impacted BTS Arts ability to scale up and maintain quality instruction.

Supporting educators is also a challenge — from staffing issues to providing consistent training statewide. Burnout, isolation and collaborating with classroom teachers have all been raised as significant workforce issues. District art coaches and university partners help address collaboration and isolation through providing professional development.

Addressing Capacity Through Various Role Groups

The BTS Arts program provides wraparound supports to create a scaffolded model that leverages these various role groups:

- District arts coordinators act as liaisons between the state education agency, the district/charter and the schools for grant writing and program implementation.
- Endowed universities and chairs offer professional learning opportunities, provide information about effective practice and research-based strategies and how to foster partnerships to support arts education at the university and with local districts. University professional development partners work under the direction of their endowed university and chair to support individual schools and act as liaisons between universities, districts, schools and the Utah State Board of Education.
- BTS Arts integration instructional coaches assist educators by setting goals and using data to improve learning experiences and outcomes for students. In the 2023-24 school year, BTS Arts funded a regional coach to support rural areas by leveraging a hybrid approach to provide professional learning, lesson planning and observations.
- Friends of BTS Arts is an advocacy organization that lobbies on behalf of BTS Arts and engages with parents, volunteers, faculty, family and community members.

Using Evaluation Data for Continuous Improvement

Annual evaluations are conducted by the BTS Arts educator and principal at each elementary site and are primarily designed to understand challenges and needs of the program through qualitative and quantitative data collection. Improvements in school culture are especially important and schools are encouraged to leverage strong student engagement and opportunities for expression and individuality. Unexpected outcomes include fewer behavioral issues, improved teacher retention and parental involvement.

Considerations for State and Local Leaders

BTS Arts leverages public-private partnerships to enhance its lobbying and fundraising efforts and enhance collaboration with universities to provide professional development and create community for BTS Arts educators. Through continuous professional learning opportunities, competition between schools diminishes while knowledge sharing and field building expand. The BTS Arts model incentivizes collaboration and sharing resources across schools and districts.

Additional Resources

BTS Arts has been achieving significant outcomes for over two decades for children in Utah. For more information, see their [Impact page](#), which contains statistics on student achievement and engagement, program site data at the district and school level.

See additional case studies in the series:

[Key Lessons from Effective K-12 STEAM Education Organizations.](#)



About the Authors

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