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REPORT TO THE SCHOOL OF CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

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Purpose: The Oversight Committee of SCPA was appointed by the Board of
Education of CPS to ensure that SCPA outcomes, processes, decision-making and
community involvement were in keeping with the vision of the Board. In turn the
O.C. reached out to ASN to have its Executive Director and a Board Officer complete
a two-day review of the school. The review included interviews with key groups,
classroom and arts program observations, document inspection and an analysis of
SCPA operations. In the summary, we present recommendations that would align
the school with the best practices employed by arts schools throughout the country.

Methodology: The review includes the above, and in addition an in-depth
investigation of financial and procedural documents sent prior to the visit. Website
content, media reports, historical data and academic ratings were also part of the
review. As the 2-day visit unfolded, the structure of the report emerged and key
areas were identified, forming the basis of the findings. From these categories
commendations and recommendations were extracted.

Summary of Findings by Category
Enrollment and Audition Processes: Recommend an overhaul of current multiple
audition system to 2x per year, open up the decision-making process to include arts
staff, address the challenge of 80 students not enrolled in focused arts classes,
analyze size of departments to ensure arts outcomes excel.
Organizational Structure: Ensure that school principal and artistic director define
their duties and relationship in the org chart, which should be visually created to
clarify all roles. This is especially necessary with some of the features unique to
SCPA, such as the box office and the new foundation which require close oversight.
Other leadership roles could be clarified and strengthened by inclusive practices
and greater collaboration. Leadership bodies such as the LSDMC and the ILT need to
be included in high-level decisions and essential school functions, which seems to be
the case, but perhaps could be further strengthened.
**Unfilled Needs:** A range of needs not currently being met was identified. In most cases faculty has the expertise and experience at SCPA to take on these tasks; in other cases SCPA leaders should work with CPS to tap into the resources and knowledge available from the central office. The areas of need we identified are the following: Master Schedule designer and Task Force leader, an annual requirement; A Technology Coordinator and Web Master, although CPS has the ability to host and manage their web page; an Internship Coordinator to place and monitor off-campus student experiences in the arts organizations; and increased mental health support, possibly available through District resources. The use of Schedule E funds to pay teachers for extended hours may be a way to support these tasks; if they do not meet the Schedule E guidelines, perhaps other discretionary funds can be directed toward these essential tasks.

**Supplementary Funds:** The allocation of Schedule E and CTE funds require an analysis to ensure they are correctly utilized. Faculty should be included in these discussions. In addition, funds that come in as donations, ticket sales and other school-generated income should be examined and monitored to direct them toward identified needs according to sound fiscal practice.

**General Fund Flexibility:** We advocate for the GF revenue to be flexible in terms of teacher allocation, if at all possible. SCPA has unique needs and would benefit from the ability to easily move allocations into new or different positions. In addition, some Districts give their arts school specialty funding to support the complex and robust arts programs that are much more costly than what most other types of schools would require. This information was highlighted in our report to the Board.

**Staffing:** SCPA staff presented as qualified, appropriately credentialed, and committed to the school. Many have been here for most of their careers. The academic staffing is in line with State requirements and college/university standards for secondary schools. In the arts, staffing is based on the size of the department. One question emerged regarding the relative departmental enrollments: does this reflect the talent that is seen at the audition, the overall vision for the school, a historical pattern that has become embedded, or the staff credentials currently held? This could be an advantageous time to take a close look at this.

**Master Schedule:** The SCPA Master Schedule is among the most complex we have seen. The mix of arts and academic classes extends throughout the entire day, and even the cafeteria schedule is unusually busy. Many ASN high schools have their arts block in the time after lunch, creating an immersive arts experience that permeates the whole school, an ideal time for tours, donor visits, special arts projects that require longer time periods. This also saves time, as arts class dress requirements are usually handled at the end of lunch. The energy dips from the varying physical demands of some performance classes coming before an academic class is another benefit of this schedule. It may be that the combination of staffing allocations and facility use will not allow for this, but an examination of this and many other points is indicated.

**External Relationships:** This was a frequent topic with many stakeholders in our meetings, and we also heard from some of the community members and agencies with their view of the relationships. The criticisms of the school that have been
prominent recently have created a feeling that “outsiders” are intruding on school operations. Some of these groups can be beneficial to the school, so an attempt to mediate these differences would be helpful. In addition, collaboration with the District departments that can support the school may help fill some of the needs mentioned earlier: mental health, technology, data study. A strong leadership vision that communicates the priority of community involvement in the school should be the starting point for work on this topic.

**Staff Culture:** The SCPA faculty and staff presented as a professional, committed group with great enthusiasm for SCPA. The internal culture could use a little nurturing, and faculty/staff get-togethers and events would help bond the team. Other culture-building activities could include joint arts/academic projects, cross-grade student relationships facilitated by faculty members and a faculty talent show/exhibition. Anything that allows for relationships to build would be helpful in a school that spans thirteen grades and eight arts disciplines (not counting sub-disciplines).

**Performance Schedule:** SCPA may have the busiest calendar in the country. Recommendations were made for the calendar team to work with the arts staff to ensure the schedule is balanced, reasonable and keeps student capacity in mind when making decisions.

**Academics:** The student achievement data is a mixed bag, with overall scores satisfactory but gaps in subgroups and grade levels. We did not discuss what academic support plans might be in place. The use of the arts as a tool to raise test scores can be a powerful strategy. As cited above, SCPA can also benefit from bringing in CPS data analysts to work with faculty on analyzing and using the data to enrich instruction.

**Commendations for SCPA:**

1. As a K-12 arts school, SCPA has set the bar very high for innovation and excellence.
2. Faculty are qualified, committed, articulate ambassadors for the school.
3. Students are joyful, insightful, passionate about SCPA.
4. The Cincinnati community and arts organizations have demonstrated a strong commitment to the school’s vision and the necessary support required by a world-class arts school.
5. The stunning new facility is evidence of the importance the community has placed on SCPA and arts education.
6. The school has an ambitious and varied calendar that indicates artistic vision and challenging aesthetic goals for students to reach.
7. Academic classes demonstrated student engagement, thoughtful pedagogy and appropriate rigor and depth.
8. Steps have been taken to address needs in certain areas i.e. a box office manager, accreditation lead, Exemplary Schools coordinators.
9. Student voice is a vibrant presence in the school. Original projects are encouraged, offering opportunities for collaboration and leadership.
10. A student internship program is developing with local arts organizations.
11. The accreditation process is underway and will be led by the department chair who filled that role five years ago, a sign of continuity and stability.
12. Staff retention is high; many staff members have been at SCPA for most of their careers.
13. School leadership is asking probing questions about solutions to challenging issues and school improvement strategies.
14. Parent involvement is robust and productive.
15. The excellence of SCPA is underscored by the enrollment of students from the surrounding region and even into Kentucky and Indiana.

Recommendations for SCPA:
1. SCPA should work with CPS on a solution to the Grades 4-6 students without formal arts programs.
2. A Master Schedule Task Force with a lead scheduler would make design and implementation more efficient and timely.
3. The organizational structure should reflect the single leader who is accountable for all aspects of the school and builds a unified vision. Current structure is split between arts/academics/ancillary entities. A visual org chart needs to be created to clarify the flow of information and authority, especially with ancillary bodies unique to an arts school, such as the Foundation and Box Office.
4. Essential tasks that allow the school to operate smoothly need to be assigned to appropriate staff. Tasks should be prioritized and acted upon. (Technology/website, Scheduling, Mental Health)
5. The new 501(c)3 needs to be selected, given direction, monitored regularly.
6. Audition process needs study and revision: current model is inefficient and taxing. Enrollment decisions should be made in tandem with arts staff.
7. SCPA needs to engage with the District on data study, website hosting, other initiatives that support school needs.
8. Achievement gap and grade level disparities in test scores could be addressed through targeted intervention and use of students’ arts abilities in academic efforts.
9. The external relationships that are currently a challenge for SCPA may require outside facilitation/mediation. The issues call for direct communication and good-faith efforts to build bridges.
10. Faculty and staff culture can be nurtured by thoughtful activities, group celebrations, designed collaborations and special events.
11. Examination and analysis of the production schedule could result in a balanced calendar that is not overly busy.
12. Prominent SCPA name and logo should be on the front of the school, and a marquee advertising coming events would also be a good addition.
13. Partnerships with local arts institutions should be facilitated by an Internship Coordinator to provide structured internship opportunities for SCPA students.
14. School leadership may want to work with the District on general fund flexibility and other fiscal procedures to support the SCPA vision.
15. Working with local universities to bring student teachers into SCPA would enhance the capacity of the school to offer support services, as well as provide a known pool for future openings as well as bring fresh educational perspectives to the school.
16. Explore CTE opportunities for music production, hosting a radio station and a Museum Studies track if possible, or consider these concepts in other programmatic structures.

Summary
SCPA is an urban gem, a prime example of public/private partnership. The school’s potential is unlimited but we did see areas that needed to be addressed. The strain of troubled external relationships is playing out at the school in ways that seem to hurt staff morale; arts schools normally embrace their external partners and benefit from their professional expertise and facilities, as well as providing internship opportunities for students. A second key area where the need for growth is indicated involves transparency and collaboration in school processes and decisions. ASN’s Exemplary School Award was not recommended after this visit, primarily due to the 80 students not in formal arts programs and the issue of external relationships. We are confident that if the school can show progress on the issues raised here, that award will be coming soon.