



**For Immediate Release**

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**St. Louis Arts and Cultural Institutions to Collaborate  
With St. Louis Public Schools**

***New Program Will Integrate Arts into Curricula to Boost Academic Achievement***

**St. Louis (March 29, 2006)** – Nearly 50 St. Louis businesses and institutions, including more than 30 arts and cultural organizations, will collaborate with the St. Louis Public Schools to launch an innovative new program designed to boost academic achievement by incorporating the arts into the entire curriculum, officials announced today.

The collaboration, called Interchange, is funded by a Ford Foundation grant to COCA, the community-based arts center. COCA has spearheaded the establishment of the collaboration, which is made up primarily of arts and educational institutions of all types and sizes -- from the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, Saint Louis Art Museum, and area universities to groups like the Black Repertory Theatre and Springboard to Learning.

The program being organized here is one of only eight that the Ford Foundation has funded nationwide. Its goal is to use the arts to boost student achievement in all areas, including reading, social studies, math, and science, as well as to boost the role of schools as neighborhood centers that engage whole families and help revitalize neighborhoods.

Ford's two-year grant is for \$250,000. Additional technical support will come from national consultants hired by Ford in the areas of evaluation, communication, and capacity building.

"The Ford Foundation has been impressed with COCA'S Urban Arts program," said Cyrus Driver, program officer of the New York-based foundation. "We also have been impressed by St. Louis' panoply of fine cultural and arts institutions. We believe that working together with the St. Louis Public Schools, these institutions can expand and improve the way the arts are incorporated into the curriculum, for the benefit of the students and the entire community."

Through its Urban Arts program, COCA has brought arts instruction, performance, and workshops to children in eight city schools during school, after school, during the summer, and through artists' residencies since 1998.

## *Interchange / ADD ONE*

“This grant represents an ambitious challenge to the community,” said Stephanie Riven, COCA’s executive director. “We’ve learned that students become more engaged with learning and improve their test scores when they are exposed to the arts. Now our challenge is to apply that knowledge in a systematic, comprehensive way with the full array of this community’s remarkable cultural resources.”

Using arts and cultural resources to expand the ways in which teachers teach and students learn has been shown to achieve measurable results. In Dallas, disadvantaged children participating in a similar program performed better on standardized tests for reading comprehension and also improved their writing, a study by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform showed. In St. Louis, students at three elementary schools – Jefferson, Adams, and Columbia – showed dramatic improvement in school attendance while participating in COCA’s Urban Arts programming at their schools, a study published last August showed.

“One of the key principles in the SLPS strategic plan is to foster community collaboration,” said Creg Williams, superintendent, St. Louis Public Schools. “Not only do we welcome Interchange, we are committed to working with it as a partner to ensure that this initiative achieves its primary goal – increasing student achievement.”

Williams continued, “This program is another example of how business, university, and community partnerships can strengthen schools. Through Interchange not only students but also their families and teachers will gain greater access to the community’s cultural resources.”

Working with the St. Louis Public Schools, Interchange will provide teachers with professional training in integrating the arts. It will also offer access to programming by the arts and cultural organizations. For example, students will see photosynthesis dramatized through the Metro Theater Company’s *Science Moves* program and develop a greater appreciation of geography and world cultures through COCA’s West African dance classes.

Interchange will implement a series of measurement tools, covering such areas as test scores, writing samples, and classroom engagement, to assess the program’s impact and help align its goals with those of the St. Louis Public Schools.

“This program will have an impact on not only the St. Louis Public Schools, but the community as a whole,” said Lawrence L. Cohn, Interchange co-chair. “Everyone benefits when students become well-rounded individuals who can take their place as responsible citizens. Interchange will also encourage collaboration between St. Louis organizations and leaders, strengthening our community’s cultural infrastructure.”

*Interchange is a community-wide collaboration of more than 30 St. Louis arts and cultural institutions dedicated to improving the academic achievement of St. Louis Public School students by providing them with an expanded, arts-integrated curriculum.*

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