



SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Adventures in Music (AIM)



Program Evaluation:
A Summary of Findings

EVALUATION ADMINISTERED BY ARTSVISION®



“Now, what was once a bus ride to a children’s concert is an integrated part of our everyday curriculum.”

—SFUSD ARTS EDUCATION DIRECTOR

San Francisco Symphony Adventures in Music (AIM) Program

The story of AIM is certainly compelling. It is the story of an institution that made an unwavering commitment to the schools of San Francisco, and went down a path that allowed the organization to build dependable, sustained relationships throughout the school community and its neighborhoods. Through AIM, the Symphony has interacted with countless new audiences and redefined its role within the community. The San Francisco Symphony made a commitment to its community, and is today, as a result, truly part of that community.

As schools nationwide are struggling to provide music education for their students, the San Francisco Symphony does not have the luxury of approaching students with an orchestral education alone. Instead, the Symphony has decided that schools are best served with a music education that includes all of the music forms representative of the diverse communities of San Francisco. The resulting program, which was introduced to San Francisco elementary schools in 1988, is called Adventures in Music (AIM).

Today, *every student in every elementary school in the San Francisco Unified School District* is served by the program, making the San Francisco Symphony the only orchestra in the country to make this kind of commitment to its community. The program also serves students in several San Francisco independent and parochial schools. All told, more than 1,200 teachers implement the program in their classrooms in 93 schools. Each and every single 1st through 5th grade student in the SFUSD—more than 25,000 total—receives five years of music education experiences free of charge from the San Francisco Symphony.

Each year, students participate in a series of music and arts activities through the program. Specially trained AIM ensembles perform as many as one thousand educational concerts in the schools each year. Teachers lead arts-integrated, multicultural lesson plans. Students learn from hands-on classroom resources, including recordings, books, videos, maps, journals, and music-making equipment. Finally, students come to Davies Symphony Hall for a culminating concert event presented by the San Francisco Symphony. Every year, one major theme connects each of these experiences. It is the high quality and tremendous impact of each of these experiences that make the program such a success.





AIM's Impact on Students

86.9% of teachers and 85.5% of principals surveyed agreed that their students are more interested in music and the arts because of AIM.

92.6% of teachers and 93.8% of principals surveyed agreed that their students have a better understanding of the symphony orchestra and its repertoire because of AIM.

Without question, AIM has significantly impacted the students of San Francisco. In a school system historically challenged by time and budgetary constraints on the curriculum, AIM is functioning as an important part of the music education schools provide. Because of AIM, elementary students are developing a greater understanding of, and interest in, music. In addition, educators report that AIM has made a significant impact on the level of interest among students in further pursuing musical study. AIM is helping lead students to play musical instruments.



"AIM is providing the necessary music education for our students. There is not always enough time in the day for music as a distinct subject area, and the classroom teacher as a generalist doesn't necessarily have the skills needed to fill this gap. AIM helps provide this resource to our classroom teachers."

— PRINCIPAL

"AIM is a wonderful springboard for inspiration to play music for my students. They look at the ensembles that play the same instruments that they are playing and see professionals doing what they want to do—with the very same instruments. It is inspiring and a source of pride for kids to see this."

— PRINCIPAL

"AIM really helps kids learn about their interests in music—so they are set up to start their own musical learning. A universal question that is asked of artists is 'how long have you played?' My kids are really into the idea that they could start playing right now."

— TEACHER

"I've noticed, through the years, that more of my students are taking music lessons because of AIM."

— TEACHER

"Our music teacher stated that this year she has been able to get a lot further in instrumental classes with her students than she ever has been able to before because of the important exposure to music that AIM provides. The kids are more excited and interested in practicing their instrument at home."

— PRINCIPAL

"What I learned is that everybody could play music."

— STUDENT





Teachers at an Adventures in Music Teacher Workshop at the San Francisco Exploratorium

AIM's Impact on Schools

AIM not only impacts individual students, it impacts entire elementary schools in several important ways. First, the level of music education has undeniably improved in AIM schools—music is now part of the everyday learning that happens in these schools. AIM has also had widespread impacts on the overall environment of schools by creating a shift in the way educators think about their curriculum. Educators know that using music and the arts in the classroom provides opportunities for hands-on participation and lets kids have fun learning. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of AIM, teachers recognize that AIM makes a positive impact on teaching and learning in many subject areas, including language arts and science. In many schools, AIM is helping to create a positive school environment and a greater sense of community within schools. All of this is evidence that AIM is creating better teachers, better curriculum, and better schools.

- 68% of teachers found that participating in AIM opened up for them new ways of thinking about the curriculum.
- 58% of teachers reported that because of AIM, they are now better teachers.
- 69% of teachers and 86% of principals found that the use of AIM in the curriculum has increased their students' understanding of, or achievement in, other subjects.
- 76% of principals and 59% of teachers found their students are more interested in learning because of AIM.



"All our elementary music programs have been strengthened by AIM."

AIM helps us determine what other resources we need—it is the foundation for music education in our schools, and all our other programs fit into it."

— SFUSD ARTS EDUCATION DIRECTOR

"AIM really enhances what we have to offer in the arts. The parents really appreciate it—they think we are the best school in the city because of this program. Parents know that music and the arts are a piece of the curriculum that is the first to go with budget cuts... and the fact that we can provide this for our students gives the perception that we really are a special place."

— PRINCIPAL

"Because of the endless ways the AIM curriculum ties into other subject areas, AIM really gets students excited about learning and music."

— TEACHER

"In literature classes, students are beginning to tie in what they learn through AIM. For example, when students were called upon to write biographies, many of them chose to write about composers that they learned about through AIM materials. There are more books being checked out from the library on music each year. And more students are requesting books on music. We have checked this statistically."

— PRINCIPAL

"I think AIM is an extremely valuable program on so many levels. It is providing a much fuller, richer overall environment for the students than we could possibly accomplish on our own. We couldn't imagine doing anything near this level without AIM."

— PRINCIPAL

"AIM helps bring our teachers together by giving them a common experience which they can talk about together."

They discuss ideas for further activities and make plans for collaborations. More and more classrooms are now working together on joint projects. This is very positive."

— PRINCIPAL



AIM Mirrors Its Community

Historically, AIM has been a program devoted to reflecting its community. The program has never been solely about the orchestra and orchestra education; it has been about music and music education for all of the elementary schools and students in San Francisco. Educators were quick to point out AIM's commitment to cultural diversity. Many teachers and principals described how AIM allows students to see first-hand a wide variety of cultures that they interact with daily, as well as experience their own culture through the program.

- 83.3% of principals reported that their students are able to talk about the art and music of cultures other than their own.
- 78.2% of principals agreed that their students are more accepting of other cultures because of AIM.



"AIM certainly opens the door to cultural diversity. Because it presents an aspect of a culture that everyone can relate to. Music transcends ethnic groups and economic levels. And I think AIM does an excellent job at opening the door and piquing interest among kids to find out more about a culture or ethnic group."

— PRINCIPAL

"I have seen a lot of kids light up when they see themselves in the music and in the performers."

— TEACHER

"Just to have a successful musician in front of kids who looks like them—this is very important for our students. We don't have enough professional minorities. AIM really makes a difference—'there is someone like me.'"

— TEACHER

"The kids can see musicians like me that come together around the arts and express ourselves through music. We are from all over the world, and we dedicate ourselves to this. Specifically, kids are learning that music really has a strong possibility of crossing over age and race barriers. It brings people together."

— AIM MUSICIAN





Reflections from Participating Musicians

AIM also greatly impacts the diverse group of musicians who participate in the program. AIM musicians feel the program helps them become better teaching artists and presenters. As musicians continue in the program, their ability to interact with children and audiences increases. In the end, musicians involved in AIM report that the program even supports their careers as working musicians, providing important networking opportunities and steady income streams.

- 94.4% of musicians reported that participating in AIM opened up new ways of thinking about their role in arts education.
- 88.9% of musicians reported that participating in AIM increased their interest in education and other social issues that impact children.
- 83.3% of musicians agreed that participating in AIM was one of the most rewarding experiences in their entire careers as musicians.



“I have learned how to speak to children in a way that is effective. I’m getting better at recognizing what they want to hear, adapting to the audience, learning how to spark their interest and educate at the same time.”

— AIM MUSICIAN

“I think it has been very important for me as a musician. I appreciate being able to play for kids because they are open and frank and brutally honest. They are a great gauge and they give you an opportunity to keep an ear to the ground.”

— AIM MUSICIAN

“If we weren’t doing this, we would have to be playing nightclubs. But this is so much more valuable because it broadens our base of communicating what we do verbally and musically.”

— AIM MUSICIAN

“The kids come with a fresh perspective and it is valuable to get to see what connects with them. This affects all your performances— it applies to adults and it helps you communicate with all new audiences. If you can do it in a school, you can work in any situation.”

— AIM MUSICIAN

“Over the years, through the training of our musicians and the tailoring of their programs, we have developed a cadre of exceptionally talented musicians who are now more accomplished music educators. Those musicians do what they do all around the country and the world. This benefits a much broader audience than AIM reaches. When musicians come into AIM, they make a tremendous commitment to the children and to the greater community, because the program binds them to the Bay Area. The ensembles are usually at schools four to five mornings per week. It’s a big time commitment, and it’s a necessity because it’s crucial that the program remain consistent at each school.”

— SFS EDUCATION STAFF MEMBER





The San Francisco Symphony and its Community

AIM is a true partnership. All of the positive impacts of the program on students, teachers, schools and artists happen within the context of a mutually beneficial relationship that the program has created between the Symphony and its community. A Symphony Education staff member remarked, “There is a real ‘give and take’ with the program. We solicit feedback constantly, and the teachers and principals trust us enough to share their thoughts on the program’s strengths and deficiencies, without fear of defensiveness on our part or negative consequences. They know we’ll address the deficiencies; they know that the communication results in a better program.”

- 84.1% of teachers agreed that AIM has allowed them to develop a positive relationship with the Symphony.
- 93.6% of principals also agreed that AIM has allowed them to develop positive relationships with the Symphony.



“Our relationship with the San Francisco Symphony is totally dependable. We often have a consciousness in this district of making do. But not with AIM. The Symphony is so generous with the program... never trying to ‘save a buck.’ Now, what was once a bus ride to a children’s concert is an integrated part of our everyday curriculum.”

— SFUSD ARTS EDUCATION DIRECTOR

“We place a premium on being responsive to teachers,” remarked one SFS education staff member. “AIM is a program created uniquely for the SFUSD to serve the children and teachers of San Francisco. It has continually evolved from inception into what it is today through the Symphony’s absolute responsiveness to the teachers’ requests and needs. When the AIM hotline rings with a request from a teacher, we make it happen right away! This kind of responsiveness is yet another signal to the teachers that we are all working in tandem—that this is not a program that we have created and imposed on the teachers and the district. Rather, it is indeed a shared program with common goals and mutual respect.”

— SFS EDUCATION STAFF MEMBER



Conclusions

These committed, dependable relationships described by educators are real because the San Francisco Symphony is committed to AIM, from the education staff to the Board of Governors. With this commitment has come a greater understanding on the part of the Symphony of issues relating to children, learning and community-building. In the end, these institutional changes have been rewarded by the community’s positive perception of the San Francisco Symphony. The San Francisco Symphony set out to serve its community in the best way possible, and has today become an active, living member of its community.



Statistics are based on answers from 503 respondents. Quotes are from in-depth interviews at nine SFUSD elementary schools in different neighborhoods throughout San Francisco.

For a copy of the complete evaluation report, please contact:

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San Francisco Mayor
Willie Brown, San Francisco
Symphony Board President
John Goldman, and San
Francisco Unified School
District Superintendent
Arlene Ackerman at a
celebration of Adventures
in Music's fourteenth year.





Adventures in Music
students at their private
concert by the San
Francisco Symphony
in Davies Symphony Hall