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# Introduction

Over the past few decades, arts-based prevention, advocacy, and treatment have increasingly served to foster healing and wellbeing for individuals who have experienced trauma.<sup>i,ii</sup> Research suggests creative arts interventions are effective at enhancing psychological wellbeing by decreasing negative emotional states and enhancing positive ones.<sup>iii</sup> The act of engaging in the creation of art has proven to be beneficial to one's health, productivity, and sense of empowerment.<sup>iv</sup> For young people, engaging in arts education activities has been shown to increase academic achievement and reduce justice system involvement and adjudication.<sup>v,vi</sup> Moreover, participatory arts activities have proven to be effective at reducing negative physical health symptoms and mitigating mental health challenges, especially in populations with disproportionately high trauma exposure and mental health needs.<sup>vii</sup>

Research also shows that, as of 2007, more than two-thirds of children have witnessed at least one traumatic event by the age of 16.<sup>viii</sup> [Traumatic experiences for youth](#) include, but are not limited to, physical, psychological or sexual abuse; domestic violence; community or school violence; and physical or sexual assault. Understanding and addressing the negative effects of trauma in youth is critical for mitigating mental health challenges. One youth population that has historically experienced higher rates of trauma are youth who have been involved with the child welfare system, particularly foster youth. A vast body of research demonstrates disproportionality and disparity exist within the child welfare system, across the nation, especially among Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and LGBTQ+ youth populations.<sup>ix,x</sup> Research also shows that foster youth experience trauma and mental health challenges at a rate more severe than the average child.<sup>xi</sup> One study found that foster youth, when compared to their non-foster peers, have a higher prevalence of anxiety (14% versus 3%), behavioral challenges (18% versus 3%), and depression (14% versus 2%).<sup>xii</sup> This is likely due to foster youth's higher risk of experiencing more abuse and neglect than other youth as well as multiple disruptions in their home and school life.<sup>xiii</sup> As such, the holistic and healing properties of an arts-rich education can be especially beneficial for young people who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by institutions and systems.

## Definition: Healing-Informed Approach

While "trauma-informed" frameworks are widely used to promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing, Arts and Culture is embracing a "healing-informed" lens.

Healing-informed (or [healing-centered\\*](#)) approaches are aimed at the holistic restoration of an individual's well-being, recognizing the profound impact of trauma on individuals. This approach advances strengths-based care and moves away from deficit-based mental health models. It seeks to promote resilience and healing from traumatic experiences and environments, in culturally grounded contexts that view healing as the restoration of identity, shared experience, community and a sense of belonging.

\*Source: Shawn Ginwright  
<https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>

14%

of foster youth experience **anxiety**  
(compared to 3% non-foster youth)

18%

of foster youth experience **behavioral challenges**  
(compared to 3% non-foster youth)

14%

of foster youth experience **depression**  
(compared to 2% non-foster youth)

This is also true for youth who are impacted by the juvenile-justice system. Over 50 percent of youth on probation are Hispanic/Latino, followed by Black, White, and other race groups. Black and Latinx youth make up a larger percentage of the probation population than their percentage of population.<sup>xiv</sup> Moreover, in 2015 four out of five (83%) youth who exited from suitable placement or had received at least one referral to Child Protective Services for suspected maltreatment, with the average number of previous referrals for maltreatment being 5.6. <sup>xv</sup> Additionally,

70 percent of youth experienced their first referral before age ten; 43 percent before age five.<sup>xvi</sup> *Creative Wellbeing* aims to embrace and utilize the arts as an effective way to address trauma, as its emphasis on using imagination and creativity as an outlet to cope with everyday life is a means to process past traumatic events and begin the healing journey.<sup>xvii</sup>



Four out of five LA probation youth had received **at least one referral to Child Protective Services** for suspected maltreatment

**5.6** is the **average number of previous referrals** for maltreatment

**70** percent of youth experienced their **first referral before age ten**

**43** percent of youth experienced their **first referral before age five**

Evidence suggests that safe and positive school climates and cultures positively affect academic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for students.<sup>xviii</sup> Through decades of arts-based programming, research and experience, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture)<sup>1</sup> has seen first-hand how healing-informed arts activities provide youth with an opportunity to learn new skills and express their thoughts or ideas in a creative and therapeutic way. They also believe that educators (e.g., school teachers, staff, and administrators) who are trained and equipped to implement healing-informed arts instruction will be better able to support their students' mental health and wellbeing.

During the 2019-2020 school year, Arts and Culture partnered with Los Angeles County Office of Child Protection (OCP), Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH), and Arts for Healing and Justice Network<sup>2</sup> (AHJN) to implement healing-informed arts education activities within select public schools known to have a high number of foster, probation, and at-promise youth<sup>3</sup> (see side bar for participating school districts). This joint initiative was coined *Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience (Creative Wellbeing)* and was designed as a starting point toward establishing school cultures grounded in healing-informed care by providing arts-based student instruction, professional development, and community building activities. *Creative Wellbeing* partners described the goals of this project as coupling mental health intervention with the arts to build sustainable communities of wellness within schools that are healing-informed and address the social and emotional needs of young people. Funding for *Creative Wellbeing* was provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health with additional support by the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

Harder+Company Community Research joined the partnership as the evaluation team to capture the outcomes and lessons learned through implementation of the initiative during this pilot phase and to inform future programming.

#### Partner School Districts

- Antelope Valley Union High School
- Los Angeles Unified
- Pasadena Unified
- Pomona Unified

<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly known as Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network.

<sup>3</sup> In 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a legislation, Assembly Bill No. 413, to replace the term "at-risk" youth with "at-promise" youth in the state's penal and education codes. This new term is less stigmatizing to refer to youth who face or are living through challenging circumstances.

## COVID-19

In March 2020, just as the *Creative Wellbeing* activities were kicking off, the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding public health emergency led to the rapid closure of schools and the suspension of direct services in all school districts across Los Angeles County. This included programming scheduled to take place between March and June 2020 as part of *Creative Wellbeing*.

In response to these shifts, Arts and Culture worked closely with their partners at Antelope Valley Union High School District, Pasadena Unified School District, Pomona Unified School District and AHJN to brainstorm ways to pivot the project's in-person services to online and virtual engagements. At this time, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was not able to partake in *Creative Wellbeing* activities due to challenges finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the district and Arts and Culture, as well as challenges in obtaining approval from LAUSD's Office of Data Accountability to implement evaluation activities with LAUSD educators.

Additionally, with the onset of the pandemic, students, families, and educators were experiencing increased stress levels due to changes in their daily lives that impacted their mental, physical, financial, and social wellbeing.<sup>xix</sup> COVID-19 potentially caused additional traumatic experiences for the individuals who were already identified as being at higher risk of traumatic exposure and in need of mental health support, further emphasizing the need to share tools and strategies to counteract the harmful effects of trauma.

According to Arts and Culture staff,

*[During this time,] many school partners reported that teachers and administrators are feeling overwhelmed by the demands of having to simultaneously learn and facilitate distance learning. Many reported that opportunities to engage in voluntary self-care workshops and additional training around mental wellbeing and healing-informed arts facilitation to support students would be highly beneficial.*

In response to feedback from school districts and considering the needs of students, families, and educators during COVID-19, Arts and Culture worked with their partners to quickly shift *Creative Wellbeing* programming to a virtual format to best meet the needs of partner districts and ensure students and educators had the support they needed to navigate this uncertain time, while still applying a systems-change approach by involving as many youth-serving adults as possible. Exhibit 1 details how the original *Creative Wellbeing* activities shifted in light of COVID-19.



*\*Images displayed throughout this report are products created by participants of Creative Wellbeing activities.*

**Exhibit 1. Shift in Creative Wellbeing activities**



**Programming**

*Creative Wellbeing* has several programming components focused on youth, educators, and families. The following are short descriptions of each component implemented as part of the *Creative Wellbeing* program, including how it was adjusted from original plans in response to the pandemic. Exhibit 2 illustrates the timing of *Creative Wellbeing* activities in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement.



**Creative Wellbeing Professional Development Trainings:** Utilizing a co-created curriculum (see callout box below) two three-day, virtual professional development trainings were facilitated by AHJN member organization WriteGirl/Bold Ink Writers. One series was held for Pasadena Unified School District educators and another series was held for school district arts coordinators from across LA County. The virtual content was adapted from the initially-planned 8 hour in-person training and instead presented in 90-minute live workshops via Zoom on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The Zoom sessions were supplemented by two at-home healing-informed art-making activities, completed by participants on their own time in between sessions, on Tuesday and Thursday. The overall objective of the training was to bring a healing-informed arts-based approach to student mental health and wellbeing and provide educators with tools to incorporate this approach into existing curriculums and campus activities. (June 2020)



**Teacher Space Workshops:** A drop-in, virtual self-care workshop series for teachers and other youth-serving adults (i.e. office staff, school social workers, administrators, etc.) led by healing-informed teaching artists from AHJN member organizations The Actors' Gang and WriteGirl/Bold Ink Writers. The workshops were offered two times per week for four weeks to youth-serving adults at all partner school districts. The intent of the workshops were to build connections, bolster protective factors, and foster community-care among educators, especially during the stressful times of the pandemic. The workshops provided an opportunity for educators to tap into their creativity, engage in artistic and creative strategies and gain tools for self-care. (May-June 2020)



**Parent/Caregiver Space Workshops:** An online, healing-informed, arts-based stress-reduction workshop series for parents and caregivers. AHJN member organization Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural led eight weekly drop-in virtual storytelling and self-care sessions on Saturday mornings called Palabras y Pan. (May-June 2020).



**Virtual Artist Residencies and Arts Supply Drop-offs at Congregate Care Sites:** AHJN members organizations Armory Arts and Dance for Healing hosted healing-informed arts residencies serving foster youth at congregate care sites at Hillside in Pasadena and Trinity Youth Services in El Monte. Residencies provided art supplies, live virtual instruction, and pre-recorded asynchronous arts instruction for digital media projects. Art forms included dance, origami/mindfulness, and visual and digital media arts. One additional site, Hathaway-Sycamores, received an arts supply delivery for their 60 youth but were unable to accept virtual instruction due to an active COVID-19 outbreak at the site. (June 2020)



**Mindful Moment Radio PSAs:** A series of intergenerationally-themed, radio-based public service announcements (PSAs) created by the AHJN member organization Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory (BHAC) Por Vida Media Youth Collective. The workshops engaged youth in the content and messages drawn from the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, as well as mental wellbeing themes, to brainstorm and create PSAs. The PSAs created by youth were aired 10 times a day, 7 days a week on KQBH Community Radio 101.5FM (LPFM.LA). (June 2020) See more [here](#).



**Pre-recorded Healing-Informed Arts Education Video Series:** Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory created a short series of pre-recorded, healing-informed arts instruction focused on promoting body positivity for young people. This resource was shared with all congregate care partner sites and with Pasadena Unified's Foster Youth liaisons. (June 2020) See more [here](#).

**Exhibit 2. Timeline of *Creative Wellbeing* Activities Collection**



Detailed information on the *Creative Wellbeing* Evaluation is included below, followed by the findings and recommendations for the *Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience* project. 🏠

**Co-Creating the Professional Development Curriculum**

Between November 2019 and April 2020, Arts and Culture worked in collaboration with 14 partners from AHJN and the LA County Department of Mental Health, including artists and mental health professionals, to co-develop the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development curriculum. Over the course of seven, three-hour meetings, and outside writing time, the team produced the professional development curriculum. Inspiration for curriculum content was taken from the [Change Direction Initiative](#) and [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) to ensure content was healing-informed and focused on supporting positive youth development, especially as it related to youth’s social emotional competency. The curriculum was also shaped by AHJN’s Shared Theory of Practice, which translates AHJN members’ years of experience into a shared healing-informed approach to arts and cultural engagement. The co-created curriculum resulted in an engaging and experiential learning opportunity that inspired faculty and staff to use arts-based tools to enhance student and community connection and wellbeing. Informed by the curriculum development process, the detailed objectives of the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development were to:

- Engage as a collaborative network of adults that promotes self-care and support for youth
- Deepen knowledge of adolescent development and social emotional competency
- Increase understanding of how healing-informed arts education promotes positive peer group connections, school bonding, enhanced self-awareness, and cultural identity for students
- Explore strategies for how to incorporate healing-informed arts education in classroom and campus activities



# Evaluation

In October 2019, Arts and Culture partnered with Harder+Company Community Research (Harder+Company) to conduct the *Creative Wellbeing* Evaluation. The objective of the evaluation was to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- 1 How does arts-focused professional development, with an emphasis on healing, better equip teachers to work with students who have increased risk and/or history of trauma or mental health concerns?
- 2 What are the programmatic facilitators and barriers that should be considered as healing-informed arts education scales up in the future?
- 3 To what extent does healing-informed arts education increase students' protective factors and decrease risk factors?
- 4 What does it take to build effective partnerships between government, K-12 schools, and teaching artists to provide effective healing-informed arts education?

While adjustments were made to the program in response to pandemic closures, these research questions continued to guide the evaluation.

## Data Collection

The *Creative Wellbeing* evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach to data collection and captured data from a variety of sources and points of view in order to ensure recommendations and findings were based on a range of sources and perspectives. At the onset of the *Creative Wellbeing* evaluation, discovery conversations were conducted with key project partners to understand the history and evolution of the program, as well as, gather contextual background about the project goals. Data was then collected from educators who participated in the Teacher Space workshops and professional development trainings, and educators who did not participate in the Teacher Space workshops. Additionally, the evaluation team conducted observations of both the Teacher Space workshops and professional development trainings to qualitatively understand how the material was delivered and how participants interacted with the content. To gather the family and youth perspectives, data were collected from parents who participated in the parent space workshops and from adult supervisors who oversaw the youth programming at congregate care sites. Lastly, interviews were conducted with Teaching Artists to explore the promising practices and challenges associated with implementing healing-informed arts education programming with each of the different participant groups.

At the time stay-at-home orders were announced, data collection had already begun for the *Creative Wellbeing* evaluation. Data collection methods and sources were adjusted to align with program changes as they were made, to ensure the evaluation was applicable to the new programming. Exhibit 3 details how the original data collection activities shifted in light of the program changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Exhibit 3. Shift in evaluation activities**

Original	In Response to COVID-19
Discovery conversations with Creative Wellbeing leadership	Discovery conversations with Creative Wellbeing leadership
In-person observations of faculty/staff arts integration trainings	Virtual observations of professional development trainings
In-person classroom observations of healing-informed arts education activities	Virtual observations of Teacher Space workshops
Post-training survey	Post survey for Teacher Space workshops, professional development trainings, and Parent Space workshops
Interviews with partner agency staff	Interviews with partner agency staff
Interviews with faculty/staff at partner schools	Cancelled due to COVID-19
Focus groups with youth program participants	Interviews with youth supervisors at congregate care sites implementing Creative Wellbeing activities
Not previously planned	Comparison survey with educators who did not attend Creative Wellbeing activities

A description of each data collection activity implemented are outlined below:

**Creative Wellbeing Professional Development Trainings.** The evaluation used registration forms and a retrospective survey to gather data from participants, as well as participatory observations, in order to understand the experiences of educators before, during, and after the professional development trainings. During the sessions, the evaluation team participated in the activities and used an observation guide to capture qualitative data on participants’ engagement in the sessions, the structure of the sessions, and the discussions that took place during the sessions. The evaluation team also reviewed chat logs of the sessions in order to capture additional discussions and questions posed during the training. At the end of the final training (day 3), participants were asked to complete a retrospective survey to assess overall satisfaction and, if applicable, any changes in their knowledge as a result of the three-day professional development training. A total of 87 individuals participated in the professional development trainings and 70 completed the retrospective survey.

**Teacher Space Workshops.** The evaluation used a pre-post survey and participatory observations in order to understand the experiences of educators before, during, and after the Teacher Space workshops. The pre-survey for the

Teacher Space workshops gathered data on demographics of the registered participants along with their responses to questions about what they hoped to get out of the workshop and their current knowledge of arts-based education. In total, 135 pre surveys were submitted from 77 interested educators\*. Additionally, for four of the eight workshops, the evaluation team conducted participatory observations using an observation guide to capture data on participants' engagement in the workshops, the structure of the workshops, and the discussions that took place during the workshops. The evaluation team also reviewed chat logs of the workshops to capture additional discussions and questions posed by participants during the workshop. Lastly, participants were asked to complete a post-survey following each workshop to assess overall satisfaction and, if applicable, any changes in their knowledge as a result of participating in the workshop. In total, the post-survey received 25 responses from 16 individuals.<sup>4</sup>

**Teacher Space Comparison Survey.** Educators who chose not to participate in any of the Teacher Space workshops were asked to complete a survey on their knowledge about healing-informed arts programs and their current stress levels. The purpose of the comparison survey was to gauge how knowledge and attitudes about healing-informed arts activities varied between those who participated in a Teacher Space workshops and those who did not. Respondents received a \$20 Amazon e-gift card as an incentive for their participation. A total of 91 educators completed the control group survey.

**Parent Space Workshops.** Similar to the Teacher Space workshop data collection, parents who participated in the parent space workshops were asked to complete a pre and post survey to gauge their experiences at the workshop(s). Unfortunately, none of the parents completed the survey, thus this data source will not be included in this report.

**Youth Supervisor Interviews.** Data were unable to be collected directly from youth due to scheduling constrains. However, the evaluation team conducted interviews with the congregate care site staff who interacted with the youth during *Creative Wellbeing* activities to gain insight into how they perceived youth to experience, and be impacted by, the activities based on their first-hand observations and discussions with youth.

**Partner Agency Interviews.** Following the implementation of *Creative Wellbeing* activities, interviews were conducted with key partner agency staff from Arts and Culture and AHJN, and Teaching Artists who delivered the *Creative Wellbeing* programming to explore promising practices and challenges associated with implementing healing-informed arts education programming with each of the different participant groups. Interviews were also conducted with the members of the Writing Team to more deeply understand their experiences co-creating the *Creative Wellbeing* curriculum.

**Reflection session.** At the conclusion of the evaluation, Harder+Company facilitated a reflection session with more than 30 *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, including teaching artists, school administrators, L.A. County Department of Mental Health staff, and more, to present the findings of the evaluation and have a discussion around the recommendations. The reflection session provided an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the extent to which the findings of the evaluation aligned with their experiences and how they can use the findings of the evaluation to inform their work moving forward.

### Statistical Significance

Statistical significance assesses the likelihood that a result is caused by something other than random chance. This can be measured by calculating a p-value. In social science research, a p-value of 0.05 or less is often considered 'statistically significant.' When a p-value is less than or equal to 0.05, this means that there is a 5% or less chance that the results observed are due to chance alone, and that the result is likely due to a real effect.

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<sup>4</sup> The total number of pre-surveys is not unduplicated as educators had the option to attend multiple workshops.



# Findings

## Demographics

Between May and June 2020, close to 300 individuals engaged in at least one of the *Creative Wellbeing* activities (see box below).



**87**  
educators

Creative Wellbeing  
Professional Development  
Trainings



**15**  
youth

Virtual Artist Residencies  
at Congregate Care Sites



**49**  
educators

Teacher Space  
Workshops



**11**  
youth

Boyle Heights Arts  
Conservatory's Por Vida Youth  
Media Collective (PSAs)



**6**  
caregivers

Parent/Caregiver Space  
Workshops



**120**  
youth

Art Supply Deliveries and  
Pre-Recorded Arts Instruction  
Videos at Congregate Care Sites



**142**

**Total educators\*  
and caregivers**



**146**

**Total Youth\***

\*Counts within each *Creative Wellbeing* activity are unduplicated, however, educators and youth could have been involved with multiple activities, thus the total number of participants is duplicated.

Demographic and administrative<sup>5</sup> data were collected from the educators who participated in the professional development trainings and Teacher Space workshops. In general, *Creative Wellbeing* activities were more frequently attended by teachers, as opposed to school staff and administrators. Demographic and administrative data were examined by *Creative Wellbeing* activity and results demonstrate some demographic differences between those who participated in the Teacher Space workshops and those who attended the professional development trainings. For instance, more classroom teachers (90%) attended the professional development trainings, compared to the Teacher Space workshops (45%). Additionally, those who attended the Teacher Space workshops were most likely to teach preschool (30%) or elementary school (30%), while professional development attendees were most likely to teach middle (43%) or high (40%) school.

In terms of race and ethnicity, more than half of Teacher Space attendees (59%) identified as Hispanic or Latino (52%)<sup>6</sup> or Black or African American (7%). Contrastingly, over half of professional development training attendees identified as White (56%), 28 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, 13 percent identified as Black or African American, and 3 percent identified as Asian. When examining race and ethnicity characteristics by professional development session, the majority of Art Leads identified as White (80%), compared to 58 percent of Pasadena Unified School District

<sup>5</sup> Demographic data were collected from Parent Space participants through a pre-workshop registration form. No participants responded to the post-survey thus, the evaluation team was unable to confirm which of the parents/caregivers who registered for the workshop, in fact, attended the workshop.

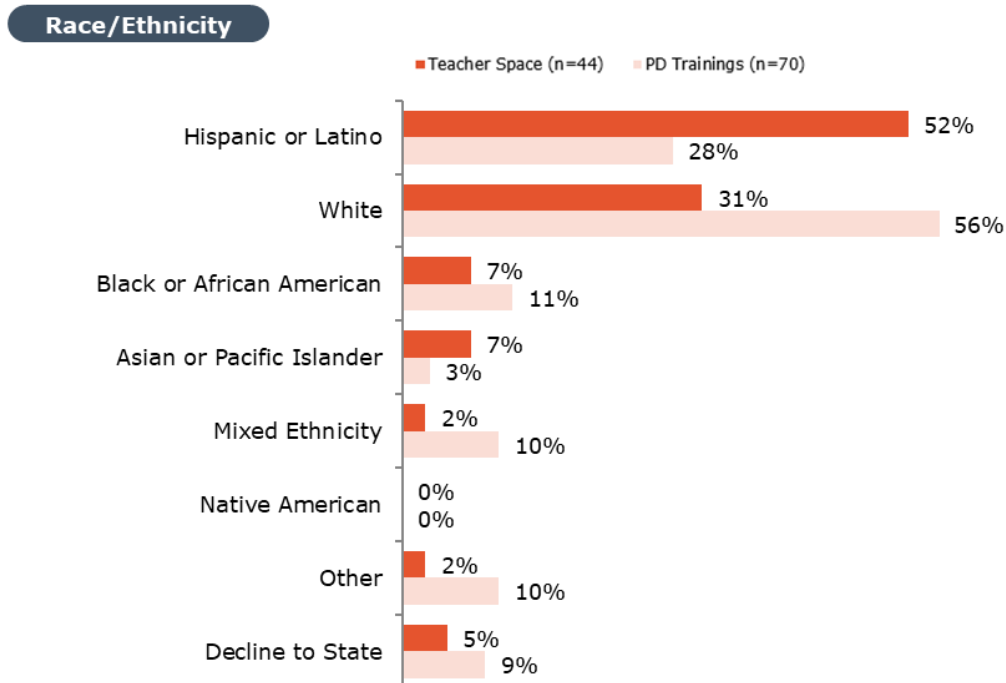
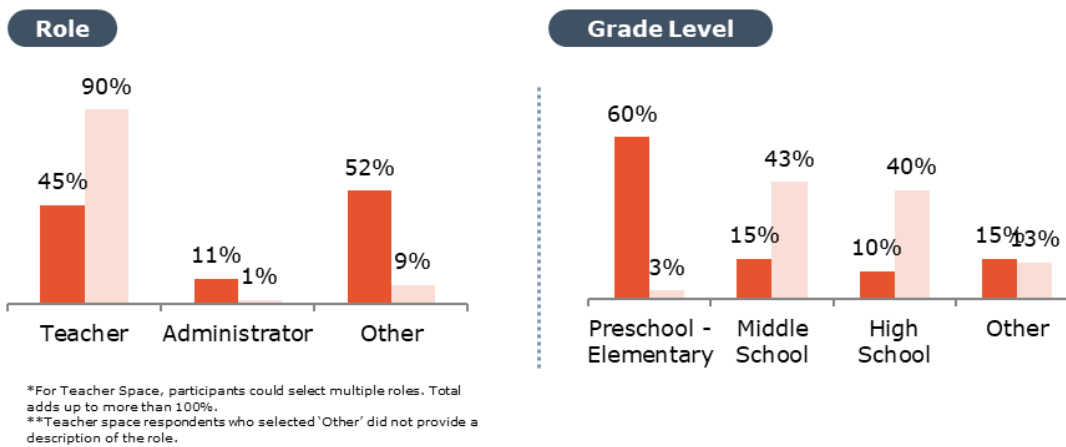
<sup>6</sup> Race and ethnicity categories were taken from a common survey administered across various DMH PEI initiatives. To ensure consistency, the terms Hispanic or Latino were used although we recognize that some respondents may prefer the term "Latinix" to reflect gender neutrality.

(Pasadena USD) attendees. Moreover, about a third of Pasadena USD attendees identified as Hispanic or Latino (32%), while no Art Leads did.

Lastly, when examining demographic characteristics by grade level taught, at least half of the teachers that teach preschool (67%), high school (50%), or adult (50%) identified as Hispanic or Latino. The majority of elementary (67%) and middle school teachers (67%) identified as White.

Exhibit 4 provides demographic/administrative characteristics for those who participated in the professional development trainings and Teacher Space workshops. For a detailed breakdown of demographic characteristics for *Creative Wellbeing* participants, see [Appendix B](#).

**Exhibit 4. Demographic/Administrative Profile of *Creative Wellbeing* Participants**



\*Participants could select multiple options. Totals add up to more than 100%.

## Satisfaction

In general, those who participated in *Creative Wellbeing* activities had an overwhelmingly positive experience. One person explained, “I liked that this training was all about bringing out the positive in what we do and how we as teachers have control of that positivity in our classrooms and with each individual student. It allowed me to reflect on my own teaching and classroom environment.”

*Creative Wellbeing* participants enjoyed the simplicity of the activities and how easily they could be incorporated into the classroom and with different age groups. Attendees appreciated the positive environment established by the facilitators, using the words “informative,” “calm,” and “affirming” to describe their experience at the sessions. Exhibit 5 illustrates participant’s responses to the question “What is one word that describes your experience at the *Creative Wellbeing* training?” (The more frequently a word was reported, the larger it appears in the word cloud.)

### Exhibit 5. What is one word to describe your experience at the *Creative Wellbeing* training?



Prior evidence suggests that safe and positive school climates and cultures positively affect academic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for students.<sup>xx</sup>

Participants enjoyed the format of both the workshops and professional development trainings and shared how the interactive activities kept things “fun and playful.” For the professional development trainings specifically, participants appreciated the opportunity to collaborate, discuss, and network with their colleagues through the small group discussions. One educator also shared, “Having the training broken up into three sessions was effective. The content is heavy and would be overwhelming in one all-day session.” Eighty-eight percent of Teacher Space participants would recommend the workshop to others while 86 percent of educators would recommend the three-day professional development training to their colleagues.

## Key Takeaways

The following sections highlight key takeaways that emerged across the various *Creative Wellbeing* activities.

### **Educators feel equipped to integrate healing-informed arts activities into their work with youth as a result of *Creative Wellbeing*.**

Even before *Creative Wellbeing* activities, educators indicated having a strong understanding of how healing-informed arts activities are effective strategies to

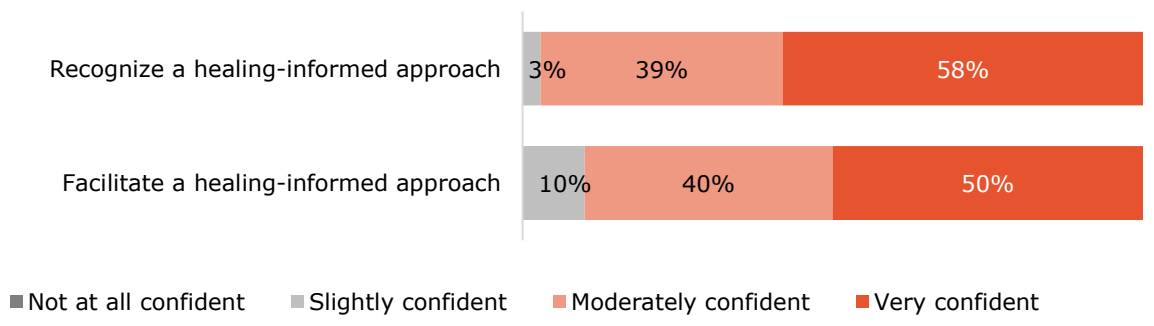
support self-care and wellbeing. When asked which aspects of *Creative Wellbeing* they found the most beneficial, educators pointed to the concrete arts activities and examples of healing-informed approaches presented in the Teacher Space workshops, and the professional development trainings. They appreciated the sessions’ interactive approach, which allowed them to experience, first-hand, how healing-informed arts activities could be easily incorporated into their work with youth. During the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, participants reflected on how healing-informed arts education activities appealed to a broad range of students and a variety of learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, tactile, etc.). They also discussed the role arts can play in healing. They explained, “So much art practice aligns with healing. [It is] about the process...it connects us to each other, we become an ensemble, we create support for each other and the weight is lifted off of each of us.”

Following the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, nearly all educators (97%) indicated feeling moderately or very confident in recognizing a healing-informed approach. Additionally, 90 percent of participants felt moderately or very confident facilitating a healing-informed approach as a result of the professional development trainings (Exhibit 6). One educator shared their plan for adapting one of the activities presented during the trainings, “I plan to adapt the activity shared about storytelling and use dance choreography as the artistic piece.” Another person explained, “I will use the drawing activity as a reflective moment at the beginning of each class and then compile them all for a portfolio or journal of reflections. Searching for inner powers is a constant process that everyone must participate in. Optimism prevails when reflective time is allowed.”

“Excellent lesson! Very reflective and insightful. Empowering to all who comes in contact with students. We have the healing tools to guide and inspire!”

– *Creative Wellbeing* Participant

**Exhibit 6. Educators’ Confidence in Healing-Informed Approaches**



Following the Teacher Space workshops, the data demonstrate that those who participated in the workshops were statistically significantly more likely to know how to lead group art-making activities to help process difficult or stressful situations compared to those who did not participate. Moreover, those who participated in the Teacher Space workshops were statistically significantly more likely to plan to use healing-informed arts activities to increase their students’ and their own self-care and wellbeing compared to those who did not participate in workshops (Exhibit 7).



**Exhibit 7. Educators’ Transfer of Knowledge (Scale 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)**



Although the data suggest that educators are optimistic about integrating healing-informed arts activities into their interactions with youth, educators also cited various barriers that could interfere with their ability to do so. One common barrier shared by educators is not having buy-in from school leadership and other colleagues to implement healing-informed activities, what one participant termed “whole-school understanding.” Other educators shared that it could be difficult to incorporate new activities into an existing curriculum that is already delivered at a rapid pace. Lastly, educators shared how some students may be resistant to participating in healing-informed arts activities due to distrust of adults or fear of being judged by their peers. Students who are resistant to activities may feel a lack of support in the classroom either from their peers or educator.<sup>xxi</sup> To broaden participation in activities, educators can reinforce the purpose of the activity, acknowledge the challenges in participating in the activities, and provide students with support and feedback throughout the process.<sup>xxii</sup>

**Creative Wellbeing increased educators’ awareness of mental health and provided strategies to support youth’s wellbeing.**

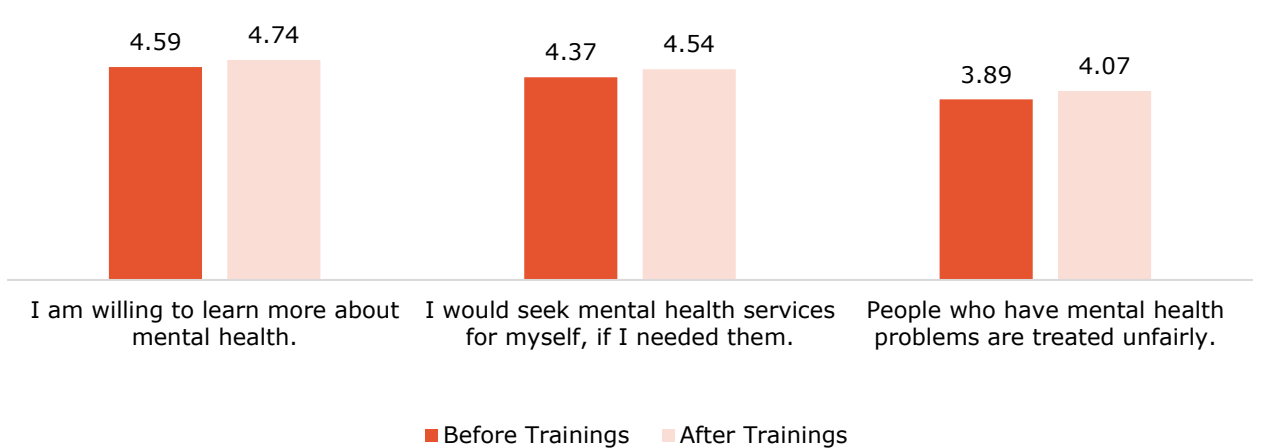
One of the objectives of *Creative Wellbeing* is to support educators and school partners to identify students who may be affected by mental health challenges and to support their wellbeing through the use of healing-informed approaches and perspectives. In order to do so, educators themselves must be well-versed on the topic of mental health and must also be equipped with strategies to destigmatize mental health challenges.

Prior to participating in the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, educators reported they were moderately knowledgeable about mental health (2.82 on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not at all knowledgeable and 5 being very knowledgeable). After participating in the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, on average, educators reported a statistically significant increase in knowledge about mental health (3.43 upon completion of the trainings, compared to 2.82 prior to the trainings). Moreover, participants reported a statistically significant increase in their willingness to learn more about mental health and seek mental health services for themselves, and in their agreement with the sentiment that people who have mental health problems are treated unfairly (Exhibit 8).

“One barrier [to implementing successfully] would be **lack of whole-school understanding** of these skills and strategies. **We all need to be on board.**”

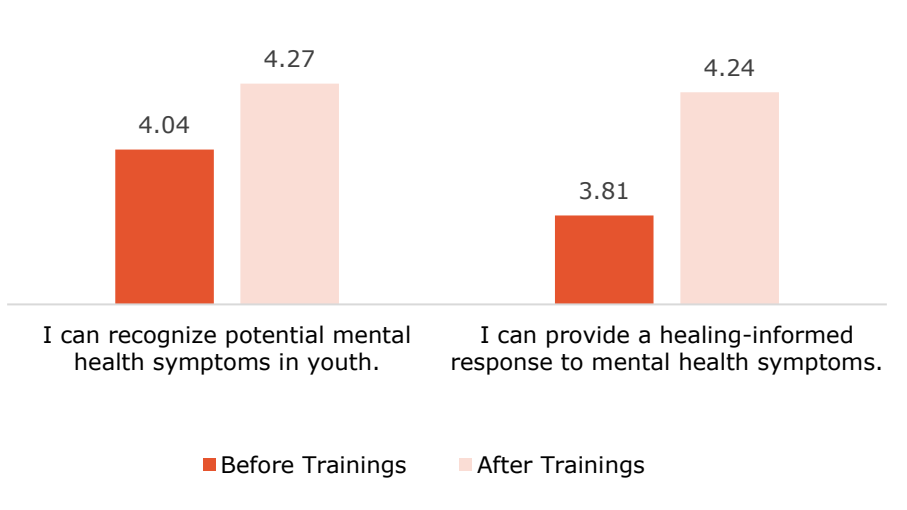
– *Creative Wellbeing* Participant

**Exhibit 8. Mental Health Awareness (Scale 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)**



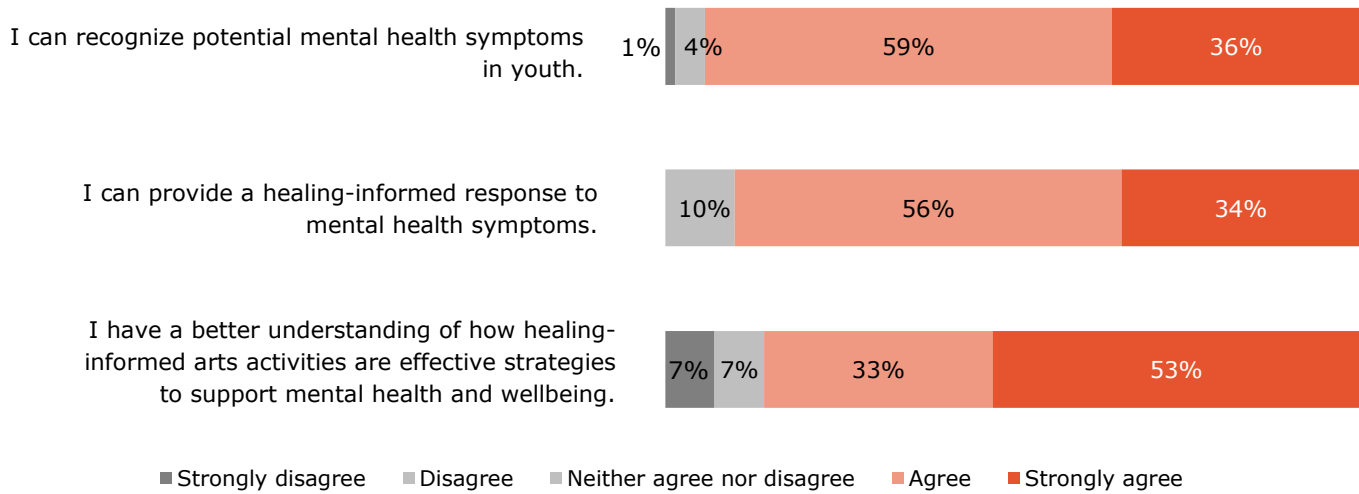
Participating in the professional development sessions also had a statistically significant positive impact on participants’ confidence in being able to recognize youth mental health symptoms and provide a healing-informed response to mental health symptoms (Exhibit 9).

**Exhibit 9. Recognizing and Responding to Mental Health Symptoms (Scale 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)**



At the conclusion of the trainings, 94 percent of educators agreed or strongly agreed that they could recognize potential mental health symptoms in youth, 90 percent felt they could provide a healing-informed response to mental health symptoms, and 86 percent felt they had a better understanding of how healing-informed arts activities are effective strategies to support mental health and wellbeing. (Exhibit 10)

**Exhibit 10. Recognizing and Responding to Mental Healthy Symptoms - Item Responses**



Qualitatively, educators reflected on how the activities presented during the professional development training can be effective tools for promoting youth’s mental health and wellbeing. One educator reflected on how the arts activities are great strategies for “bringing out the positivity in [my students].” Another educator shared how they now have better ways to approach sensitive issues with the intent of finding a solution to the underlying problems. Many educators also expressed that the training helped reinforce the importance of being empathetic and compassionate, and providing positive feedback to youth to promote their wellbeing. One participant shared, “All the different modalities of arts [used in *Creative Wellbeing*] are really focusing on reaching the emotions/feelings of students.”

A key component of the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings is using Change Direction’s “Five Signs of Emotional Suffering and Healthy Habits of Emotional Well-Being” framework<sup>xxiii</sup> to help participants recognize trauma or mental health concerns and provide youth with needed support. After participating in the professional development trainings, nearly all educators indicated being confident in recognizing the “5 Signs” that a youth may be experiencing a mental health concern, taking the initiative to use the “5 Ways to Help” to reach out and connect with a youth who may be experiencing a mental health concern, and encouraging youth to practice the “5 Healthy Habits of Emotional Wellbeing” (Exhibit 11). Qualitatively, educators shared that using the 5 Signs approach will be extremely helpful to incorporate into their instruction and how they support youth. One person shared, “The 5 signs of recognizing trauma in my students will be a better way to filter and classify behaviors.” Another person stated, “Teachers are often asked to evaluate students by our school counselors, etc. These 5 questions would be easier and beneficial for teachers to respond to for SST, 504, etc. meetings.”

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“I loved the fact that these sessions taught me to **step back** from the rigor and stresses of science curriculum and state testing and **focus more on the child as a whole!** Much needed for all of us!”

– *Creative Wellbeing* Participant

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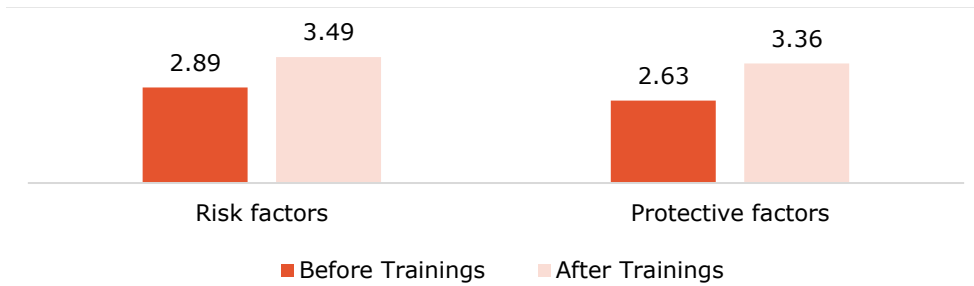


**Creative Wellbeing increased educators’ knowledge of, and confidence identifying, risk and protective factors in youth.**

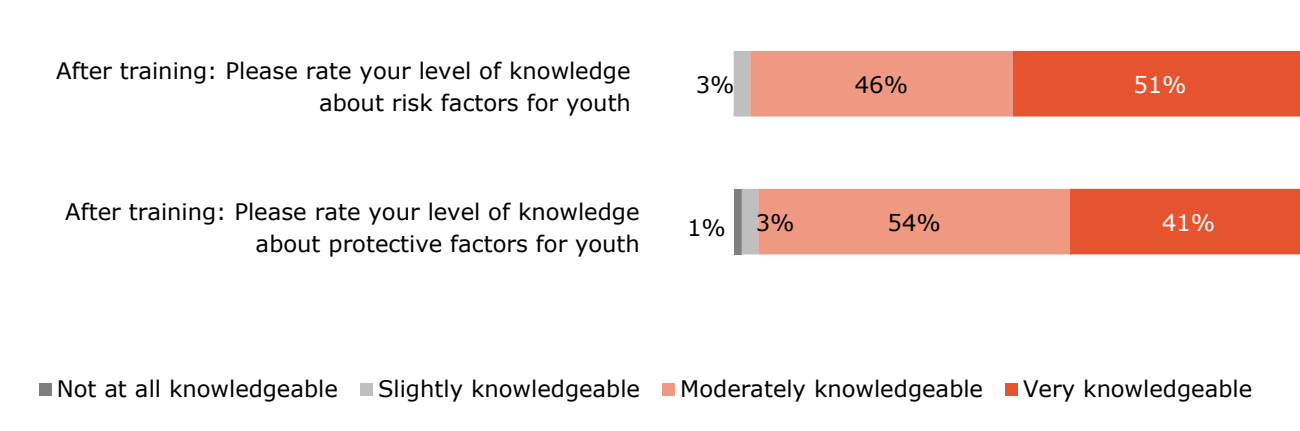
In order to facilitate and support healing from trauma, it is critical to understand youth’s experiences through a risk and protective factors lens. Risk and protective factors can help explain youth’s behavior, shed light onto why a challenge exists, and support in the construction of specific interventions or preventative efforts to support youth. Because of the relationship between risk and protective factors and healing from trauma, one of the objectives of the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings was to support educators in understanding what risk and protective factors are, how to identify them in youth, and how to use protective factors to build upon youth’s resiliency and wellbeing.

Prior to attending the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, participants were moderately knowledgeable about risk (2.89 on four point scale) and protective factors (2.63 on four point scale). After participating in the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings, educators reported a statistically significant increase in their knowledge on risk and protective factors, with nearly all educators feeling moderately to very knowledgeable of risk and protective factors at the conclusion of the trainings (97% and 96% respectively; Exhibits 12 and 13).

**Exhibit 12. Educators’ Average Knowledge of Risk and Protective Factors (Scale 1-4, 1 being not at all knowledgeable and 4 being very knowledgeable)**



**Exhibit 13. Risk and Protective Factors- Item Responses**

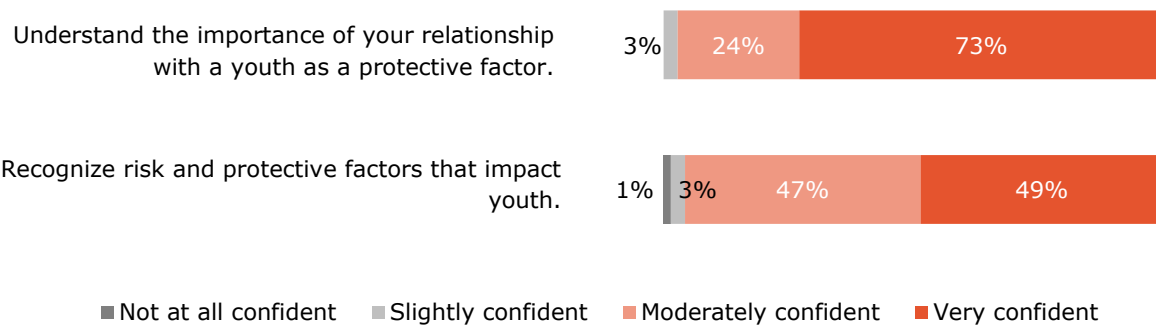


When examining the statistically significant increase in knowledge of protective factors by Pasadena USD and Arts Leads participants in the professional development trainings, the data suggests Pasadena USD educators experienced a greater increase (i.e., Arts Leads only experienced a statistically significant increase in their knowledge of risk factors, not protective factors). However, Arts

Leads participants started the trainings with a slightly higher average knowledge of protective factors than Pasadena USD session attendees (M=2.92 versus M=2.57), and therefore had less room to grow compared to Pasadena USD educators.

In addition to increasing their knowledge of risk and protective factors, educators also reported feeling confident in identifying risk and protective factors in youth and using them to promote youth’s wellbeing. The vast majority of educators (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident in recognizing youths’ protective factors that might help build resilience. In addition, nearly all educators reported feeling moderately or very confident in understanding the importance of their relationship with youth as a protective factor and recognizing risk and protective factors that impact youth as a result of the professional development trainings (Exhibit 14). One participant noted that the session brought “...awareness to promote protective factors more intentionally with my students and at the school as a whole.” These high levels of confidence suggest that the professional development trainings helped educators see themselves as a protective factor for youth and reinforced their role, as an educator, in helping youth navigate through their risk factors and trauma.

**Exhibit 14. As a result of the training, educators are confident in...**



The *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings also allowed educators to experience how art can help youth increase their protective factors and build resilience. The reflections that result from some healing-informed arts activities can potentially shed light on youth’s protective factors and how youth navigated through a challenging scenario in the past. One consideration raised by educators was the need to ensure healing-informed arts activities utilize a trauma-informed lens to prevent the likelihood that an activity provokes negative or harmful emotions in youth. Reflecting on past experiences or people can be triggering for some youth, and especially foster youth, so facilitators reiterated the importance of using more general and neutral prompts during healing-informed arts activities.

Nonetheless, as a result of the trainings, many educators agreed that healing-informed art activities are an effective vehicle for increasing protective factors and building resilience (87%). One person shared, “[Window to Your Soul]<sup>7</sup> allows you to provide context instead of focusing on the pain. That’s encouraging, which leads to resilience.”

**“Arts activities are a way to get at some of young people’s risk/protective factors without asking it head on.”**

– *Creative Wellbeing Participant*

<sup>7</sup> Window to Your Soul is a healing-informed arts activity created by Fabian Debora of Somos LA Arte/Homeboy Art Academy.

### **Creative Wellbeing increased youths' mood, social connections with peers, and self-confidence.**

*Note: It was not possible to collect data directly from youth. However, the evaluation team spoke with the adults who interacted most with the youth at congregate care settings during Creative Wellbeing activities. The following represent how they perceived youth to be impacted by the activities based on their observations and discussions with them.*

In speaking with the supervisors of youth who participated in *Creative Wellbeing* at the congregate care sites, they shared how youth appreciated the opportunity to engage in the healing-informed arts activities. Supervisors noted that after *Creative Wellbeing* sessions the youths' mood seemed to change and they seemed happier. The supervisors also reflected on the community that was built amongst the youth as a result of the *Creative Wellbeing* activities. One shared,

"I know for a fact there were two youth who after class would help each other out. They would go and practice what they learned in class together. They built a community to support each other and although their relationships were there [before *Creative Wellbeing*], the classes helped them get stronger and bond more because now they had something in common. They could relate to one another and got along around a common activity."

The same supervisor shared how one of the youth was able to use the tools learned during the *Creative Wellbeing* activities as coping mechanisms and as a way of expressing their emotions as opposed to fighting, breaking something, or self-harming. They explained, "When one of the youth would start feeling a certain way, she would start dancing and that was her way of calming down and de-escalating. Dance was her way of expressing emotions."

Additionally, the *Creative Wellbeing* activities were effective at bolstering youth's self-confidence. One supervisor shared how the activities helped youth recognize their artistic skills and increase their confidence. They shared, "The activities were great at promoting self-confidence. These activities were new for youth, so them knowing that if you give it your best, it may not be perfect, but it made them feel good."

During the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, one participant reflected on how impactful healing-informed arts education activities can be for students, especially introverted students. They explained how healing-informed activities are mechanisms that allow students to open up about trauma and abuse and often times, their experiences shine-through in their artwork. One participant shared how it is important to use healing-informed arts methods as a way to lean in and for educators to reach their students.

### **Creative Wellbeing supported participants during a stressful and challenging time.**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice movement, Americans are more stressed than ever.<sup>xxiv</sup> The events that have transpired during 2020, overlapping with *Creative Wellbeing's* implementation, have driven stress and anxiety levels into overdrive. Now, more than ever, individuals are looking for strategies to reduce and control stress and anxiety. Educators must consider their own trauma and stress even as they work to support the wellbeing of the youth they serve. The Teacher Space workshops and professional development trainings

were opportunities for educators to come together to learn about, and apply, self-care strategies, while also affording the opportunity to interact and network with other educators.

Starting in March 2020, all schools in California shifted to distance learning. As shared by educators, distance learning has negatively impacted them and their students. Many educators feel like the personal connection with their students has been lost. As one wrote, “I feel I lost the connection with certain students because being able to say good morning in person and check in on the wellbeing of my students is very important to building positive relationships. It is not the same connection online.” In addition, educators feel like their students need more social emotional support due to the extra stressors in life, such as losing family members, parents losing jobs, and taking on extra family responsibilities. Moreover, doing so with an anti-racist lens is critical for youth’s social emotional development.<sup>xxv</sup> “COVID-19 really brought to light how absolutely necessary it is to bring social-emotional work to the forefront of education,” one educator wrote.

The protests, uprising, and racial justice movement that followed the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in May 2020 was another impactful event for educators and their students. During the 2019-20 school year, the majority of Los Angeles County’s K-12 students identified as Hispanic or Latino (66%), followed by White (14%), Asian (8%), and Black or African American (7%).<sup>xxvi</sup> The demographic make-up of Los Angeles educators looks different. During the 2017-18 school year, 44 percent of educators identified as White, 32 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, 8 percent identified as Asian, and 8 percent identified as Black or African American.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Many educators recognized how the racial justice and Black Lives Matter movement will impact the new school year, including the opportunity to create a more inclusive and safe environment for Black students and have discussions about race with their students. “My hope with the racial justice movement, is that the students of color will see this as an opportunity to move forward in a productive way and that white students will be more sensitive and understanding of students and staff of color. I see this as an opportunity to appreciate each other for who we are,” one educator wrote. Another educator shared, “It is hard to understand that we continue to face injustice around the world and in our own country. As an educator, I find strength in knowing that I can help students analyze human actions, cause and effect, and to come up with some logical explanation as to why this all happened. Education is the road to justice.” Additionally, during the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, various participants discussed how important it is for educators to engage in healing work so they can support their students. They shared, “[This work is] so powerful! It is not just how we work with young people, it’s about the practitioner/teacher also engaging processes of healing...We can’t teach others without doing our own healing work and being upfront about living in systemically oppressive system.”

As captured in the Teacher Space workshop survey, many of the workshop participants reported that practicing self-care is important to them. For the 14 educators that completed both the pre and post survey, over 90 percent reported that practicing self-care is “very” important to them. Educators indicated that they practice self-care through exercise, reading, meditation, and interacting with friends and family. About eight of ten (84%) respondents practice self-care at least weekly, with 52 percent practicing self-care daily. Overall, self-care is important to the workshop participants and many use different techniques throughout the week to take care of themselves. Thus, workshops that focused on self-care appealed to this group of educators.



Prior to participating in the Teacher Space workshops, educators shared that they hoped to gain “strategies to engage my students in self-care, mindfulness,” “self-help skills for my tool kit,” and “different ideas on how to express my creative side and engage in self-care acts” through their participation.

Each session of the Teacher Space workshop series followed a similar structure, which included a warm-up activity, group activities, individual activities, transition activities and group discussion. All of these activities had self-care embedded elements, such as focusing on breathing, mindfulness, and gratitude. Participants appreciated the self-care elements of the sessions. One participant wrote that they liked “all the activities that promoted connecting with others virtually. Movement, mindfulness, creative journaling about emotions, Acrostic poetry writing, breathing exercises, and self-care reminders.”

Though the sessions were done virtually, the Teacher Space workshops still focused on engaging participants and creating a community by reviewing community agreements and utilizing the chat function in Zoom. During the observations, Harder+Company noticed that the community agreements set clear expectations for each session and allowed for participants to share what they hoped to gain from the session. The community agreements included items such as “be kind to ourselves” and “stay clear of distractions” to promote engagement during workshops. The facilitators also encouraged the use of the Zoom chatbox to ask and respond to questions, giving participants more time to think about their answers and to feel more comfortable, without judgment.

Educators from the comparison survey and those who completed the pre or post Teacher Space survey were all asked to rate their stress level on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is “not stressed at all” and 10 is “extremely stressed.” At the time of data collection, the evaluation team expected reported stress levels to be heightened due to COVID-19 and the rise of the racial justice and Black Lives Matter movement. One educator wrote “...the norm stress level is higher and therefore my actual stress is higher due to baseline of the environment/ situation.” As shown in Exhibit 15, across the three surveys, respondents reported a moderately high average stress level (M=5.64 to 6.03). According to the American Psychological Association, in 2011, the average stress level of Los Angeles residents was 5.3<sup>xxviii</sup> (Scale: 1-10, 1 being little to no stress and 10 being a great deal of stress) indicating *Creative Wellbeing* participants were slightly more stressed than the county pre-pandemic average. Interestingly, workshop participants’ pre and post survey stress levels were the same at an average 5.64. Although the comparison group had a slightly higher average stress level (M=6.03) than the workshop participants, this difference was not statistically significant (Exhibit 15).

**Exhibit 15. Reported stress levels (Scale: 1-10, 1 being not stressed at all and 10 being extremely stressed )**



Although stress levels and views of self-care did not show statistically significant differences over time, the Teacher Space workshops provided educators with stress reduction tools for themselves and for youth, time to take care of themselves, and time to interact with other educators. One participant wrote that they were able to “...learn new strategies to utilize not just in the classroom but at home and with

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“I loved that this got me out of my head for an hour – I feel so much better. And I learned so many things to do for myself and with kids.”

– Creative Wellbeing Participant

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loved ones.” Examples of activities that participants plan to use include, but are not limited to, the personal object writing exercise, soundtrack writing exercise, dedication writing exercise, and dancing exercise (see callout box for example). When participants were doing these exercises during the sessions, they mentioned feeling better. One wrote, “I liked most the strategy to write about personal objects because it brought me happy memories and made the task of writing a pleasant one.” Moreover, the workshops allowed for participants to “reenergize” and “refocus” for the day by creating a calm and safe space. During the reflection session, a *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholder shared how healing-informed arts activities create, and strengthen, protective factors for participants and promote resilience and pro-social behavior. So although the goal of quantitatively reducing stress levels through participating in the Teacher Space workshops was not evident, educators got much more out of the workshops to support both their own wellbeing and that of the youth they serve.

### “Window to your Soul” Exercise

The “Window into Your Soul” activity is an interactive healing-informed arts activity, designed by Fabian Debora of Somos LA Arte and Homeboy Art, that allows participants to reflect and build community amongst their peers. During this activity, participants are provided a piece of 5x4 card stock and are instructed to reflect on a person, a place, or an object of importance and draw, or visually depict, those reflections on the 5x4 card – this becomes their window. Facilitators explain how the piece of card stock is now a window to your soul, and they are inviting participants to share with the group, and the rest of the world, a glimpse of their soul and are especially encouraged to reflect on a person/place/thing that helps them feel supported when facing challenges. After participants have reflected and created their window, facilitators provide an opportunity for people to share out their reflections and explain their window.

During the share back, the facilitator captures the commonalities in the windows and once everyone has shared back, they make connections for participants, followed by a statement that acknowledges that we are not alone; that there is someone who has a similar story that you can turn to for support and empathize with. Once everyone is done sharing, the facilitator collects the window from each participant and begins placing them on a designated wall taped side by side as to create a tile wall or mosaic. Once assembled the facilitator gestures towards the wall, which has transformed into a community tile wall, and states “There is no us and them, only us. One in unity.”

This activity enables participants to engage in reflective practice and also make connections with peers by finding the commonalities amongst all participants and demonstrate to participants that they are not alone. It also affirms expression of identity, encourages non-judgmental listening, provides reassurance, acknowledges the struggle to define oneself, and creates an opportunity for conversations around how we see each other.

## Summary of Findings

In summary, the *Creative Wellbeing* activities had numerous positive effects on educators’ ability to take a healing-informed arts-based approach to student mental health and wellbeing and incorporate this approach into existing curricula and campus activities. The following points summarize the greatest changes as highlighted by the data:

- Those who participated in the Teacher Space workshops were significantly more likely **to know how to lead group making art activities** to help process difficult or stressful situations than those who did not.
- Those who participated in the Teacher Space workshops were significantly more likely to plan on using healing-informed arts activities to **increase their own self-care and wellbeing** compared to those who did not

participate in workshops.

- Those who participated in the Teacher Space workshops were significantly more likely to plan to use healing-informed arts activities to **support their student's self-care and wellbeing** compared to those who did not participate in workshops.
- The *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings significantly **increased participants' knowledge of, and confidence identifying, risk and protective factors** in youth, compared to before the trainings.
- The *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings significantly increased participants' **ability to recognize** mental health symptoms in youth and **provide a healing-informed response** to mental health symptoms, compared to before the trainings.
- Nearly all educators feel moderately or very confident in their ability to **recognize the 5 signs** that a youth may be experiencing a mental health concern as a result of the *Creative Wellbeing* trainings (97%).
- The vast majority of participants agree or strongly agree that they feel **confident to incorporate what they learned** into their work with youth. (90% for PD training participants; 88% for Teacher Space participants).
- *Creative Wellbeing* **increased youths' mood, social connections** with peers, and **self-confidence**.

## Implementation and Evaluation Practices

Following the implementation of *Creative Wellbeing* activities, interviews were conducted with key partner agency staff from Arts and Culture, AHJN, and Teaching Artists who delivered the *Creative Wellbeing* programming to explore promising practices and challenges associated with implementing healing-informed arts education programming with each of the different participant groups. Specifically, these interviews provided insights into the programmatic facilitators and barriers that should be considered when implementing healing-informed arts education activities and the essential components of building effective partnerships between government, K-12 schools, and teaching artists to provide effective healing-informed arts education. The following section showcases several high-level implementation and evaluation promising practices that emerged during *Creative Wellbeing*.

*For more detailed information on promising practices see the supplemental documents "Tips for Healing-Informed Arts Education Initiatives: IMPLEMENTATION" and "Tips for Healing-Informed Arts Education Initiatives: EVALUATION".*

### Implementation Promising Practices

Implementing an innovative healing-informed arts education initiative within a complex system, such as the K-12 public education system, can be difficult. Doing so in a 100% virtual environment creates additional unique challenges. A critical first step to implementing a successful initiative is building a strong foundation to work from. Authentic and trusting partnerships lay the foundation for an initiative like *Creative Wellbeing*. In order for a program to be successful and effective, trust and communicative relationships among partners is vital. Without trust or communication, implementation may fail or not be sustained. Additionally, once initiative activities are implemented, it is essential to consider the audiences in

which the programming is being delivered to and be intentional about how to interact with each participant group. Through experience and reflection, *Creative Wellbeing* instructors identified various promising practices that are applicable across a wide range of populations and promising practices specific to engaging educators and youth/families in healing-informed arts education activities.

The virtual implementation of *Creative Wellbeing* provided opportunities for connection and togetherness during a globally difficult period. As shared during the reflection session with stakeholders, the pandemic forced *Creative Wellbeing* partners to figure out how to use virtual methods effectively and has left them more prepared to continue using more online tools in the future. For areas where there are geographic and transportation challenges, these tools could improve access to arts programming for students and families.

Exhibit 16 highlights promising practices identified by *Creative Wellbeing* implementers as key for building effective partnerships.

### Exhibit 16. Promising Practices – Building Effective Partnerships

Promising Practice	Description
Set clear expectations between partners.	When collaborating with multiple organizations, agencies, work to build a shared understanding of what is expected of each partner at the beginning of the engagement. This includes having MOUs and contracts in place with partners at the onset of the project.
Establish clear channels of communication.	To promote shared understanding among partners, have designated times for all partners to check-in on a regular basis. For each meeting, use an agenda to guide the conversation and explicitly highlight the goals and objectives of the meeting.
Leverage each partner’s expertise and experiences.	During the formative stages of initiative planning, draw on partner’s expertise and experience to inform the design and implementation of initiative activities.
Have critical conversations early on.	For a meaningful partnership between funders and contractors or grantees, be explicit about exploring relationships of power between institutions and, possibly, individuals. Additionally, engage partners in explicit conversations on cultural competency and implicit bias to establish a common understanding of how the project will address and promote equity through the design and implementation of activities.
Identify a champion to promote the work.	When working with school districts, identify a person within the district who has some decision-making power and can shepherd the implementation along. This person can serve as a conduit between the implementation team(s) and the school district to ease any challenges and contribute to successful implementation.

Exhibit 17 showcases promising practices, identified by *Creative Wellbeing* implementers, for implementing healing-informed arts education activities with a diverse group of participants.

### Exhibit 17. Promising Practices – General

Promising Practice	Description
Offer a breadth of activities.	Consider providing a variety of activities during sessions that vary in terms of length, complexity, and needed materials. To help transition into different activities, try to incorporate transitional activities like stretching or breathing exercises. Additionally, include breaks or activities when participants can turn off their screens for a period of time.
Culturally responsive programming.	Ensure those who are delivering and guiding the programming are racially diverse and that content is culturally relevant. Additionally, ensure programming is responsive and applicable to the needs of participants.
Encourage active participation.	Consider following a scaffolding model (i.e., I Do WE Do YOU Do), where 1. instructors explain the activity; 2. provides tips or suggestions to help the participants learn; 3. instructors demonstrate the activity; 4. provide time for participants to do the activity; 5. reflect on the successes and challenges of the activity.
Check out with participants.	Especially in a virtual engagement world, it is important to “check out” with participants to assist in closure and transition from the session into the rest of the day. Checking out with participants wraps up a session and creates space for participants to mentally shift to their next task.
Ask for feedback.	Though it can be challenging to collect data from participants after the session has ended, we encourage using a survey to capture participants’ feedback. Consider carving out time at the end of the session to have participants complete a survey.

Exhibit 18 highlights promising practices identified by *Creative Wellbeing* implementers for engaging educators in healing-informed arts education activities.

### Exhibit 18. Promising Practices – Engaging Educators

Promising Practice	Description
Debrief activities with educators.	Following healing-informed art activities, facilitators can promote integration of learning by taking a moment to debrief the activity with educators. This time allows educators to explore how the activity made them feel and have a discussion about how the activity can be incorporated into their existing curriculum.

Provide a forum for educators to network.	Both during and following sessions, provide educators the opportunity to network with their peers.
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Incentivize educator participation.	Teachers may find it hard to participate in arts programming that is beyond their typical requirements due to the many other competing priorities associated with being a teacher. To promote participation consider offering healing-informed arts education initiative activities as paid professional development opportunities or incorporate the programming into existing professional development options.
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Exhibit 19 describes promising practices identified by *Creative Wellbeing* implementers for engaging youth and families in healing-informed arts education activities.

### Exhibit 19. Promising Practices – Engaging Youth and Families

Promising Practice	Description
Meet families where they are at.	Consider working directly with districts to ask caregivers what they need and the best way to deliver the content (e.g., virtual vs in person). Another option is to build family programming into existing activities such as back to school night or PTA meetings.
Provide self-care strategies for youth.	Art can be an escape for youth during stressful times. Provide youth with self-care strategies during sessions that can be easily used outside the session, such as breathing or meditation.
Consider affinity groups for families.	Families may have different needs and goals for the sessions. To provide additional support for different types of households (e.g., single parent families, extended families, bilingual families, same-sex parent families, adoptive/foster families), sessions can be strategically geared towards specific family contexts where families can share their experiences and offer advice to other participants.
Engage the caregivers of younger students.	For caregivers to have a better sense of the programming that their child(ren) is participating in, instructors should consider hosting an introductory session to orient them to the programming/technology and discuss how they can help their child(ren) participate.

### Evaluation Promising Practices

Evaluation is an important component of program delivery as it provides opportunities for continuous learning and program improvement. Evaluation is especially critical for newer initiatives, like *Creative Wellbeing*, to monitor implementation, outcomes, and assess impact. Exhibit 20 highlights several promising practices for evaluating healing-informed arts education initiatives, specifically those delivered through online technologies.

## Exhibit 20. Promising Practices – Evaluation

Promising Practice	Description
Capture Diverse Perspectives.	Conducting a Stakeholder Mapping exercise at the onset of an evaluation will help identify how an initiative’s impact may differ based on participant type and shed light on the power dynamics the evaluation is embedded in. By identifying these aspects early on in the evaluation, subsequent steps (e.g., data collection, analysis, reporting) can be attuned to these considerations and designed appropriately to ensure all participants are represented in the evaluation.
Pre/Post Data Collection.	Collecting data at multiple time points can be instrumental for demonstrating how participant’s knowledge or behaviors changed as a result of arts-education activities. If possible, consider collecting data from participants before the onset of any activities to capture baseline data and then collect the same data at the conclusion of initiative activities to assess how participant’s knowledge or behaviors changed.
Youth Data Collection.	Some youth groups may be reluctant to engage in data collection activities. When designing data collection efforts, consider how gender, racial, and ethnic identities, as well as lived experiences may interplay with youth’s insights and experiences. Approaching data collection from a culturally responsive lens is critical for ensuring a safe space is created for youth to share their insights and experiences.
Utilize a Comparison Group.	Especially for new initiatives, consider using a comparison group, a group of individuals who were not involved with initiative activities and closely resemble the individuals attending the initiative activities. This will allow you to understand how the initiative impacted participants on key metrics and measures.
Communicate Back Results.	Sharing results back with key stakeholders (including those involved in data collection) is important for building trust and promoting transparency.

Although implementing and evaluating healing-informed arts education activities should be a dynamic and responsive process, the promising practices outlined above draw on the lessons learned through *Creative Wellbeing* and can be used as a guide to support successful implementation of similar healing-informed arts initiatives. ✦

# Recommendations

As this report highlights, healing-informed arts education is a valuable approach for fostering communities of wellness within schools and supporting educators to use healing-informed approaches to address the social and emotional needs of young people. Drawing on the findings of the data analyses conducted as part of the *Creative Wellbeing* evaluation, the recommendations that follow are intended to provide guidelines and suggestions for designing, and supporting the implementation of a healing-informed arts education initiative.

## Planning and Designing Healing Informed Arts Education Initiatives



**Include students, families, educators, and those with lived experience when designing and implementing healing-informed arts education activities.**

An initiative like *Creative Wellbeing* is most effective when the activities are designed by those most impacted by the activities and those with lived experience similar to the population intended to be served through the initiative. In the case of *Creative Wellbeing*, this would include students, families, educators, and those with experience in all aspects of the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Research suggests that initiatives who incorporate the perspectives of those with lived experience with those systems into the planning, design, and implementation of services are more likely to reach their intended communities and more effectively meet their needs.<sup>xxix</sup> Authentically including and incorporating the perspectives of those who have experienced trauma in the design of healing-informed arts activities is also imperative for ensuring programming is effectively implemented in a culturally responsive way. Including students, families, educators, and those with lived experience in the design of the initiative and initiative activities allows these valuable perspectives to guide the work. Additionally, soliciting feedback from these stakeholder groups throughout the implementation of healing-informed arts activities is instrumental for ensuring content is appropriate and responsive to the needs of the communities to be served and promotes the continuous improvement of initiative activities. During the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, participants echoed the importance of including those with lived experience in the design and implementation of a healing-informed arts initiative to vet and validate content. And to do this authentically, organizers need to build in sufficient time and space to fully engage those who have many other priorities and responsibilities.



**Ensure arts activities implemented with youth are healing-informed and culturally responsive.**

*Creative Wellbeing* was intentionally implemented within public schools that have a high number of system-involved and at-risk youth. Research shows that foster youth, probation, and at-risk youth, who disproportionately identify as BIPOC and LGBTQ, experience trauma, mental health challenges, and child protective service involvement at rates greater than children not involved in those systems.<sup>xxx</sup> For these youth, the arts can be an effective way to address trauma, due to its emphasis on using imagination and creativity as an outlet to cope with everyday



life; however if not designed and implemented in a healing-informed way, arts activities can resurface past traumas and exacerbate the negative effects of trauma. Literature on critical race theory suggests art forms, such as storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family history, scenarios and biographies, are effective strategies that allow educators to learn about the lived experiences of their students.<sup>xxx</sup> Learning about the lived experiences of their students can help educators understand their students' identity and personal struggles and building trust is an essential step in that process. Effective healing informed arts curricula should be tailored and intentionally designed, rather than a "one size fits all" approach. Additionally, healing-informed activities should empower students to share their diverse stories and experiences with their peers and teachers and be received in a non-judgmental, open, and empathetic way. It is critical that educators understand the links between oppression, racism, discrimination and youth's mental health and wellbeing, particularly for BIPOC youth, in order to implement healing-informed arts activities in a culturally responsive way. Lastly, during the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, participants discussed how there is not yet a shared understanding of healing-informed or culturally responsive approaches/practices across organizations or practitioners. Establishing a shared understanding of these key concepts is a critical first step for shifting school practices and cultures to be healing-informed.



**Engage educators and staff who may not be as interested in the arts, and those who may not be as familiar with a healing-centered approach.**

In order to shift a school culture towards being trauma or healing-informed there is a need to engage all educators and staff. Commonly, trainings on arts-based interventions are more likely to be attended by those who have an existing interest in the arts or have an arts component to their teaching curriculum. Prior research by Arts and Culture<sup>xxxii</sup> has found that schools in LA County with a larger share of students of color tend to offer less arts instruction and lesser quality instruction. This is also true in schools with larger percentages of students enrolled in free and reduced price meal programs, and schools with larger percentages of English Learners. Therefore, educators and staff need to recognize the demographics of their schools and surrounding areas in order to address this gap in equity. Consider having conversations with district or school leadership about the ability to incorporate a healing-informed arts education training into school-required professional development and discuss the value-add of these activities. This approach worked well for the *Creative Wellbeing* professional development trainings as educators teaching a variety of subjects attended and found value in the content.



**Clarify key concepts, roles, and what is expected of partners from the start.**

*Creative Wellbeing* was a trans-disciplinary partnership between the Department of Arts and Culture, Department of Mental Health, Office of Child Protection, and AHJN. Each partner brought their expertise to the project which allowed the initiative to successfully blend mental health concepts with healing-informed arts education activities to increase educator's capacity to support their students' mental health and wellbeing and establish school cultures grounded in healing-informed care. When collaborating with multiple organizations or agencies, work to establish an explicit shared understanding of what is expected of each partner at

the beginning of, and throughout, the engagement. This includes establishing a mutual understanding of key constructs, project outcomes, and how each partner is expected to contribute along the way. This also includes having explicit conversations, early on, about cultural competency and implicit bias to establish a common understanding of how the project will address and promote equity through the design and implementation of activities. A formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlines, in detail, the roles and expectations of each partner may promote transparency, trust, and clarity among all partners involved in the initiative, leading to a more seamless process of designing and implementing an innovative initiative like *Creative Wellbeing*.

### Training and Supporting Educators



#### **Continue to support teachers and build their capacity to implement healing-informed arts activities to support youth wellbeing.**

For the educators who participated in a *Creative Wellbeing* activity, there was an overwhelming interest in transferring the knowledge and approaches acquired through *Creative Wellbeing* into the classroom. Many educators already have a strong understanding of how healing-informed arts activities can be effective strategies to support self-care and wellbeing, but there is an opportunity to continue training and supporting educators as they adjust to implementing this new approach in their classroom. This is particularly critical right now, in light of the disproportionate health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BIPOC communities. Continually updating the repository of healing-informed arts activities shared during the professional development trainings and reminding educators of this resource will aid in the transfer of knowledge into the classroom. Moreover, making this resource available to the educators who participated in the Teacher Space workshops would be valuable for promoting implementation in their classrooms. Lastly, educators identified various barriers that could hinder their ability to implement healing-informed arts activities in their work with youth, such as lack of school leadership buy-in, challenges associated with incorporating new approaches into an already rigorous curriculum, and barriers to student engagement ([see this section](#)). As schools begin to adopt a healing-informed approach, educators may benefit from having conversations early on, and frequently, about anticipated barriers and take proactive steps to mitigate these challenges.



#### **Create a community of practice for the subset of educators who participated in Creative Wellbeing.**

In order to maintain and build on the knowledge gained through the brief interactions with *Creative Wellbeing*, consider creating a community of practice amongst the educators who attended the Teacher Space workshops or professional development trainings. Creating a space for these educators to come together regularly would allow an opportunity for them to learn more about healing-informed approaches, learn about how their peers have been implementing this approach in their classroom, and share ideas related to healing-informed arts education. It would also increase the likelihood that the strategies learned would be retained and implemented, rather than forgotten about or deprioritized. Additionally, a community of practice could provide a safe space for educators to engage in dialogues about race and equity, specifically how to support equitable

teaching practices in the classroom. Educators appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues during the professional development trainings and discuss how the arts activities could be adapted to best serve their youth. Another option could be developing a buddy system for attendees to keep each other accountable and encourage each other to continue incorporating healing arts strategies in their classrooms. Additionally, Teacher Space workshops could be provided regularly as follow-up sessions to the professional development training to continue to provide a space for reflection, healing, and inspiration. It should be noted that part of the original in-person program design of *Creative Wellbeing* included opportunities for educators to come together and discuss their experiences. Due to COVID-19 this was unable to take place. Currently, Pasadena USD is working to host a community of practice for participants and Pomona USD is raising funds to build out a learning community practice for the 2020-21 school year.



**Provide trainings to school leadership on how healing-informed approaches will support their students, teachers, and school culture.**

Leadership buy-in and commitment are critical to shifting school cultures to be grounded in the practices of healing-informed care by providing arts-based student instruction. At the onset of *Creative Wellbeing*, the Arts and Culture team had multiple planning meetings with school leadership to secure buy-in and commitment to the implementation of *Creative Wellbeing* activities on campus. This buy-in, and the resulting relationships, allowed Arts and Culture to quickly pivot activities in response to COVID. However, across both the Teacher Space workshops and professional development activities, there was minimal attendance by school administrators, and the administrators who did attend *Creative Wellbeing* activities largely identified as White (*Creative Wellbeing* activities were not specifically promoted to administrators). Similar to the professional development session for Arts Leads, and as initially planned in the original *Creative Wellbeing* approach, consider providing a healing-informed arts education training specifically for administrators and tailor the content to focus on how administrators can use healing-informed arts approaches to support teachers, staff, and the diverse range of students – specifically teachers and students of color. An administrator-specific training can be a great first step in exposing school administrators to the benefits of healing-informed arts education and could provide a platform for collaborating on ways to implement healing-informed approaches that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within a school setting.

During the reflection session with *Creative Wellbeing* stakeholders, participants discussed many ways in which healing-informed arts education approaches can be infused into existing processes including hiring external consultants and incorporating healing-informed principles into strategic plans. They also shared how leadership recognizing the value-add of arts education is imperative to promote the adoption of healing-informed approaches and reduce antagonism around doing something new. ✦

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- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7306404/>
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- <sup>xiii</sup> Morton, B. M. (2018). The grip of trauma: How trauma disrupts the academic aspirations of foster youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 75, 73-81.
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- <sup>xv</sup> <https://www.datanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/CrossoverYouth.pdf>
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.datanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/CrossoverYouth.pdf>
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- <sup>xxvii</sup> <http://www.ed-data.org/county/Los-Angeles>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2011/los-angeles#:~:text=Los%20Angeles%20residents%20report%20a,high%20levels%20seen%20in%202008.>
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- <sup>xxxii</sup> [https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/sites/lacaec/files/artsedprofile\\_countyreport\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/sites/lacaec/files/artsedprofile_countyreport_lowres.pdf)

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Details on Data Analyses

### Teacher Space Workshop Data

- **Pre-post comparison of Teacher Space workshop data:** A total of 14 educators completed both the pre and post-survey for the Teacher Space workshops and gave the evaluation team consent to match their data. If an educator completed the *pre*-survey more than once, their first survey was used for the analysis. If an educator completed the *post*-survey more than once, then their latest survey was used for the analysis. Since the matched sample is small ( $n = 14$ ), the evaluation team used the Wilcoxon sign rank test to assess change in knowledge from attending the workshop(s).
- **Post-comparison of Teacher Space workshop data:** Survey responses of similar questions were compared for educators that attended at least one of the teacher workshops ( $n = 25$ ) with those educators that did not attend any of the teacher workshops ( $n = 91$ ). To assess any differences with these groups, the evaluation team used an independent samples t-test.

### Creative Wellbeing Professional Development Training Data

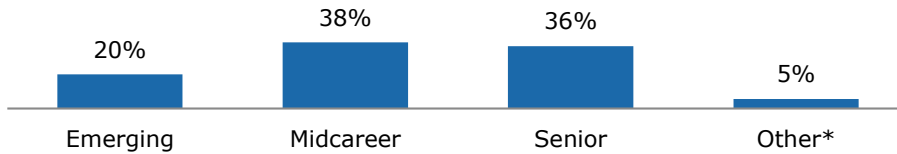
- **Retrospective professional development survey data:** Respondents were asked to reflect on their knowledge and behaviors from before attending the professional development trainings to after attending the trainings. To assess change in these questions, matched-pairs t-tests were conducted.
- **Pasadena USD and Arts Leads professional development survey data:** The professional development trainings were offered to Pasadena USD educators and Arts Leads. A total of 58 Pasadena USD participants and 12 Arts Leads participants completed the retrospective survey. The evaluation team examined differences within and between the groups' survey responses. For any group differences, due to the non-normally distributed samples, the evaluation team used the Mann-Whitney U test. The evaluation team also looked at the overall descriptive statistics for each subgroup.

## Appendix B: Detailed Demographic Characteristics of Creative Wellbeing Participants

### Demographics of Control Group Respondents

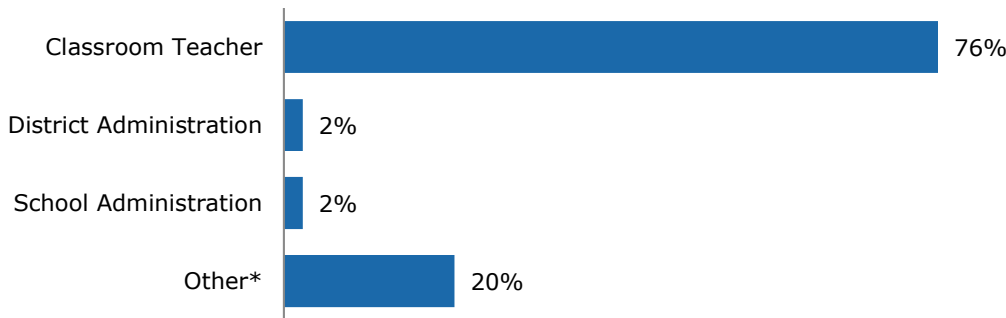
A total of 91 educators and administrators completed the control group survey. Below are their reported demographics.

#### Exhibit 1. Career Level (n = 91)



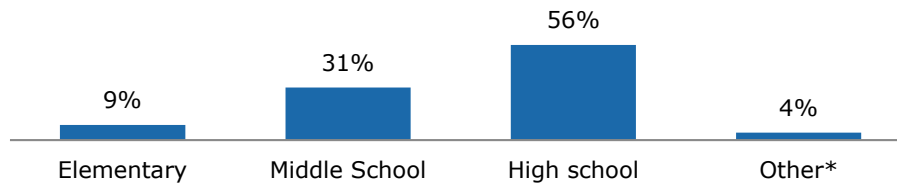
\*Other includes Early mid-level and 6 years of teaching.

#### Exhibit 2. Role in district/organization (n = 91)



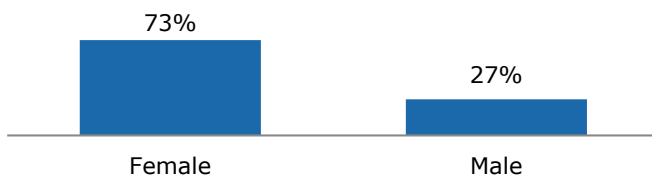
\*Other includes counselor, program specialist, teacher specialist, and school nurse.

#### Exhibit 3. Grade levels that classroom teachers teach (n = 68)

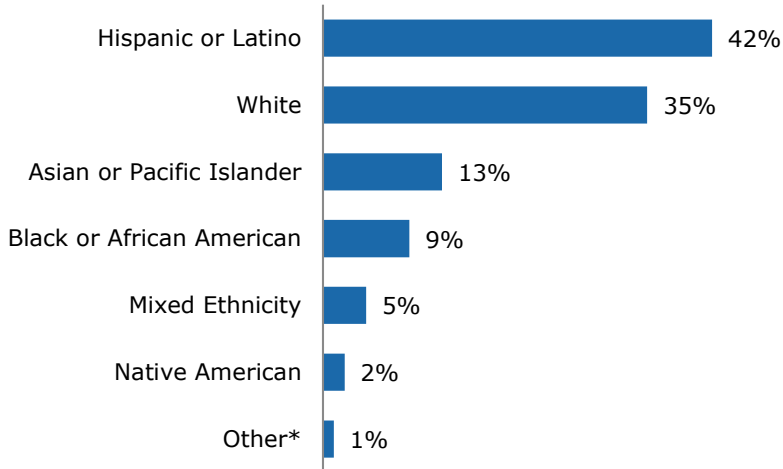


\*Other includes special education.

#### Exhibit 4. Gender (n = 91)

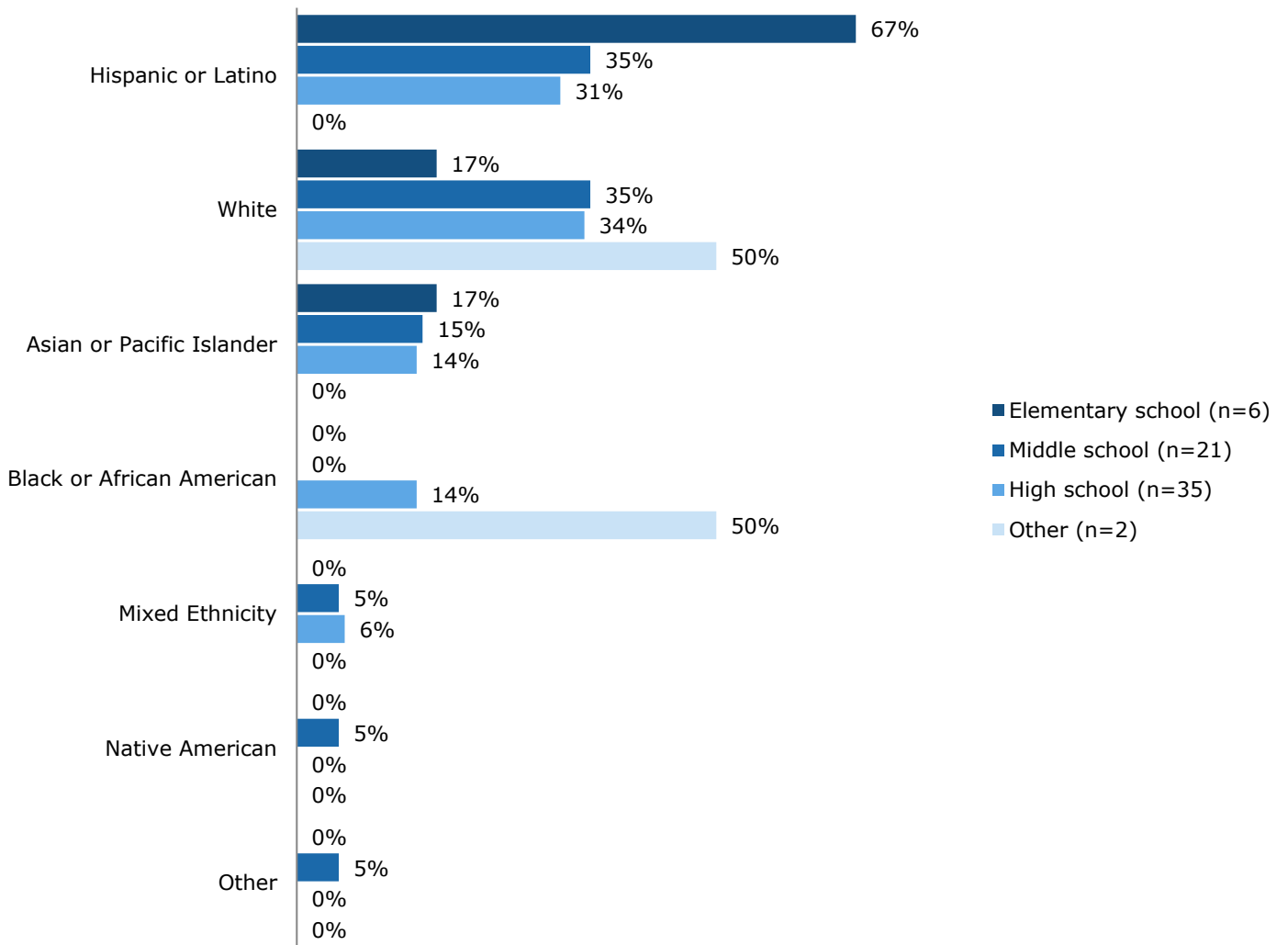


**Exhibit 5. Ethnic background (n = 86)\***



\*Participants could select multiple options. Totals add up to more than 100%.  
 \*\*Other was not specified.

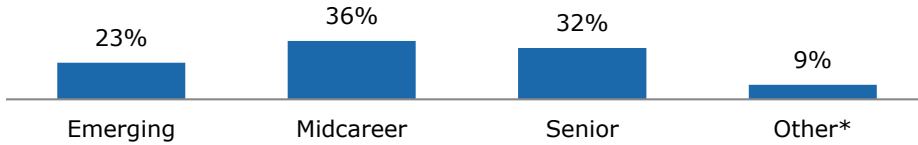
**Exhibit 6. Ethnic background by grade level**



### Demographics of Teacher Space Workshop participants

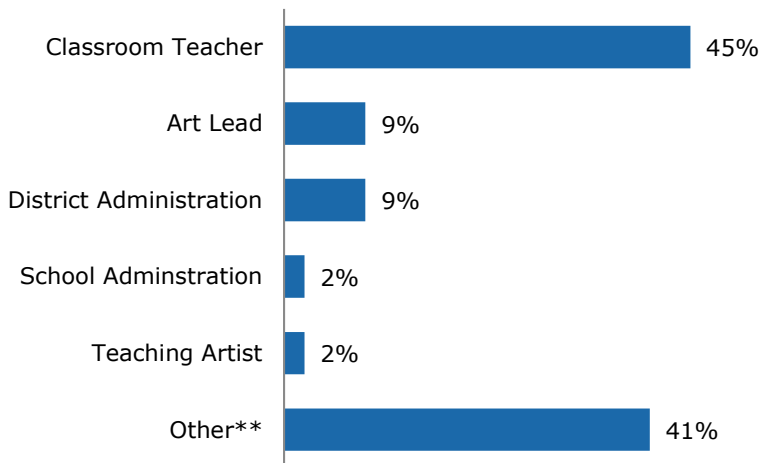
A total of 44 educators and administrators attended at least one Teacher Space Workshop and provided their demographics. Below are their reported demographics.

**Exhibit 1. Career Level (n = 44)**



\*Other includes Early mid-level and 6 years of teaching.

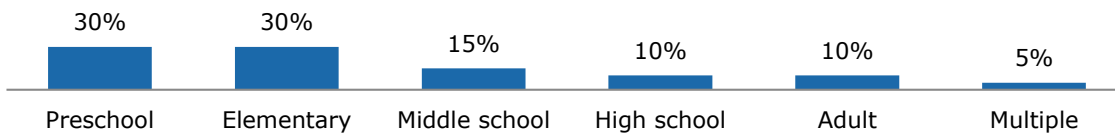
**Exhibit 2. Role in district/organization (n = 44)**



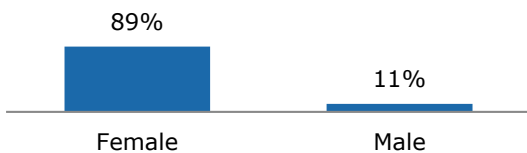
\*Participants could select multiple options. Totals add up to more than 100%.

\*\*Other includes teaching specialist, librarian, instructional coach, and supporting students with disabilities.

**Exhibit 3. Grade levels that classroom teachers teach (n = 20)**

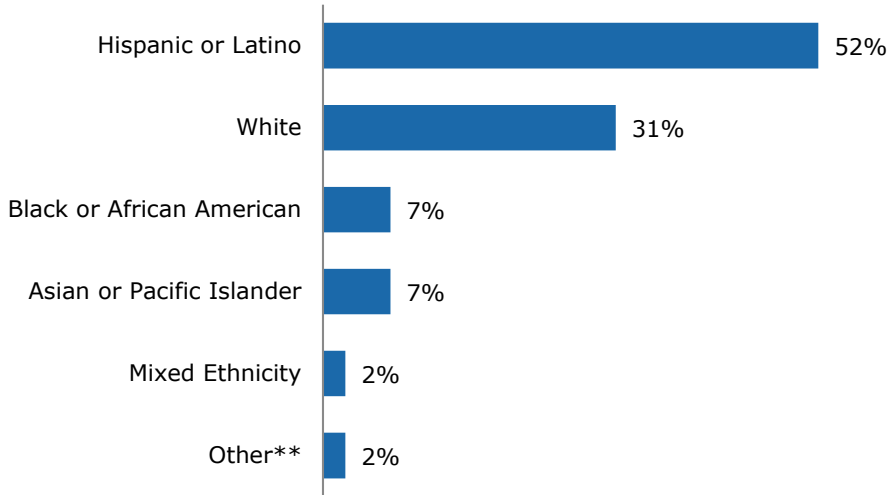


**Exhibit 4. Gender (n = 44)**



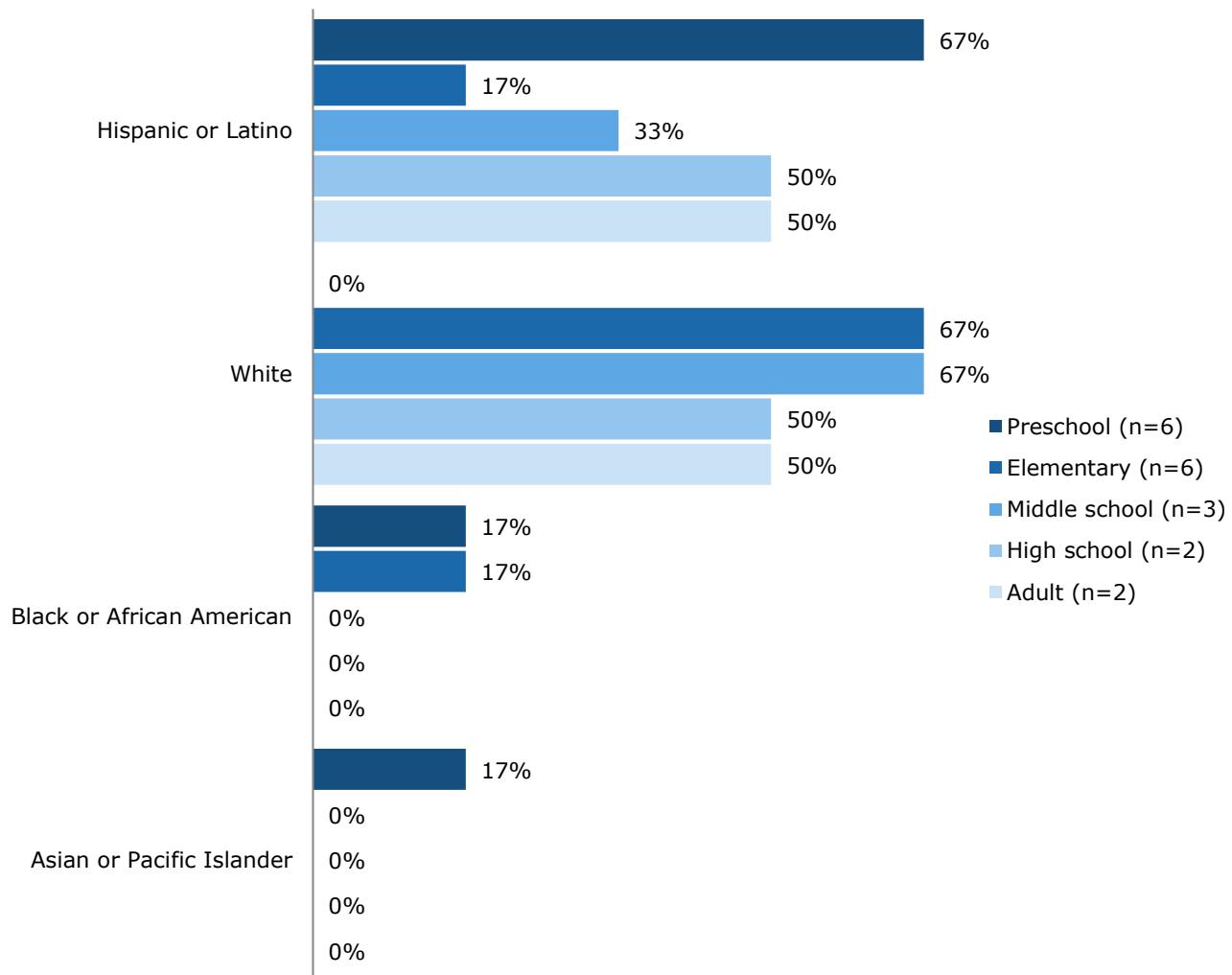


**Exhibit 5. Ethnic background (n = 42)\***



\*Participants could select multiple options. Totals add up to more than 100%.  
 \*\*Other was not specified.

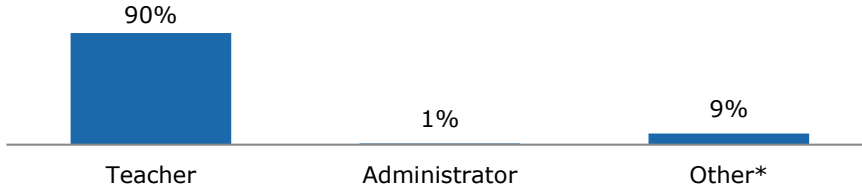
**Exhibit 6. Ethnic background by grade level**



### Demographics of Teacher Professional Development

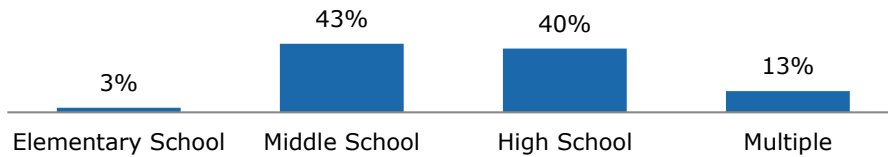
A total of 70 educators and administrators completed the teacher professional development survey. Below are their reported demographics.

**Exhibit 1. Role in district/organization (n = 70)**

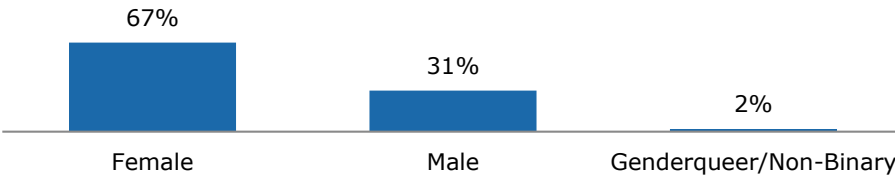


\*Other includes instructional coach, regional arts coordinator, and school counselor.

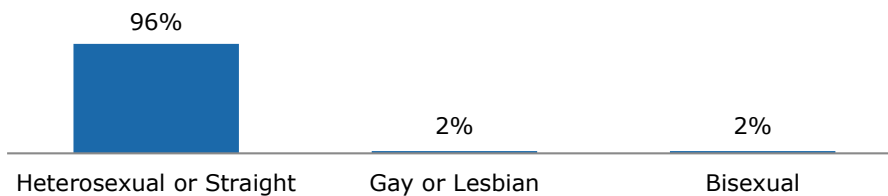
**Exhibit 2. Grade levels that classroom teachers teach (n = 67)**



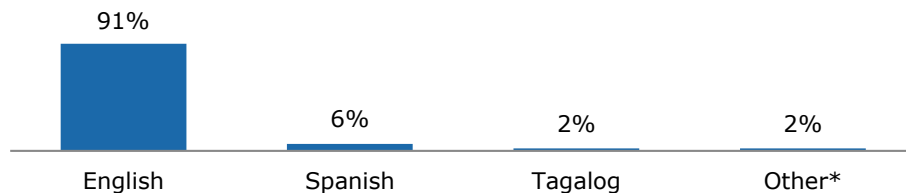
**Exhibit 3. Gender identity (n = 64)**



**Exhibit 4. Sexual orientation (n = 56)**

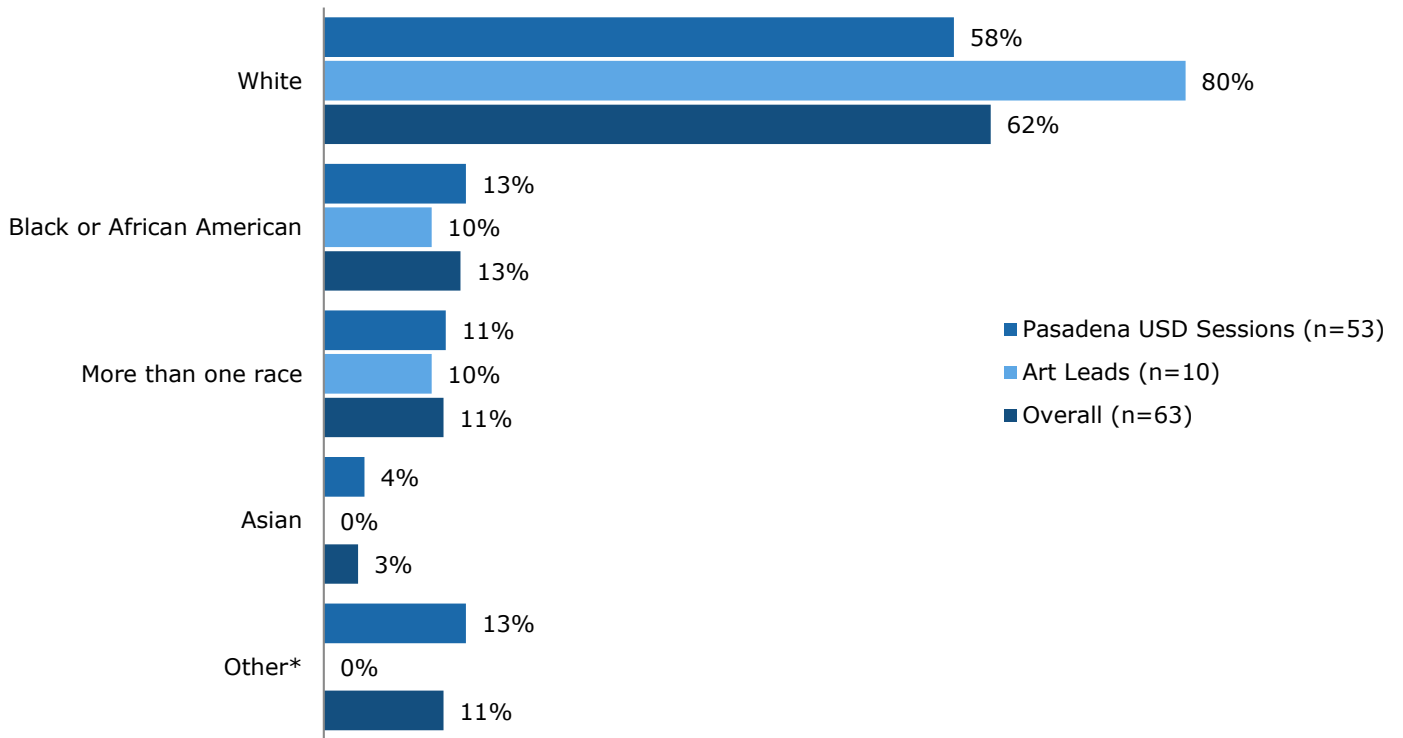


**Exhibit 5. Language most often spoke at home (n = 64)**



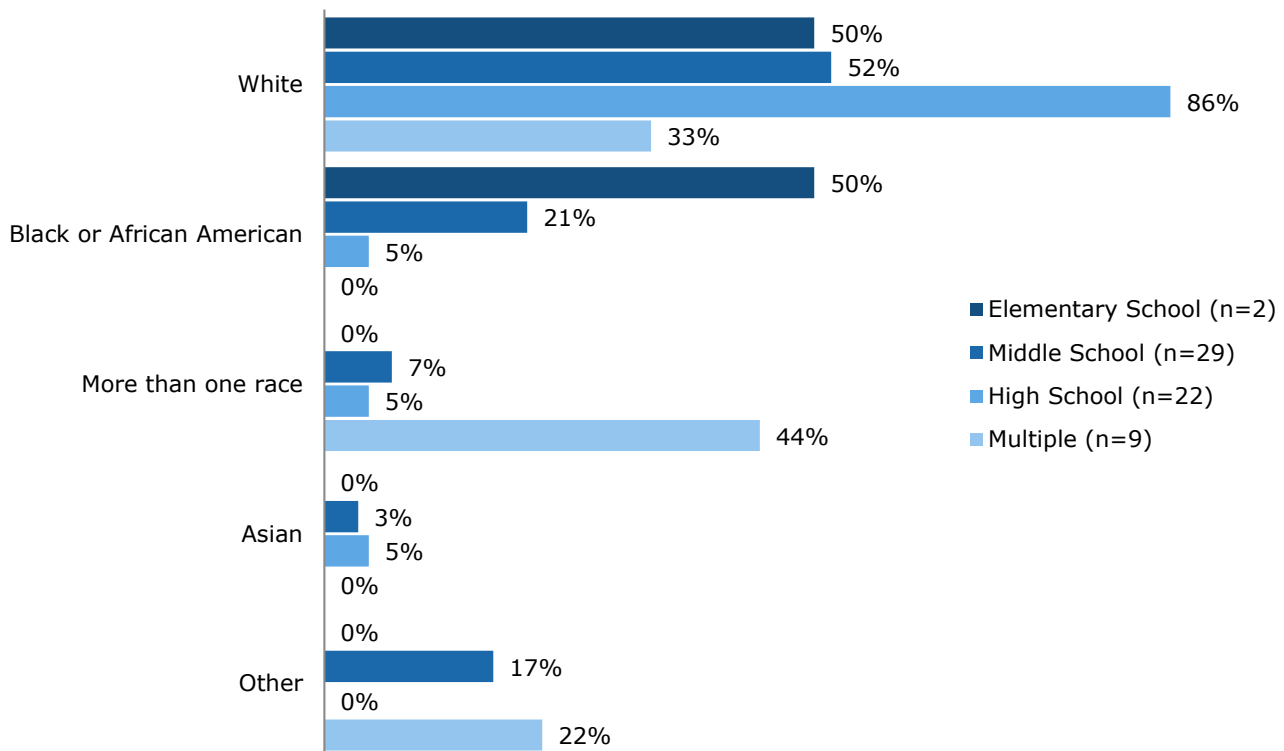
\*Other includes Portuguese.

**Exhibit 6. Race by session**

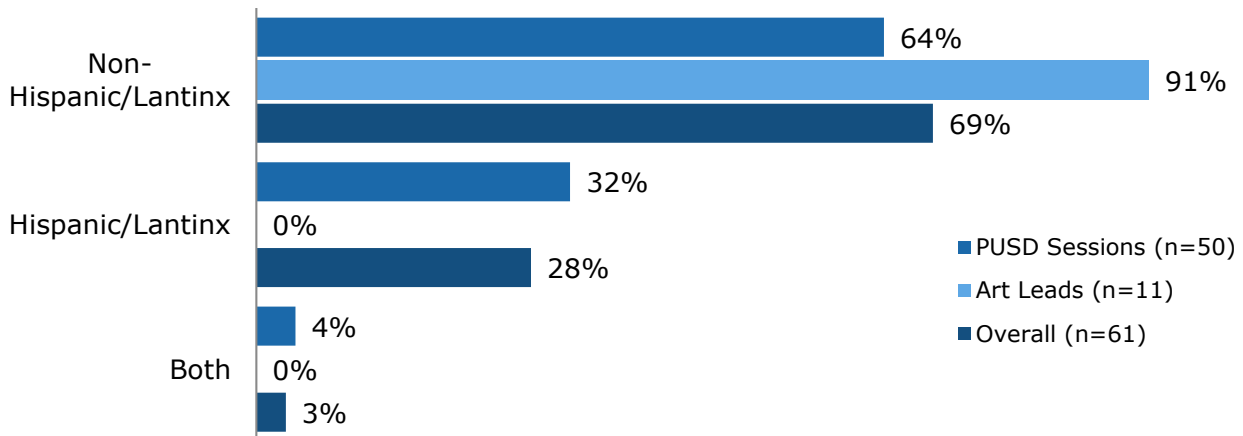


\*Other includes Latinx, Sri Lankan, and Brazilian.

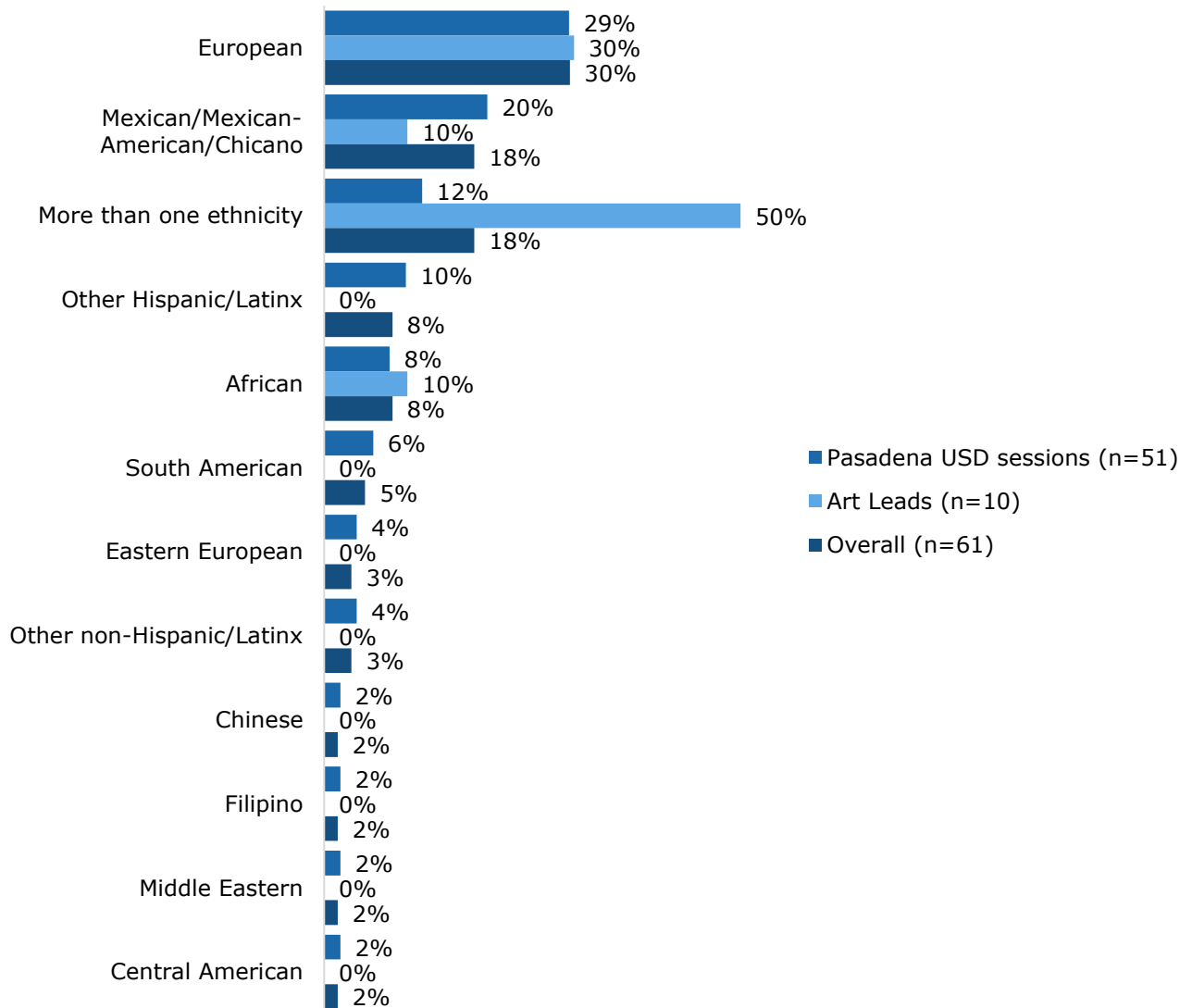
**Exhibit 7. Race by grade level**



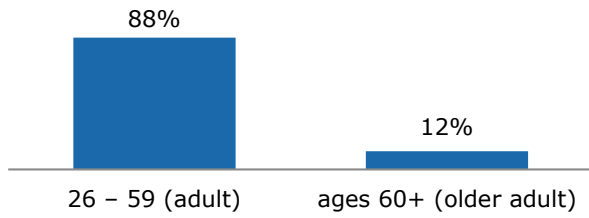
**Exhibit 8. Ethnicity by session**



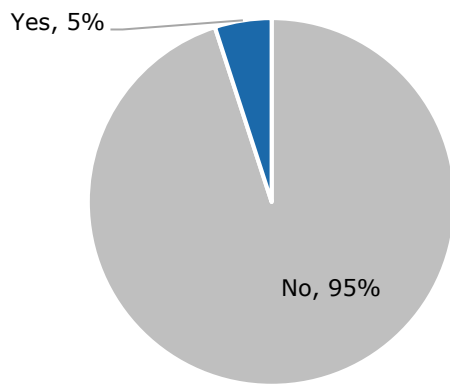
**Exhibit 9. Ethnicity broken down by session**



**Exhibit 10. Age (n = 64)**

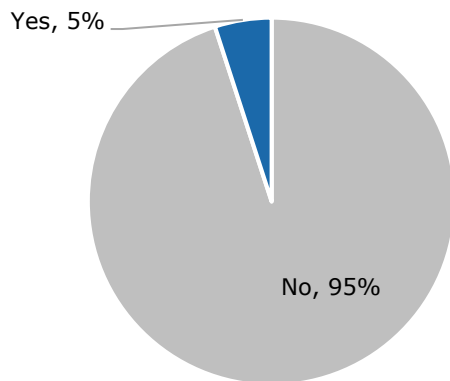


**Exhibit 11. Disability status (n = 63)\***



*Disabilities include mental, physical/mobility, and difficulty hearing.*

**Exhibit 12. Veteran status (n = 66)**



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