

## **Background of PTA's relationship to Schools**

The PTA maintains that each local school district is responsible for curriculum content, buildings, educational equipment, furniture, supplies, etc. or what could be called the basic costs of education and that PTA "Partners with schools – work closely with administration and teachers on achieving their goals". For additional information on our instruction from National PTA, please see – [www.WiltonPTA.org/postedfiles/Presidents\\_QRG.pdf](http://www.WiltonPTA.org/postedfiles/Presidents_QRG.pdf).

## **Background of the PTA art program**

The art program that PTA has been using was developed by a Wilton parent and implemented in grades K-6 in 1971 as enrichment to the curriculum of the time. Volunteers attended 3-hour training sessions each month along with their commitment of numerous additional hours preparing for each presentation. Later the founder and one of her volunteers joined talents to form the company, Reading & O'Reilly. Their business has continued to update and improve on the original program, with lessons delivered today on CD-ROMs (for more information <http://www.wiltonart.com/>). While Reading & O'Reilly has continued to improve and update their program, these updates were done independent of the Wilton Public School's art curriculum during the same period.

Unlike the Wilton Art Program, we have not successfully updated or improved the original program we were given. At least 10 years ago as we know, the administrations and a majority of K-5 teachers requested that an effort be made to return the program to its intended purpose of art enrichment. In 2001, a committed group of parents and teachers embarked on the task to address grades K-3. A member from that group recently said that while moving the lessons around to better align them to general classroom curriculum was completed, the substantive work of writing lessons was never accomplished.

In 2004, another group comprised of administrators, teachers and a new set of determined parents were charged with the task of once again creating an enrichment program. They conducted surveys to improve their understanding and explored commercially available products given the experience of the 2001 group. The task force evaluated purchasing the new, updated Reading & O'Reilly program, but concluded their program did not meet Wilton's art enrichment needs at that time. In the end, all involved determined they would improve where possible or create anew on what had been delivered in our classrooms for approximately 30 years. Some requests from the group were addressed – improvements in the art closets and thanks to dedicated individuals, the lessons were made available online. While these steps made improvements for the volunteers, 4 years later it can be said that no substantive work has been completed to revamp the enrichment program in line with the goals of the administrators, teachers and parents.

## **The last 2 years**

Because of the history surrounding this program and at the request of frustrated parents, a further look at the task force was needed to gain an understanding of the problems. Given the inability of 2 separate groups of parent volunteers to bring forth change, it seemed logical to take a different approach. Before substantive discussions about creating a new art enrichment program could continue, a clear understanding of the current Wilton Public School's art curriculum was necessary.

## **Art Curriculum**

At grade levels K-8, children receive instruction on various categories of art – painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, etc. Within each of those areas, the focus is on 6 different content standards – Media, Elements of Art & Elements of Design, Content, History and Culture, Analysis, Interpretation & Evaluation and Connections/Values. Here is a link to the CT Department of Education for further detail of each [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Curriculum/artccl/cclart\\_va.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Curriculum/artccl/cclart_va.pdf).

The next question centered on how does this information translate to the children of Wilton. For this, meetings were held with the K-8 Instructional Leader who provided a grid showing, for example, that in kindergarten under History and Culture, the children are exposed to the works of Paul Klee, Cezanne and begin collection of work from Chinese students. That standard goes to 1<sup>st</sup> grade with exposure to Mondrian

and Vasarely, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade - Rembrandt, Impressionists and Picasso-Blue & Rose, and so on. Here is a link to the instruction grid for painting (<http://wiltonpta.org/postedfiles/Painting.pdf> print the 2 pages and put together).

What became clear through this discovery was that while our program was introduced in the 1970's to bridge gaps in art education, the Wilton school curriculum now largely covers or goes beyond what our art program covered. The content of our program is no longer substantively enriched art education.

## **Volunteers**

Another factor toward understanding the challenges of the task forces is the volunteer. Individuals come forward with earnest intent but if personal circumstances cause them to walk away from a project, what can be said. Unlike an employee or someone you hire, we have no leverage over their actions. Any time that an individual can give to others is precious and we are always grateful.

## **Roll-out of Decision**

Once the agreement was reached that parent time and talents could best serve the children in other ways, the PTA conversations centered on how to inform the parent community. We felt that out of respect to those who had volunteered in June or September of 2007, a general announcement would not be made until the end of the school year. Principals of each school decided not to inform the teacher community until year-end, because of the concern the program would be ended prematurely.

Since news is hard to contain, by March a large number of people were aware that the program was ending and little comment was being heard. It was my overestimation of how many individuals had learned of the demise of the program at that time that led to what appeared to be an abrupt announcement in the last 2 weeks.

## **Going forward**

Similar to us, New Canaan Public Schools has just ended their parent owned/delivered art program. Some new ideas they have surfacing are: Docent for field trips and assisting 4<sup>th</sup> grade students with digital portfolios. Our program took over 200 parent volunteers to deliver what even those most passionate refer to as worn and stale material. We all agree the end of a 37-year-old program is unfortunate, but can't something better emerge?

This is a wonderful opportunity to think outside the box on how we can enhance and enrich our children's experience. Driscoll and now Miller have created the position of "Art Angels" to provide additional support to their art curriculum (volunteer for 2008-2009 [http://www.wiltonpta.org/postedfiles/M\\_DVolunteer.pdf](http://www.wiltonpta.org/postedfiles/M_DVolunteer.pdf)). The International Art Exchange is a large undertaking and an ongoing opportunity for parental involvement. Consider the possibilities and share your ideas at [info@WiltonPTA.org](mailto:info@WiltonPTA.org).