



June | 2019



# EQUITY & ACCESS TASK FORCE

Final Report

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**LOS ANGELES COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS (LACHSA)**

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## Background and Overview

The Los Angeles County High School for the Arts (LACHSA) is a tuition-free public school run by the Los Angeles County Office of Education in partnership with, and on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). Founded in 1985, LACHSA offers a specialized program combining college-preparatory academic instruction and conservatory-style training in the visual and performing arts.

Recognized as one of the premier public arts high school in the U.S., LACHSA is the recipient of numerous awards, including the California Distinguished School for Academic Excellence, Golden Bell Award, Grammy Signature School, Bravo Award for excellence in arts education and the Exemplary School Designation by the Arts Schools Network. LACHSA is also routinely identified as one of "America's Best High Schools" by Newsweek Magazine and one of LA's best high schools by Los Angeles Magazine.

The school serves 600 culturally and socioeconomically diverse teens from more than 80 school districts in the county. Prospective students must meet minimum academic, attendance and behavioral standards, and must audition for acceptance into one of five departments: Cinematic Arts, Dance, Music (vocal and instrumental), Theatre, or Visual Arts. Each department selects its own students through a juried audition or portfolio review process.

In the summer of 2018, LACHSA hired John Lawler as the school's new principal. In reviewing demographic data and based on early discussions with officials of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), school staff, and Executive Director Jeffrey Dollinger of the Arts High Foundation (which provides support for the school's mission), it was brought to Principal Lawler's attention that there were concerns regarding the makeup of LACHSA's student population, primarily in terms of access for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. LACHSA's mission, as a specialized public school, is to provide an arts conservatory-styled program and rigorous academics for exceptionally talented students across Los Angeles County, and it's the duty of the school, LACOE, and government officials to ensure our student population reflects the population of the entire county. LACHSA's first step toward creating sustainable solutions to the problem was to reference and complement the findings of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) report.

In April of 2017, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission published the findings and recommendations from the CEII report, a process that began in 2016 to identify "workable strategies for how to intertwine the goals of achieving diversity, equity, inclusion, and access so that all residents and all communities in LA County can experience the benefits of the arts."

Inspired by the work and findings of the CEII process, LACHSA began organizing an Equity & Access Task Force in the fall of 2018, and held our first convening in February 2019. A broad representative group was invited to participate, including representatives from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), directors of LA's visual and performing arts organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs)

providing arts instruction, educators from arts departments at LACHSA, current and past parents, and members of several prominent foundations supporting the arts.

The Task Force's stated purpose was:

*"In order to advance LACHSA's vision of making diversity, equity and inclusion evident in the school's student population and school culture while maintaining its exceptionally high artistic standards, the LACHSA Task Force on Equity & Access will convene from February through May 2019 to provide leadership and analysis toward achieving this vision. The Task Force will include representatives of LACHSA's many constituent groups and will deliver specific recommendations in areas such as outreach, recruitment, admissions process, communications, staffing, and budget. The school's ultimate goal is for LACHSA's students to reflect the socio-economic, racial, and cultural diversity of the population of Los Angeles County."*

### Core Team Organizers

- John Lawler – *Principal, LACHSA*
- Lynn Alvarez – *LACHSA Parent*
- Jonathan Dhauw – *Outreach Coordinator, LACHSA*
- Roth Herrlinger – *Facilitator, Herrlinger Management & Consulting*

### Participants

- Glenna Avila – *Artistic Director, CalArts Community Arts Partnership*
- Katherine Bonalos – *Program Officer, Ralph M. Parsons Foundation*
- Tim Dang – *Co-Chair, LA County Arts Commission, Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII)*
- Fernando Delgado – *Deputy, LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis*
- Denise Grande – *Director of Arts Education, LA County Arts Commission*
- Suzanna Guzman – *Music Center Education Artist / Co-Director, LACHSA Opera Company*
- Genethia Hudley-Hayes – *Deputy, LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl*
- Lois Hunter – *Theatre Chair, LACHSA*
- Piper Kamins – *Program Officer, Ralph M. Parsons Foundation*
- Kate Leach – *Special Educator & LACHSA Parent*
- Karen Louis – *Executive Director, Neighborhood Music School*
- Rebecca Nevarez – *Executive Director, Latino Arts Network*
- Danette McBride – *Deputy, LA County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas*
- Monte Perez – *Board Member, LACOE Board of Education*
- Luis Rodriguez – *Writer, Community Activist*
- Sonia Romero – *LACHSA alum / artist*
- Bob Smiland – *Executive Director, Inner-City Arts*
- Connie St. John – *(Fmr.) Executive Director, Neighborhood Music School*
- Dana Vanderford – *Senior Deputy, LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger*
- Jonathan Zeichner – *Executive Director, A Place Called Home*
- Walter Zooli – *Executive Director, Young Musicians Foundation*

## **Barriers to Admission**

LACHSA is dedicated to the mission of providing a rigorous academic and arts education to the most promising young artists in Los Angeles County. The identification of those student artists is critical to maintaining the school's standing as the top-rated public arts high school in the country, and because the school cannot admit every student who demonstrates talent, this poses an inherent barrier for all of them. For students from a low socio-economic background or community, and for students of color, there are even more challenges to gain admission. For the purpose of this report, a barrier can be defined as an institutional, economic, cultural, or logistic limitation that hinders students' ability to gain admission to the school. This is a fact the school must accept and address head-on.

Potential barriers to admission to LACHSA may include a lack of knowledge and awareness of the school, a lack of early-age arts exposure or training due to minimal public school funding or a family's ability to pay, potentially overwhelming or challenging audition requirements, a need for more accessible information on the school website, and a lack of adequate transportation options. This is not an exhaustive list of barriers, and the identification of these potential obstacles is partially based on anecdotal and qualitative data. It is the hope of the task force that its key recommendations will present ways to identify these and other barriers, and help more young artists overcome them.

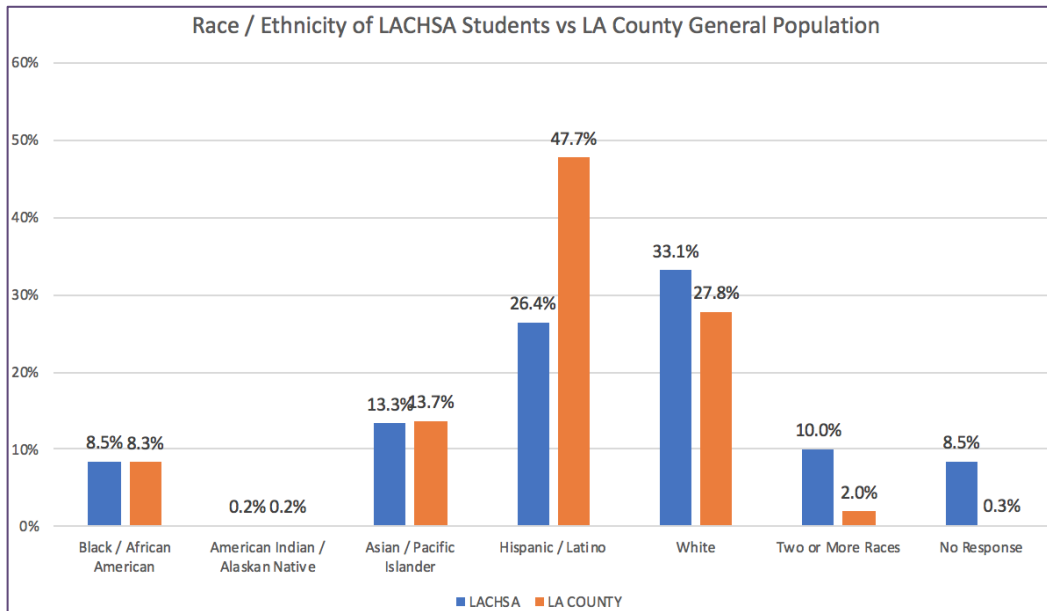
## **Previous and Ongoing Equity Efforts**

The desire to serve a student population demographically aligned with LA County's is not a new one for LACHSA. In 2016, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and LACHSA developed a preliminary Equity Plan to assess some of the potential obstacles to recruiting diverse communities to the school. The report analyzed LACHSA's audition process, rubrics and scoring systems, outreach efforts, and retention strategies. Through this initial assessment, LACHSA made several modifications to the admission process, including modifying the music department's aria requirement to allow for songs from other cultures and in different languages, adding a day of audition preparation and personalized coaching for the theatre audition, and eliminating the cutting of dancers after barre exercises, as is common practice in the dance world. Instead, every auditioner performs at the barre and also presents a solo piece for review. In addition, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic data of auditioners was shared with the arts chairs, who are responsible for the auditions and student selection.

In an effort to create meaningful and sustainable changes, LACHSA administrators extended the excellent work from that report and sought an even more comprehensive analysis through an inclusive and collaborative study. Drawing on the expertise and thought-partnership of external partners and experts in the arts and equity fields, the Equity & Access Task Force is another step in a continuous assessment of LACHSA's community positioning and policies, and the school commits to an ongoing examination of those policies and structures moving forward.

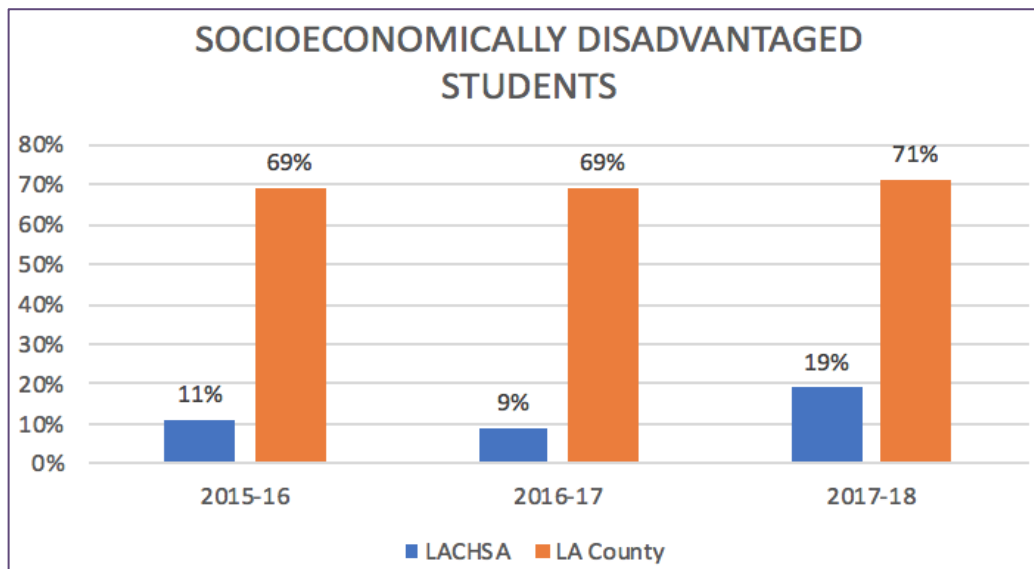
## Key Statistics

Two statistics were shared with the Task Force: race and ethnicity of LACHSA students vs. the LA County general population, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students of LACHSA vs. LA County public schools. Both comparisons revealed significant deltas of representation, the first being an underrepresentation of students who identified as hispanic or latino, and the second being an underrepresentation of students who were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (students who either received free or reduced-price lunch, were migrants, homeless, foster youth, or both parents did not graduate high school).



County Data Source: US Census 2010

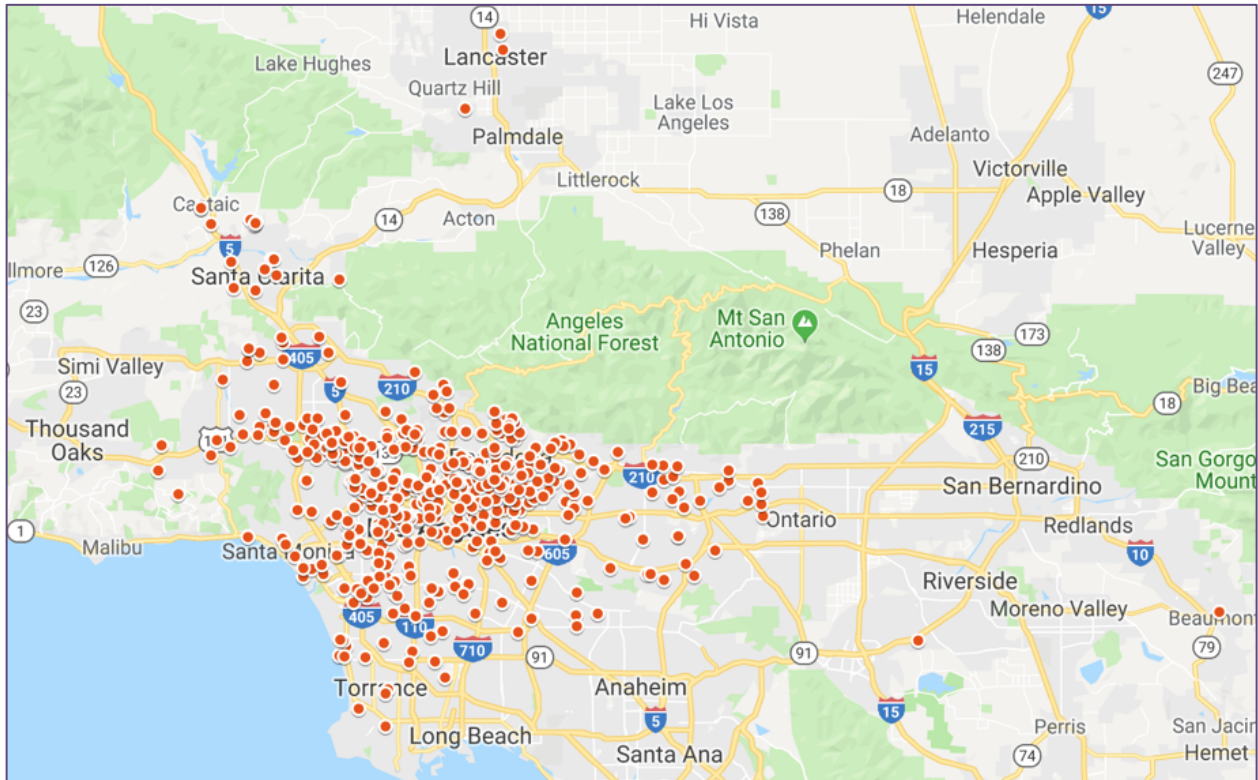
LACHSA Data Source: DataQuest, 2017-18 Enrollment Data



Source: Dataquest, <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Enrollment> > Enrollment by Subgroup

After this initial data was shared, more in-depth data was requested, such as geographic spread of households, predicted household incomes based on median household income by zip code, and detailed racial breakdowns of the incoming class.

**Geography of Current LACHSA students:**



**Process**

LACHSA’s Equity & Access Task Force met three times, in February, March and May 2019 to share data, gather insights and best practices, and prepare recommendations. Additionally, the school consulted with peer institutions around the country to discover and learn from their experiences with similar efforts around equity and access.

***Session 1***

During the first session, the LACHSA administration shared data on the school’s demographics, admissions, acceptance rates, geographical reach, offered an in-depth overview of the audition process, and reviewed past and present outreach initiatives. Task Force members broke out into four groups for broad discussions on admissions, outreach, barriers to access, and data, where they charted potential solutions and strategies to improve equity and access. Further data was requested and subsequently shared after the meeting via email.

## **Session 2**

Between the first and second sessions, the core team analyzed all the strategies proposed by Task Force members at Session 1 and identified those with the highest impact and feasibility, which were distributed before the session. At Session 2, members broke out into three groups (barriers, outreach, admissions) and discussed them in depth, identifying actionable steps to achieve those actions. In a group share-out, participants identified resources, potential partners, and funding sources for each strategy.

## **Session 3**

Between the second and third sessions, the core team identified six high-leverage strategies for lasting and sustainable change based on the collective work of the Task Force. At the third session, the Task Force discussed each of these recommendations in depth, particularly with regards to funding, implementation, and impact.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations of LACHSA's Equity & Access Task Force are to:

### **1. Establish a Director of Equity**

1. LACHSA will produce a study on the financial costs of creating a coordinator position dedicated to issues of equity and outreach.
2. LACHSA will explore the possibility of hiring a director of equity and access
  - i. This director's job duties will directly address program development, admissions, data gathering, outreach, student retention, and partnership management.
  - ii. The Arts High Foundation will take the lead in securing funding, and the position will be paid through the Foundation.

**Lead entity:** LACHSA Administration, Arts High Foundation

**Funding:** Grants, Foundation

**Timing:** Hiring by Fall 2019

### **2. Develop Programming at Community-Based Sites**

1. LACHSA will formalize partnerships with community-based organizations to develop and/or supplement existing arts programming specifically to provide advanced, sequential arts instruction for students identified as potential LACHSA candidates.
2. Initial partners will include City Ballet of LA, CalArts Community Arts Partnership, Inner-City Arts, Neighborhood Music School, Young Musicians Foundation, City of LA Department of Cultural Affairs, Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center and others.
3. Other partners will be identified to provide comprehensive geographic and programmatic coverage.
4. LACHSA will work with partners to provide audition workshops, satellite auditions, and performances for participants.



5. LACHSA will have bilingual staff available to communicate with family participants.

**Leads:** LACHSA Outreach, LACHSA Admissions, Arts Chairs

**Funding:** Grants, LACHSA administrative budget

**Timing:** In progress

### 3. **Host a Series of Audition Workshops**

1. LACHSA will determine the costs of hosting audition preparation workshops and identify funding sources.
2. LACHSA will program a series of classes over the summer and on weekends in the Fall semester aimed at prospective students.
3. LACHSA will work with the Summer Arts Conservatory to coordinate resources and room availability over the summer.

**Leads:** LACHSA Outreach Department, LACHSA Admissions, Arts Chairs

**Funding:** Grants, LACHSA administrative budget

**Timing:** Weekend sessions to begin Fall 2019; Summer sessions to begin in 2020.

### 4. **Develop Marketing Materials that Better Address the Diverse Population of LA County**

1. LACHSA will design a dynamic website that offers information in Spanish and English.
2. LACHSA will produce written marketing materials in both Spanish and English, and possibly other languages, such as Korean, Vietnamese, and Mandarin.

**Leads:** LACHSA Outreach Department, LACOE Translation Services

**Funding:** LACHSA administrative budget, grants

**Timing:** December 2019 to April 2020

### 5. **Increase Communication with Schools**

1. LACHSA will identify and build relationships with faculty and staff from feeder schools.
2. LACHSA staff will provide direct admissions information to middle school arts teachers and administration via email and mailed communications.
3. LACHSA will invite faculty and staff from feeder schools to visit and observe LACHSA programming to cultivate a stronger awareness of curriculum.

**Leads:** LACHSA Outreach Department, LACHSA Admissions

**Funding:** LACHSA administrative budget, grants

**Timing:** Fall 2019

**6. Continue and Expand Research into Issues of Equity that Affect the LACHSA Population**

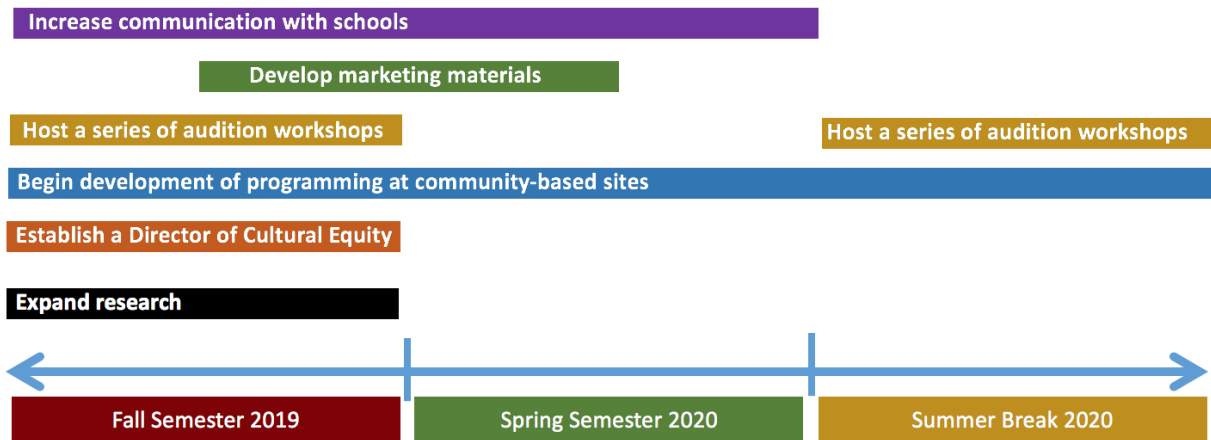
1. LACHSA will develop a comprehensive survey and distribute to current students and families, as well as prospective students. Topics will include:
  - i. Barriers to access to LACHSA
  - ii. Transportation (commute times, modes of transportation, etc.)
  - iii. Potential action items to improve equity and access
  - iv. When students first became interested in their art
  - v. How students heard about LACHSA
  - vi. Level of artistic training before LACHSA

**Leads:** LACHSA Outreach Department

**Funding:** LACHSA administrative budget

**Timing:** Fall 2019

## TIMELINE



### Director of Equity

The most immediate and high-impact goal the task force identified is the hiring of a staff member to oversee equity and outreach activities for LACHSA. The requirements for this position have been detailed below.

### **Proposed Job Description**

The Director of Equity serves as a strong and vocal champion for equity, diversity and inclusion across all programs associated with the school. The ideal candidate will be a visionary and transformational thought leader, who has demonstrated experience and influence in achieving positive change in an academic or community-based setting in the areas of diversity, access, inclusion, multiculturalism, community partnerships, development, admissions, and educational and employment equity.

The position reports to the principal of LACHSA and works in close collaboration with the Executive Director of the Arts High Foundation, school leaders, stakeholder groups within the district, and with external partners such as community organizations, advisory boards, other school districts, and local governments to shape, promote, and implement LACHSA's Equity and Access Plan. The director will promote a culture of inclusion and embracing differences in support of LACHSA's strategic efforts to build a welcoming environment of equity and inclusion for all students, families, employees, and the community, while developing key initiatives to ensure that admission to LACHSA is equitable to all prospective students. The Director of Equity will collect and analyze data, set goals, create strategic plans, and work to develop, maintain, and broaden partnerships in targeted communities.

### **Requirements**

- 5+ years experience in the field of arts education
- Demonstrated ability to work with diverse communities in LA
- Communication skills and public speaking
- Project management
- Ability to work collaboratively with faculty, students and parents
- Car and valid driver's license
- Ability to collect, analyze, evaluate, and present data

### **Desirable**

- Bilingual in Spanish
- Knowledge of the nonprofit and arts communities of LA
- Knowledge of LA public school systems

### **Pay Scale**

- \$70,000 - \$80,000/year, commensurate with experience

## Conclusion

LACHSA is grateful for the participation of so many individuals and organizations in this extremely important initiative and stands with the members of the Task Force in making these six significant recommendations to achieve the school's equity and access goals.

The partnerships developed and strengthened during the course of this Task Force will assuredly benefit the school for years to come. More importantly, we are confident that the successful application of the recommended strategies will provide Los Angeles greater access and preparedness to succeed in the application, audition, and ongoing studies of LACHSA's rigorous programs.

As with any such undertaking, the greatest work begins now, after the Task Force has completed its advisory efforts: to implement each of these recommendations, measure their efficacy, and fully support everyone in the LACHSA community throughout the journey. The school appreciatively seeks the support of its partners – arts organizations, community-based organizations, schools, and perhaps most significantly, funding institutions – to assist in realizing each of these strategies for the benefit of current and future generations of LACHSA students, families, teachers, and the community at large. An investment in these efforts will help ensure that the cultural landscape of Los Angeles is represented, influenced, and celebrated by our county's most talented artists, now and into the future.

