



## **El Sistema Case Study Questions**

### San Diego Arts Education Learning Exchange

#### **Purpose & Description**

We believe that El Sistema inspired programs have the potential to be change agents for their communities and schools, just as they are for children and families. The majority of El Sistema inspired programs across the U.S. meet on school campuses. Their connection to in-school music programs varies. Quite often, the vision for connecting the two is undefined or under developed.

The five questions below are intended to help programs begin exploring their potential to make systemic change within schools. A select group of completed Case Studies will be used during the San Diego County Arts Education Learning Exchange as workshop content facilitated by Eric Booth.

Please answer the three questions below by March 7, 2016 and send them to:  
Annette Fritzsche at [afritzsche@sdys.org](mailto:afritzsche@sdys.org)

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Program Name: El Sistema - Trenton

Program Contact: Ronnie Ragen, Program Director, Trenton Community Music School

Email and Phone Number: [rragen@trentoncommunitymusic.org](mailto:rragen@trentoncommunitymusic.org); 609-273-2008

1. Use a metaphor to depict the current relationship between your El Sistema inspired program and school site or district partner?  
Our relationship with our partner school district is like flying an airplane while we build it.
2. In no more than two sentences, please describe how this metaphor represents your program/school relationship. Our program is based on presumed, good intentions, and “flies” relatively well. Occasionally, though, we realize, “mid-flight”, that our operating expectations are not mutually held and it takes a lot of on-the-spot trouble-shooting to “keep the plane from crashing”. (i.e., we are functioning without an MOU).

3. Have you sought to use your El Sistema inspired program to influence equitable availability of in-school music? If yes, how? If no, why not?

This is complicated in our district. Over the past four years, with the filling of the long-vacant Arts Supervisor position, the district has rebuilt its elementary school instrumental program. All but two of 22 schools now have VH1 supported instrumental programs with in-school, assigned teachers. All but three of the programs chose band instruments. These are pull-out programs available to fewer than half of the district's fourth and fifth graders. Children are chosen by their classroom teachers and the music teacher for participation, with academic and behavioral standing usually conditions of permission to participate. Our after-school program is a string program, started in the original, and at the time, only elementary school with a string instrument program. We introduced programming for third graders in our host school (after which the in-school program included third grade). Any child interested in participating is invited to join the after-school program, and every effort is made to insure they are successful, including assistance with both academic and behavior problems. We are helping to demonstrate that all children benefit from ensemble instrumental instruction, with the hope of making in-school instruction more equitably available. We will expand to include K-2 in the next year or two.

We will add a middle school in the fall to serve fifth grade children in our program who are moving up to the middle school, so as to insure continuity of opportunity. There is currently no string instruction at the middle school level. We employ in-school, district music teachers from our host schools when they fit our El Sistema-inspired social and musical standards (or are open to professional development to prepare to fulfill the Citizen/Artist/Teacher requirements of the position. This has helped stave off difficulties with the teacher union.

4. What opportunities exist for your program to have a systemic influence on the availability of in-school music?

Trenton is in the first year of its tenure as a Kennedy Center "Arts Education for Any Given Child" city/school district designee. With commitment from the mayor, superintendent and school board to embrace the development of district-wide arts programming, Trenton is poised to become a strong, arts-infused district. As a community partner in this Kennedy Center-led process, the Trenton Community Music School is in a good position to have an influence on the systemic development of in-school music. We think our El Sistema –inspired, after-school program can influence the quality and content of the in-school programs.

5. What obstacles interfere with your program influencing the availability of in-school music?

**Funding:** We are coming to the conference to better understand how Title I has been utilized to support the programming in the Chula Vista district.

**Buy-in from the teachers' union** to allow non-union, teaching-artists to serve alongside union music teachers to build the program.