



## Arizona School for the Arts Discovery Executive Summary

April 2022

Arizona School for the Arts contracted Avenir Consulting Partners in March and April of 2022 to conduct an organizational needs assessment to identify their current state and inform opportunities to create capacity and build sustainability in people, processes, culture, and structure for the future. Avenir's Organization Development Practice Lead, Lori Howard and Sarah Gonzalez, Practice Lead for Justice, Equity, and Inclusion led this effort. This assessment included data collection in the forms of interviews and surveys with key leaders, board members, students, faculty, and parents which are the basis of this report.

A detailed report was delivered to the Head of School, Leah Fregulia. The data points in the detailed report include insights into ASA's strengths and improvement areas. This report highlights a summary of that report. Avenir has identified recommendations for next steps and how they can support ASA in driving forward for impact. Additional themes or action items may be determined by ASA after review of this report and can be included in future project planning as needed.

## Discovery and Organizational Assessment Process and Methodology

Avenir worked with ASA to identify participants who would be willing to provide insight into the culture, communication, environment and operations at ASA. Avenir engaged with participants in several ways. Middle School Students, High School Students, Academic and Arts Faculty and Parents participated in focus group discussions led by Avenir. Admin feedback was collected via individual discussions with Avenir consultants. The ASA Board of Directors completed a survey. Similar questions were asked of all participants.

### Overview of Participants

Middle School - 9 participants

High School - 7 participants

Admin - 6 participants

Academic Faculty - 6 participants

Arts Faculty - 10 participants

Parents - 6 participants

Board of Directors - 8 participants

### Discovery and Organizational Needs Assessment Themes

Participants highlighted strengths and things that are going well at ASA as well as opportunities for improvement. Some feedback and themes surfaced across multiple groups. The summary of general themes that were brought forward across groups is as follows:

- Overwhelming sense of immense pride and commitment to ASA.
- Participants expressed a strong desire to partner with ASA administrators to design solutions for improvement.
- Administration is willing to do whatever it takes to make things happen and get things done.
- Lack of confidence and trust that feedback will be heard and action will be taken by ASA administrators to make improvements.
- Faculty expressed the need for visionary and strategic leadership with intentional approaches and decision-making.
- Leadership's positive response to and management of COVID was recognized across the board.
- Academic and Arts faculty acknowledge that through their team's efforts ASA managed to survive COVID and resume learning through distance and hybrid approaches to now being in person. Both teams expressed the lack of communication, planning and support from the administration.
- Teachers are committed to student achievement and performance.
- There is a vision of a school filled with arts, academic rigor and creative thought.
- Desire was expressed for clear roles and responsibilities within the Admin team and across faculty and

office staff. This included rightsizing workloads to meet the capacity of staff.

- A communication strategy is needed. It was recognized that ASA has tried to work on more effective communication, but it still needs a lot of work. ASA is in need of a hub for communication that is accessible to everyone. There is a desire for communication to be clear, focused and consistent with feedback loops and follow through.
- Because of the scale and complexity of the management of COVID, ASA may have lost ground in staying aligned with the mission and vision.
- It was expressed that there is a lack of care, maintenance and attention to address facility issues that promote serious safety concerns and potential liability risks. It was indicated that the facility team takes a band aid approach to many of the existing facility issues.
- There is an apparent sentiment of not feeling safe at ASA due to the lack of planning, interventions, systems and procedures and inadequate communication to mitigate social issues such as homelessness, bullying, violence, substance use, racism, homophobia, etc.
- There is an illusion of ASA culture aka “ASA Way” that is disconnected from what is being demonstrated and experienced by faculty, parents and students.
- Arts faculty expressed a feeling of not being valued, prioritized and or considered by administration. They expressed often being left out, an afterthought, and adhered to different expectations.
- Administration is creating a bottle-neck and has been identified as the source of many of the challenges being experienced. This appears to be because ideas are lifted up to Administration but there is a lack of empowerment for other groups (students, parents, faculty) to drive ideas and initiatives forward.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts and progress are recognized, but there’s still work to be done

around creating shared language, integrating and applying DEI into the ASA system.

- DEI efforts are more focused on engaging teachers, staff, admin and board and needs to be expanded to students and parents.
- There is lack of accountability in many areas, including following systems and processes.
- Admin believes communication has improved and is better than faculty, staff and parents think it is.
- Questions were asked as to whether ASA is an Arts school or College Prep School. There is a disconnect from the ASA mission and what is being operationalized.
- There is a desire from admin to support community agency, this requires power sharing and admin is being experienced as unable to.
- Admin sends a message that they encourage ideas, voices, support and effort from students, parents and teachers. These groups are engaged to help inform and co-create, but are not empowered to own or drive anything. Instead, Admin owns it and does it the way they want to do it.
- Perception that funding and fundraising is at the center and driving decisions, initiatives, and engagement efforts.
- It is felt by faculty that there is inherent toxic positivity deeply embedded in the ASA culture where issues and concerns are often sugar coated, and spun in ways that belittles the challenges students, parents and faculty face not allowing for necessary change.

## Recommendations

1. Send thank yous to discovery process participants- partner process between ASA and Avenir.
2. Co-design the report out/town hall process and include focus group participants to ensure adequate feedback loops.
3. Redesign Organizational Structure with consideration for:
  - Addressing spans of control
  - Boundaries of roles, authority and decision making
  - Alignment and assessment of current responsibilities of the following roles:
    - Grade Leaders
    - Department Chairs
    - Vice Principal
    - Arts Director
    - Principal
    - Head of School

- Identification of potential new roles
  - Communications Role
  - Counseling Resources
  - Office Staff
- Review of Talent (9-block process) leading to Succession Planning
- Support Staff Development Planning
- Once roles and responsibilities are determined and rolled out, identify how to honor them, and ensure accountability
- Support Organization Change management
- Build Communication plan to support rollout of new organization structure.

#### 4. Streamline task forces to include:

- Identification of action items from report and prior work
- Alignment of new action items with current task forces
- Assess participants in each task force
- Engagement of focus group participants
- Creation of committee charters and timelines
- Consider Avenir participation in task forces to drive progress and accountability

5. Revisit Mission/Vision/Values to increase clarity and alignment with strategic plan. Address questions regarding ASA being a college prep school or an art's school. Target June strategy meeting with the board of directors.
6. Co-create holistic Communication Strategy to potentially include, but not limited to:
  - Integrated communication methods to reach students, parents, teachers, staff, admin, and the public
  - Determine central point of contact for all communications
  - Create a communication process map to include owners, timing, content, approvals etc.
  - Create central hub for communication with ways to determine audience
  - Ensure communication strategy is inclusive of DEI practices and ASA brand
  - Revamp of website to include teachers and make it easier to navigate
  - Integration of feedback loops
7. Address Systems and Process improvement opportunities in this report:
  - Substitute teacher process
  - System integration
  - Rigorous Arts Program
  - College Preparation



- Records management
- Student discipline
- Competitive pay for teachers
- Communication framework for addressing serious school issues, safety concerns to include transparency
- Opportunities for integration of extra-curricular activities
- Define a system of accountability at all audiences, which could include how to navigate conflict
- Integrate into task forces if applicable or determine appropriate department to assign to and ensure resources

### Next Steps

ASA is grateful to everyone who participated in this process. They will begin work immediately to organize and address items identified in this feedback report focused on building culture and capacity and driving process improvement.

The Avenir team will assist ASA in building a plan to address these findings. This will include prioritizing recommendations, creating project plans, and providing support. ASA also plans to include members of the community (faculty, staff, parents, and students) in the project planning and delivery process. This work will begin in April and will continue through the summer and fall. Where possible, process improvement opportunities will be integrated into already existing task forces. ASA will also develop a feedback loop to keep all parties in the loop on progress.