



A Joint Study conducted by:  
**Longy School of Music of Bard College and WolfBrown**

*Funded by the Buck Family Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation*

### Why We Need to Study

#### El Sistema-Inspired Programs

The past decade has witnessed a rapid growth of El Sistema-inspired music programs for children throughout the United States. Based on reports of its successes in its home country of Venezuela, and early findings from U.S.-based programs, there is much hope that these programs can:

- Build on the aspirations and assets of children and families,
- Buffer the effects of risks like poverty and unsafe neighborhoods,
- Demonstrate how music fuels individual and community development.

To do this, we have to be clear about our specific goals and build evidence for progress toward those goals in different El Sistema-inspired programs. Only with this evidence can we jointly build credibility and support for the continued development of the El Sistema movement, the associated opportunities for children, families, and communities, and the growing understanding of the power of participation in live orchestral music.

### About the Study

In answer to a call from the Buck Family Foundation, the Longy School of Music of Bard College and arts research firm WolfBrown formed a partnership to carry out a multi-year study of the benefits of El Sistema-inspired programs for the children they serve. Based on its interest in the vitality of symphony orchestras, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation contributed additional funding to investigate the intersection of professional and youth orchestras with El Sistema-inspired programming. This summer, the Buck Family Foundation committed funding to continue the study through the 2016-17 academic year.

After an open call and application for participation, researchers selected eleven Core Sites that offer music programs to young children using a variety of approaches. These sites represent a cross-section of the national landscape of El Sistema-inspired programs, featuring a mix of in-school and after-school programs in urban and suburban areas situated in communities across the U.S. We also have a network of Collaborating Sites that are following the work and deciding how they might want to participate.

(continued)

## Core Sites

Conservatory Lab Charter School (Boston, MA)  
Incredible Children's Art Network  
(Santa Barbara, CA)  
Kalamazoo Kids in Tune (Kalamazoo, MI)  
KidZNotes (Durham, NC)  
Miami Music Project (Miami, FL)  
New Jersey Symphony Orchestra CHAMPS  
(Newark, NJ)  
OrchKids (Baltimore, MD)  
The People's Music School Youth Orchestras  
(Chicago, IL)  
Play On Philly (Philadelphia, PA)  
Reno Philharmonic (Reno, NV)  
San Diego Youth Symphony Orchestra  
Community Opus Project (San Diego, CA)

## The Work So Far

During our pilot year, 2014-15, staff and teachers at Core Sites field-tested two sets of common measures with children in grades 2-4. By beginning at such a young age, we laid the foundation for a longitudinal study that would follow young musicians across multiple years. The common measures included:

- **Measures of Musical Growth:** El Sistema-inspired programs are centered on using the excitement and joy of making music to open up possibilities and, eventually, to change lives. Consequently, it is vital to track what children are learning as musicians in terms of technique, skills, expression, and self-confidence. Based on what we learned in our pilot year, children participating in the study in 2015-16 will play two short excerpts: a common leveled excerpt (taken from the Royal Conservatory of Music repertoire used worldwide) that they rehearse once, and one excerpt that is familiar to them from their local orchestral repertoire. Evaluators rate children on multiple dimensions at the opening and close of each program year. This will allow us to track how children grow and improve musically within and across years in the program. Not incidentally, the development of this system also provides the teachers with a common language for thinking about musical growth and how to support it.
- **Measures of Socio-emotional Growth:** Earlier research with other music and enrichment programs suggests that participating in El Sistema-inspired programs may build skills like focus, persistence, effort, and empathy that are key to engaging and thriving throughout life. To look at this more closely, we ask children to fill out two booklets: one in which they report on their behavior and

attitudes in their regular school day and one in which they report on how they experience themselves in their music program. This comparison will provide new insights into whether musical learning provides distinctive opportunities for developing these important skills.

## Additional Features of the Study

- We are collecting academic information and teacher reports about behavior and engagement levels so as to examine the intersection of these important markers of youth development with participation in El Sistema-inspired music programs.
- Each of the core sites has the opportunity to develop a set of site specific measures that explore aspects of learning important in their local environments – such as executive function or family engagement
- Joining our team for the 2015-16 data collection are two Research Fellows, Angelica Cortez and Jennifer Johnson, who are recent graduates of Longy's Master of Arts in Teaching program. Angelica and Jennifer assist the Research Team in various capacities and will travel to sites this fall to support the music performance measures at each site.
- At the completion of the study, the team will publish a report for the wider El Sistema field. The measures will be posted on the study's website (see, [www.wolfbrown.com](http://www.wolfbrown.com)), available for any El Sistema-inspired program to use at its own site.

## For More Information

- At the Take A Stand conference in Los Angeles, please talk to **ELSJE KIBLER-VERMAAS**, Director of the MAT Program of the Longy School of Music of Bard College or **ANGELICA CORTEZ**, Research Fellow, Graduate of the MAT Program
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