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**Interchange and the St. Louis Public Schools celebrate Arts Education Month
with innovative arts integration program;
Announce public and private grants totaling \$540,000**

Thursday, March 13, 2008 – Students in Sue Turner’s fourth grade classroom transported some very special visitors back in time today during a dramatic presentation of the Civil Rights movement. It was all part of a celebration of Arts Education Month and members of Interchange were among those treated to a front row seat. The arts integration exercise at Jefferson Elementary School culminated four months of collaboration between Ms. Turner and two teaching artists through Interchange, the arts education collaborative that partners some 30+ arts and cultural organizations with the St. Louis Public Schools.

“Interchange is a community effort,” said Stephanie Riven, executive director of COCA, the community arts organization that is the convenor of Interchange. “It brings together teachers, artists, arts organizations, parents, and the community to engage and support our students in the St. Louis Public Schools.”

Interchange supports professional development of classroom teachers through collaboration with area arts and cultural organizations. As an example of Interchange’s collaborative approach, the program in Ms. Turner’s classroom brought together Metro Theater Company; teaching artists Diane Davenport and Laurie Melnik; Springboard to Learning/Young Audiences; and Wendy Saul, the Allen B. and Helen S. Shopmaker Endowed Professor of Education and International Studies in Collaboration with Springboard to Learning at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Twice a week since November, Ms. Turner’s students have participated in in-classroom dramatic re-enactment, sing-along, and writing exercises developed to bring history to life for the Jefferson students illustrating ways both teachers and students benefit when arts are woven into the broader curriculum.

“I wanted my students to really understand what it was like to be a part of the Civil Rights movement,” said Sue Turner, a teacher at Jefferson Elementary School. “Using dramatic re-enactment, song and writing made the experience real to my students. Their work as a result of this program is extraordinary. I am really proud of them.”

“The students have really been engaged in the program, re-enacting the difficult decisions people made about whether or not to participate in non-violent protests, learning music from the Civil Rights era, and writing from the point of view of participants in the Movement about their experience,” added Metro Theater Company’s Education Director/Artistic Associate Emily Petkewich. “This has been an incredibly rewarding experience for all of us.”

“On the surface, Interchange does not sound like a ground-breaking approach to education; using the arts to help illustrate fundamental concepts is a pretty basic idea,” said Interchange co-chair Bill Carson. “But as those involved in today’s presentation will tell you, it is life-changing for those who have been involved in the activities in Ms. Turner’s fourth grade classroom for the past four months.”

The exercise is part of a St. Louis Public Schools’ initiative to integrate the arts into school classrooms to help students understand complex subjects and energize their creative thinking.

“The St. Louis Public Schools system is excited about Interchange because studies show that arts learning produces results,” said Paula Knight, executive director of curriculum and instruction for the St. Louis Public Schools. “Dramatic enactment, for example, improves comprehension which leads to more reflective and expressive writing. Through Interchange we’re demonstrating that the arts engage students more deeply in learning traditional subjects like reading and math.”

St. Louis is one of nine sites across the country funded by The Ford Foundation through its Integrating the Arts and Education Reform Initiative, which supports innovative arts integration pilots in urban public school systems.

The Ford Foundation recently awarded a \$450,000 grant to COCA, the fiscal agent for Interchange, to continue and expand the pilot program. That grant has leveraged additional investment in 2008 from the Missouri Arts Council (\$45,000) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (\$45,000) for additional teacher professional development.

“We believe the arts stimulate the creative and innovative thinking Missouri needs in its future workforce and we’re impressed with the St. Louis Public Schools’ approach to integrating the arts into the classroom,” said Steve Williams, fine arts education consultant for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

“We are excited about the work of the St. Louis Public Schools to integrate arts into the curriculum and are pleased to support their efforts through a grant for professional development of classroom teachers,” said Beverly Strohmeier, executive director of the Missouri Arts Council.

“We are pleased to have the support of the Ford Foundation, MAC and DESE to improve student engagement and learning through teacher professional development that brings the arts into the classroom,” responded Superintendent Diana Bourisaw. “This support acknowledges the St. Louis Public Schools’ leadership nationally in integrating the arts into the classroom to improve student outcomes. We believe the district’s use of the arts to improve education for our children is one of the things that really sets the St. Louis Public Schools apart and we’re pleased that private and public funders agree.”

“We are excited to partner our classroom teachers with the resources of St. Louis’s arts and cultural organizations through Interchange,” added Special Administrative Board Member Melanie Adams. “This is the kind of community partnership we need to improve outcomes for the students in the St. Louis Public Schools.”

Jefferson Elementary School is one of five original pilot schools for Interchange, which is also operating in Columbia and Dunbar Elementary schools and Blewett and Stevens middle schools. Interchange is in the process of expanding to four additional schools. The Ford Foundation has challenged St. Louis to ultimately expand arts integration to all of the schools in the district.

Interchange is funded by the Ford Foundation, Missouri Arts Council, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, St. Louis Regional Arts Council and individual donors. More information about Interchange is available at www.InterchangeStLouis.org. More information about the St. Louis Public Schools is available at www.SLPS.org.

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