

The Impact of Arts Education on Student Success

by

Julia Tyson

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Introduction: What Sparked My Interest in Arts Education

I have been engaged in arts-related activities for my whole life, and it has served me well throughout my schooling and beyond. Some of my earliest and fondest memories of school took place in my Kindergarten class; I still remember some of what we learned because of how my teacher delivered content through all manner of the arts. My arts-related experiences in school have in part motivated me to become an educator myself because I want to inspire students in the same way. I have played the violin since I was six years old and was able to attend The Duke Ellington School of the Arts, an arts magnet high school in Washington, District of Columbia. I was more motivated to go to school because I needed to attend orchestra rehearsals, which I enjoyed. The arts can play a critical role in student engagement and success. My high school's 98% graduation rate in 2018, 29% higher than D.C.'s average, is a testimony to the power of the arts in education (DCPS, 2018).

I am incredibly fortunate to have been exposed to such a rich array of the arts from a young age; however, these are not opportunities or experiences that most students are able to have. I have seen the positive impact that the arts can have on me and my classmates, and I believe in the good the arts can do for students of all ages and at all levels. There is significant research supporting this idea and successful programs that serve as proof of the power of the arts in fostering the education of students.

The History of Arts Education in American Schools

The Beginning of Arts Curriculum

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When Horace Mann began the public school movement in the 1830s, he advocated for various art forms to be included in the curriculum. He believed that the arts engaged a person's rational, emotional, and physical faculties and contributed to their overall mental power (Raber, 2017). Fifty years later, however, a committee appointed to standardize high school curriculum did away with art subjects because they "lacked the mental-disciplinary value of academic subjects" (Raber, 2017). This mindset largely persisted and was strengthened after Sputnik I was launched by the Soviet Union in 1957; the curriculum emphasis moved to science and math because the United States wanted to educate individuals who could compete with those of the Soviet Union. In the mid- to late-1900s, that mindset began to change as the United States worked towards providing an equal public education to all.

Curriculum Development Today

Among the states, the development and control of arts education curriculum is shared by politicians, administrators, educators, and parents (Lehman, 1995). There are often differences between what these four decision-making groups want in terms of arts education. The official curriculum is developed by various levels of officials, ranging from state boards of education to school principals and perhaps classroom teachers. The majority of arts teachers have little to no influence on curriculum development, despite the fact that they are the ones responsible for teaching it. Arts educators find themselves pulled in several directions at once—they need to teach the curriculum outlined by their schools, while also trying to appeal to the desires of parents and community members, all of this while wanting to engage the students. Furthermore, arts teachers frequently lack the basic resources and supplies to teach what they are required to teach. Lehman states

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that the overall goal should be for the four bodies, politicians, administrators, educators, and parents, to work together to build a cohesive and realistic curriculum, as opposed to all fighting for different priorities and ultimately putting stress on the arts teachers themselves.

The Evolution of Educational Acts Impacting Arts Education: ESEA to NCLB to ESSA

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), passed as a part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty campaign, reshaped public education in the United States. Its main purpose was to provide federal funding to improve instruction at impoverished or low achieving schools, the goal being to close the achievement gap of students in those schools and more affluent suburban schools. It did so mainly through the designation of Title I schools, or schools with over 40% of their population from low-income families, and providing federal funding to improve instruction at those schools. Although ESEA did not specifically outline the use of funds for arts education, it helped build the foundation of today's public education system. ESEA evolved over time throughout multiple presidential administrations, but still kept its core purpose of providing funding to Title I schools. It evolved into the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), put into place by the George W. Bush Administration in 2002. No Child Left Behind significantly increased the demands of the United States education system out of fear that it was no longer "internationally competitive" (Klein, 2015). One requirement of NCLB was that teachers be "highly qualified," meaning they have a college degree in the grade and subject area to which they are assigned and state certification to be a teacher (Klein, 2015). This had an assumed positive impact on education, including arts

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education, because it meant that teachers had to be more educated in their content areas and possess effective teaching practices.

Beyond teacher qualifications, NCLB required much more rigorous high stakes testing in schools based on approved national and state curriculum standards, something that was a new addition to public education. Until 2015, NCLB required that students be tested annually from third through eighth grade on reading and math, and once between 10th and 12th grade in English, science, and math to track student and school performance (Lee, 2015). Schools were required to set annual goals for improvement in academic performance based on state standards to meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP), which was set by the state board of education. Along with mandatory reporting of scores to parents, test scores were also monitored by the state departments of education. This requirement was especially impactful for Title I schools outlined in ESEA; they risked having new school leadership forced upon them or even being closed if they did not meet the AYP. If a school did not attain AYP for two consecutive years, parents were allowed to transfer their child to another school at the school's expense. Schools not meeting AYP three years in a row were forced to put aside 10% of their federal funding to use towards free tutoring and other intervention methods to increase performance. They also became subject to local and state assessment committees. This took resources away from areas seen as non-essential, particularly arts education.

NCLB has been harshly criticized for a number of reasons. The new academic measures and requirements did not significantly improve test scores or school performance. Furthermore, teachers had to direct their instruction to the content of the tests, namely math and reading, which left less time and resources for so-called

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nonessential subjects like social studies, science, and the arts. F. Robert Sabol, a professor at Purdue University and president of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), did a study in 2010 regarding art teachers' opinions of the No Child Left Behind Act. Ninety-one percent of the over 3,000 randomly selected members of the NAEA stated that they were highly qualified by the NCLB's definition of having at least a bachelor's degree and state certification (Sabol, 2010). However, only 22% of respondents agreed that NCLB contributed to their being highly qualified; the rest said that they were highly qualified before NCLB. Overall, respondents agreed that NCLB had "negative effects on scheduling, workloads, and funding for their art education programs" (Sabol, 2010).

After 13 years of No Child Left Behind, the congress under President Obama reauthorized ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This act gave states more authority in determining their educational goals within a federal educational framework and monitoring them through "accountability indicators," which included measures like academic achievement and graduation rates (Lee, 2018). ESSA still places importance on helping schools struggling with academic achievement and progress and still allots federal funding to Title I schools, especially to support literacy development. However, ESSA placed great importance on giving students a "well-rounded education," which spans far beyond literacy and math; the law defines "well-rounded" as including visual art and music, among many other subjects (Walker, 2016).

Today, arts education curriculum varies by state and district across the United States, as allowed under ESSA. If the arts are defined as a core academic subject by a

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state, then it is more able to get federal funds to support arts education. According to the Arts Education Partnership (2014), only 27 states considered the arts to be a core academic subject (Figure 1). Voluntary standards for arts education were published in 1994 to provide guidance for states to develop their curriculum, long before No Child Left Behind or Every Student Succeeds, although many states decided to develop their own standards. Forty-five states have instructional requirements in place in regards to arts education, meaning those individual states have dictated “content, frequency, and duration of instruction, and qualifications for delivery of instruction” for different grade levels. Despite these nationwide standards, millions of elementary school students each year receive little to no specific arts education, the majority of whom attend high-poverty schools. This is devastating because low-income students can benefit most from arts instruction; studies have shown that students with low socioeconomic status who have had high involvement in the arts were less likely to drop out of school (Americans for the Arts, 2013). The Arts Education Partnership describes this as the “policy paradox,” wherein state policies do not reach local schools due to budget deficits or lack of resources. Because the majority of states do not require assessments in arts instruction, there is no data to show to what extent students are getting arts education, if at all. This makes arts education policies incredibly difficult to enforce because there is no verifiable evidence for arts instruction.

The Maryland State Department of Education considers the arts to be a core academic subject, thus listing art, music, dance, and drama/theater under that umbrella on their website (Maryland State Department of Education, 2003). The state published Fine Arts/Visual Arts voluntary standards in 2008 (MSDE, 2008). Maryland was also one of

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the first school systems in the United States to make arts credit a high school graduation requirement in 1989, as detailed on the Maryland Fine Arts Education Instructional Toolkit (2006) website. In order to graduate from a public high school in Maryland, students are required to take at least one credit in one of the following fine arts subject areas: dance, music, theater, or visual arts.

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Figure 1.

Requirement	Number of States
Arts as a Core Academic Subject	27 (Including Maryland)
Early Childhood Arts Education Standards	45 (Including Maryland & Washington, D.C.)
Elementary and Secondary Arts Education Standards	50 (Including Maryland & Washington, D.C.)
Arts Education Instructional Requirement—Elementary School	45 (Including Maryland)
Arts Education Instructional Requirement—Middle School	45 (Including Maryland)
Arts Education Instructional Requirement—High School	42 (Including Maryland)
Arts Requirements for High School Graduation	26 (Including Maryland & Washington, D.C.)
Arts Alternatives for High School Graduation	18
Arts Education Assessment Requirements	17
Arts Education Requirements for State Accreditation	16 (Including Maryland)
Licensure Requirements for Non-Arts Teachers	34 (Including Washington, D.C.)
Licensure Requirements for Arts Teachers	42 (Including Maryland & Washington, D.C.)
State Arts Education Grant Program or School for the Arts	19

As of 2014 curriculum updates, Washington, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) does not consider the arts to be a core academic subject (AEP, 2014). Consequently, it does not enforce requirements in arts education; instead it provides recommendations for instruction. It is suggested that elementary school students in DCPS receive at least 45 minutes of music and visual arts instruction each week, and middle schoolers should have

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at least one semester of music and one semester of visual art instruction per year. High school requirements are more structured because the District of Columbia also requires fine arts credits for students to receive a diploma—at least a half credit in both music and visual art at some point during their high school education (DCPS, 2017). However, DCPS also says that students will have “exposure to a wide range of art forms through field trips, residencies and assemblies” due to the rich arts culture in the city.

DCPS has made partnerships in the arts throughout the city, one of them being Fillmore Arts Center, which I attended throughout elementary school. That particular program consists of one half-day per week of high quality arts classes in dance, music, theater, visual arts, or digital/media arts. Programs like these are very beneficial because they have more concentrated resources and are able to provide a more intensive arts education.

Decline in Arts Education

Lack of Funding

Despite the Every Student Succeeds Act, which has the potential to have a positive impact on arts education, funding is still a significant barrier standing between schools and arts education. Because of the emphasis on judging schools based on students’ scores on reading and math high stakes testing, federal funding for arts education has become so scarce that many school districts have been forced to cut arts programs in order to keep up with the demands for perceived essential subjects like reading and math. Consequently, many school districts rely on private funding to keep their arts programs running. For instance, the biggest arts education program in Baltimore

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is funded and run by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, not through government leadership or funding (Midgette, 2013). Arts in Education, a large program through the Department of Education that awards grants to help educate arts teachers received \$0 of funding in 2013 and 2014 (US Dept. Ed., 2019), which understandably had a significant impact on the standing of arts education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Teachers are expected to be ‘highly qualified’ as outlined in No Child Left Behind; however, removing funding from a program that helps educate arts teachers decreases the number of arts teachers who are able to work in schools, therefore meaning fewer children are able to access arts education.

Although arts education saw some improvement under President Obama’s Every Student Succeeds Act, funding is once again in danger under the current presidential administration. The proposed budget for 2019 eliminates federal funding for The National Endowment for the Arts (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2019), a valuable national program that provides funding for the arts in every congressional district in the country in 2015 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). This will have an incredible negative impact on schools’ ability to provide quality arts education to their students due to a decrease in resources available to them.

Increased Testing of Academic Subjects

Due to the stricter academic testing requirements since the No Child Left Behind legislation, schools are being forced to focus more on language arts and math, often at the expense of other subjects, including the arts. A national survey by the Farkas Duffett Research Group (2014) found that 81% of elementary school teachers feel that ‘other subjects’ like the arts are crowded out of the curriculum to make more space for math and

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language arts; 62% of middle school teachers and 54% of high school teachers felt the same way. Thus, 66% of teachers, or two-thirds of the educators surveyed felt that arts education is not given sufficient time in schools, leading to what is referred to as curriculum narrowing.

Approximately half of the teachers from that survey felt that art and music classes have had decreasing focus placed on them in the past decade, and 63% of participants believed that “the school system has failed to do its job” if students graduate with solid skills in *only* math and language arts and not in ‘other subjects,’ including the arts, social studies, and science. Many of those teachers particularly emphasized the importance and necessity of electives for lower-achieving students in keeping them engaged and motivated in school. Overall, the study indicated that “curriculum narrowing is more prevalent in elementary schools” (Farkas Duffett Research Group, 2012).

Availability of Different Art Disciplines

The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) published a comparison of the availability of arts education in public elementary schools during two school years: 1999-2000 and 2009-2010. Music education was offered in 94% of schools for both of those school years, whereas visual arts was taught in 87% in 1999 but decreased to 83% by 2009. Dance and theater education saw even sharper declines—not only were they only offered in 20% of schools to begin with, they decreased to 3% and 4% respectively in 2009-2010. In other words, in the 2009-2010 school year, 96% of public elementary schools did not offer drama or theater classes, and 97% did not offer dance instruction. Millions of America’s elementary school students do not get exposure to drama and dance in school or ever. Although it may seem as if music education is faring better,

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about 1.3 million students make up the 6% of schools that do not provide music education, and that is 1.3 million students too many who are not exposed to music in schools.

Data on secondary schools collected in the same report had similar findings; music and visual art education were offered at more schools than drama and dance in years 1999-2000 and 2008-2009. Music education increased slightly from 90% in 1999 to 91% in 2008, but visual art instruction was offered at 89% of schools in 2009, 4% less than in 1999. Just as in primary schools, dance was offered the least of the four subjects; however, it was offered at 14% of secondary schools in 1999 and had decreased to 12% by 2008. Drama, conversely, was offered at 45% of secondary schools in 2008, a 3% decrease from 1999 but still over 40% more frequently than in primary schools. In 2008-2009, only 57% of public secondary schools included any arts courses in their graduation requirements. Although that was up 5% from 1999, that number still leaves the possibility that almost half of public secondary students in the United States did not take any arts classes before they graduated (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

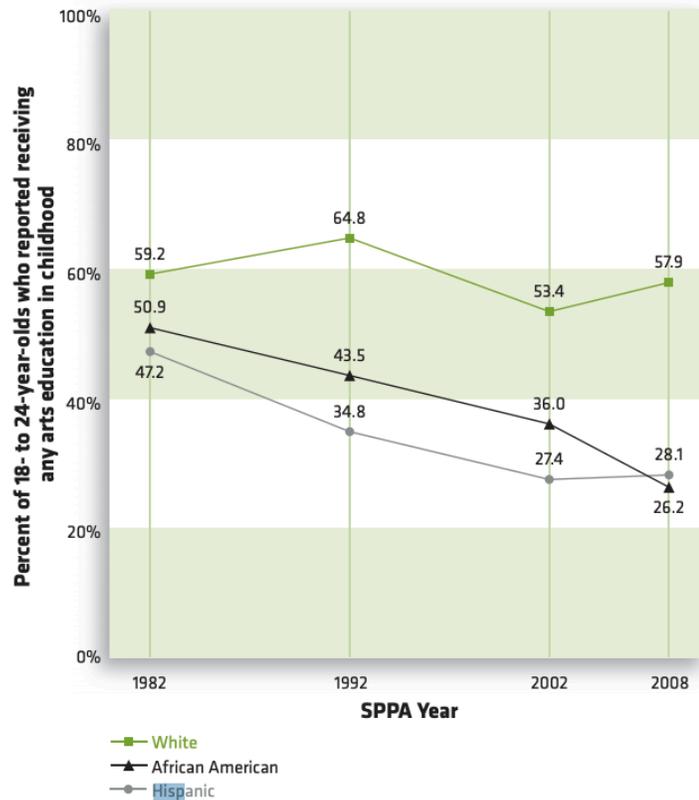
The lack of access to arts education is not evenly distributed throughout America's students. Rabkin and Hedberg (2008), compiled research from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts from 1982 to 2008 and asked 18- to 24-year-olds if they had received arts education. Participation of white students in arts education started at 59.2% in 1982 and fluctuated mildly throughout that time, the lowest percentage being 53.4% in 2002. Participation rates in arts education was very different for African American and Hispanic students, however. The highest percentage of participation from either African American or Hispanic students, 50.9% and 47.2% respectively, was lower

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than the lowest level of participation from white students, and it only declined from there. In 1982, about half of Black and Hispanic students received some form of arts education, but that decreased to under 30% for both groups by 2008 (NEA, 2011) (Figure 2.).

Figure 2.

Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by race/ethnicity and SPPA year⁷



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

Research Supporting the Positive Impact of Arts Education

This decline in arts education is unfortunate because there is significant research supporting the fact that arts education is beneficial in many ways, for a wide range of ages both inside and outside the classroom. Starting from preschool, inclusion of arts

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education in the curriculum showed increased parent involvement and attendance, characteristics that led to greater achievement in schooling after preschool (Baker, 1992). Elementary school students who participated in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's program, Learning Through Art, performed better in literacy than those who were not in the program. Teenagers with lower socioeconomic status who had long term involvement in the arts got better grades in school and had a higher rate of enrollment in college (National Endowment for the Arts, 2012).

Successful Arts Integration Programs Impacting Achievement

Turnaround Arts is one widespread arts education initiative providing evidence of the positive impacts of art in schools. The Turnaround Arts program was implemented by Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center at several low-achieving schools around the country in the hopes of improving academic progress. The study looked at changes in standardized test scores by percentage points in reading and math at eight pilot schools from 2011 to 2014. Seven of the eight schools showed improvement in reading proficiency, while six of the eight schools showed improvement in math proficiency rates. Of those six schools, three schools improved math proficiency by at least ten percentage points. Overall, there was a 22.5% improvement in math proficiency and a 12.62% increase in reading proficiency. This data was contextualized by the proficiency of other elementary schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG Schools), or schools with low achievement comparable to that of the Turnaround Arts schools that are given federal grants to try to improve academic performance. The Turnaround Arts

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schools improved math proficiency 6.35 percentage points more and reading proficiency 7.04 percentage points more than other SIG schools. Even beyond that, Turnaround Arts schools showed more proficiency improvement than the average school district in the United States—math by 2.42 points and reading by 4.7 points.

Beyond improved academic achievement, Turnaround Arts schools showed consistently high attendance, with half of the schools showing increased attendance from 2011 to 2014. By 2014, the average attendance rate in the Turnaround Arts schools was 91.77%. The study also looked at disciplinary action taking place in Turnaround Arts schools; over half of the schools had a significant decrease in student suspensions and/or expulsions. The most drastic results took place at Orchard Gardens School in Massachusetts; the school had an 85.9% decrease in suspensions from 2011 to 2014 and zero expulsions in 2014. Over 75% of teachers and school administrators said that they saw decreased classroom disturbances and increased student focus over the course of the study (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2015).

Music Center of Los Angeles County

The Music Center Education Division of Los Angeles started an artist-in-residence program that served as another example of the positive impact of arts integration on student achievement. For the school year 1989-1990, MCED placed 25 artists-in-residence at 31 schools, working with a total of 331 classrooms ranging from Kindergarten to 9th grade (Redfield, 1990). These artists were experts in either dance, drama, music, visual arts, or writing. A study done by D. L. Redfield at the University of California (1990), examined the impact of MCED's artist-in-residence initiative. Attendance data, grades, surveys, interviews, and observations were collected from 65 of

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the classrooms across 11 schools before and after the program to analyze its effectiveness.

Three of the elementary schools participating had their grades monitored in various subjects on both achievement and effort. A 4-point grading scale was used, with 4.0 being equivalent to an A, 3.0 being equivalent to a B, and so on. Average grades in both effort and achievement increased by the end of program (Redfield, 1990). At school C, the average math achievement grade before the program was a 1.80; after the program that grade had increased to a 2.16, surpassing the satisfactory grade (Redfield, p. 159). School A's English as a Second Language achievement improved by almost .40 points from a 2.42 to a 2.83. All three schools saw an increase in students obeying school rules.

Furthermore, students participating in the program had fewer school absences and late arrivals to school than those who were not participating. Responses on student questionnaires also reported that students "felt that they gained in knowledge and skills; experienced positive feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, pride in their accomplishments" after participating in the artist in residence workshops (Redfield, 1990, p. 45). Observations in a first grade visual art class showed that by the end of the workshop, every single student raised their hand and volunteered participation in the lesson, a contrast to the first observation. The observer also noted student enthusiasm in showing their work to others and praising one another's' efforts.

A+ Schools is an arts integration program that was started in North Carolina in 1995, but has since spread to several other states including Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania. Its goal is to use "interdisciplinary teaching and daily arts instruction" to improve school performance in low-income schools (North Carolina Arts Council, 2018).

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Before the program begins at any school, all staff members receive intensive 5-day training about interdisciplinary instruction, hands-on learning, and how to use various strategies to successfully implement the program. The program is centered around six core commitments that include “increase exposure to arts instruction” and “increase professional collaboration” to help guide schools (Noblit, Corbett, Wilson, & McKinney, 2009).

The A+ Schools program has data supporting their success. Data from an A+ school in Oklahoma City were compared with ‘matched cohorts,’ or other local schools with similar demographic makeup. 72% of A+ School students scored satisfactory or advanced on the state standardized math test while only 65% of non A+ schools in Oklahoma City scored satisfactory or advanced (Kimball, 2006). In addition, 70% A+ Schools students compared to 66% of similar students scored satisfactory or advanced on statewide standardized reading tests (Kimball, 2006).

Boston Public Schools Arts Expansion Initiative began in 2009 with the goal of increasing access to high quality arts education for students in Pre-k through 8th grade. The Boston school district partnered with private funders with the goal of providing every Pre-K through 8th grade student with arts instruction once a week. From 2009 to 2018, there was a 28% increase, almost 17,000 more students who received art instruction every week (BPS, 2018). This initiative had far-reaching positive impact. Student performances “open a window to positive interaction between students and teachers”; students are so enthusiastically engaged in their art that they are willing to share that and become closer with their teachers (BPS, 2013).

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Parents and families are also drawn in by their students' enthusiasm and want to participate in arts-related school events. Andrew Bott, who is the principal of a public K-8 school in Boston, said that schools are able to use that parent interest in the arts to further engage them in school participation for more academic-related events.

An Overview of Research

Positive Impact on Reading Achievement

Inoa, Weltsec, and Tabone (2015) examined student scores on the New Jersey Assessments of Skills and Knowledge to see if the scores differed between students in the Integrating Theater Arts Project (ITAP) and standard classrooms. The study compared the scores of 1,193 6th and 7th grade students in an urban school district; 464 were in the control group (no arts integration), and the remaining 729 were in the treatment group (arts integration). The scores were measured in terms of proficiency for grade level standards. Of the 647 6th grade participants, 274 were in the treatment group and 373 were in the comparison group. In the control group, 38.7% of students were proficient in Language Arts Literacy, while 46.4%, almost half, of students in the treatment group were proficient for their grade level, meaning they passed the state assessment. The differences between 7th grade treatment and control group scores were less significant; however, there was still an almost 5% increase in treatment group students who were proficient in Language Arts Literacy (figure 3).

Figure 3.

	Sixth Grade	Seventh Grade
ITAP Math	50.9%	43.8%

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Traditional Math	39.4%	41.6%
ITAP Language Arts	46.4%	57.3%
Traditional Language Arts	38.7%	53.7%

Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on New Jersey Assessments of Skills and Knowledge Test

Positive Impact on Math Achievement

Inoa, Weltsec, and Tabone (2015) also examined the impact of arts integration on math test scores. Again, the 6th grade scores had a more significant difference in proficiency at over 10%—50.9% of students in the treatment group passed the state exam while only 39.4% of students in the control group passed the exam (Inoa, Weltsec, & Tabone 2014). 7th grade results showed that 43.8% of students in the treatment group passed the exam while 41.6% of the control group passed (figure 3).

B. H. Helmrich (2010) compared the Maryland Algebra/Data Analysis High School Assessment results of 6,026 9th graders from six school districts in the state of Maryland to see if their scores were impacted by participation in music education. The assessment is required for graduation from high school in the state of Maryland, suggesting that students were more inclined to do their best work. Students in the sample were categorized by the music instruction, or lack thereof, they had received: instrumental, choral, or neither. 90.62% of students who received instrumental instruction passed the assessment. A lesser percentage of choral students passed at 81.51%, and 75.03% of students receiving neither passed the assessment (Helmrich 2010).

Increased attendance

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Increased attendance has been noted after the implementation of various arts programs in schools. Overall, attendance rates in Turnaround Arts schools improved after the program was implemented. Most significantly, the attendance rate at Martin Luther King School in Oregon increased from 94% to over 98% from 2011-2014. Attendance at Roosevelt School in Connecticut rose over 2% after the program was implemented. Unrelated to Turnaround Arts, daily attendance at Roosevelt Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, rose from 85% to 92% after the implementation of an arts-infusion program (Fowler and McMullen, 1991). School districts in Missouri with a high rate of participation in arts classes had a 95.1% attendance rate, which is higher than that of districts with lower participation in arts classes.

From 2007-2011, the Teaching Artist Program was implemented in elementary schools in the San Diego Unified School District to “expand the availability of high-quality arts instruction” to schools lacking in that area with the goal of increasing engagement of English Language Learner students (Brouillette et al., 2014). Researchers at the University of California, Irvine took the implementation of this program as an opportunity to examine the impact of arts education on student attendance at five Title-I schools with high percentages of English Language Learner students. The study examined attendance of Kindergarten-2nd grade students on days with arts classes versus days without arts classes. Attendance averages from the five schools during the 2008-2009 school year showed increased attendance on days that arts classes were taught (Brouillette et al., 2014). The overall average attendance on days with arts classes was 94.41%, while on days without arts instruction the percentage was 93.49%, a 0.92 percentage point difference.

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Student Engagement

The arts have frequently served as a tool to engage students of all backgrounds in academic work. A paper released by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (2014) outlines many of the benefits of arts integration. One such benefit is that arts integration can be used to differentiate instruction and make content accessible to all different types of learners and “reach all students of every ability, ethnicity, and linguistic background” (Taylor, 2014). Allowing teachers to reach all students in a meaningful way can enable them to build stronger relationships and further learning in the classroom through trust and understanding. The author also points out that arts integration can serve as “a vehicle for strengthening the core curriculum, and deepening and assessing learning.” Integrating the arts into everyday instruction helps students contextualize academic skills and see the value and relevance in what they are learning, making them be more engaged in school. Furthermore, arts integration often helps students “develop, deepen and demonstrate their learning in other content areas” (Taylor, 2014).

Decreased Disciplinary Action

There has been a decline in disciplinary action in many schools with increased arts education. In the Turnaround Arts Program, over half of schools participating had a decrease in student suspensions and expulsions. (President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2015). Similarly, after becoming an arts magnet school, Roosevelt Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin had suspension rates that were at least 8% lower than that of the rest of the county’s public schools (Fowler and McMullen, 1991). A study by the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education found that violent incidents decreased with

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increased participation in arts classes (Schueler, 2010). The principal of Integrated Arts Academy in Burlington, Vermont, noted that the arts provided a way for English Language Learners to communicate with their peers and express themselves effectively, leading to a sharp decline in discipline referrals (Sterman, 2018). Of teachers participating in the Teacher Artist Program in San Diego, 93% reported that students were behaving better due to involvement in arts classes (Brouillette et al., 2014). An Arts Access Initiative study for Houston found that an increase in arts education experiences led to a 3.6 percentage point decrease in students receiving disciplinary infractions (Bowen and Kisida, 2019).

Higher Graduation Rate and Lower Dropout Rate

The Missouri Alliance for Arts Education published a study in 2010 that analyzed graduation rates, among other things, in comparison to the students' level of involvement in the arts in various school districts. The graduation rate decreased as the level of arts involvement did. School districts with high participation in the arts had a 91.2% graduation rate, while districts with low participation had only an 87.9% graduation rate (Schueler, 2010). Batiste Cultural Arts Academy in New Orleans, Louisiana, one of the pilot schools for Turnaround Arts, showed an incredible increase in students on track to attend college. Within just the first two years of the program being implemented, 55% of students were on track to graduate, more than twice the starting rate of 21% (Gross, Gustafson, Beete, & Gallant, 2013).

A study by the Arts Education Partnership in Washington, D.C., found similar results; students with high involvement in the arts were less likely to drop out of school than those who were not (Deasy, 2002). The National Endowment for the Arts published

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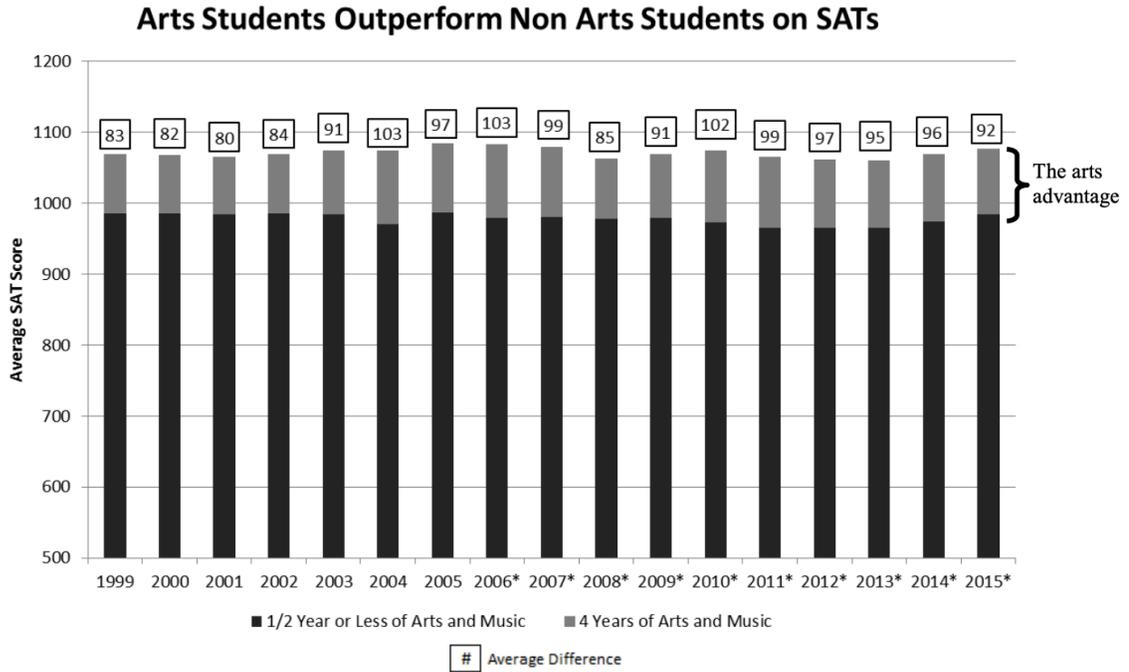
facts and figures about art education in 2013, stating that students with a low socioeconomic status who had high participation in the arts had a dropout rate of only 4%—5 times lower than their peers with less involvement in the arts (Americans for the Arts, 2013).

A study in Hawai'i on the impact of Arts on Learning found that of 8th graders with low arts involvement, 4.8% dropped out of school by 10th grade, while that percentage was only 1.4% for students with high arts involvement (Hawai'i Educational Policy Center, 2004).

Higher SAT Scores

The positive impact of arts education is also represented in SAT and standardized test scores. In “Critical Evidence” published by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), students who participated in four years of arts education courses earned higher SAT scores than their peers with less than one year of arts classes (Ruppert, 2006). The Americans for the Arts released a report in 2015 highlighting the difference in SAT scores for students who took 4 years of arts and music versus students who took ½ year or less (Americans for the Arts, 2015) (Figure 4).

Figure 4.



Drama Participation Linked to Improved Reading Skills

Ann Podlozny, of the University of Illinois compiled several studies on the effect of drama on student comprehension and ability to retell stories (Podlozny, 2000). One study compared the oral comprehension of two randomly assigned groups of students; one group was read aloud a story and asked to enact it, while the other group was read the story aloud twice. Both groups were then given an oral comprehension test. Of the 200 students participating, 64 of the students acting out the story demonstrated a higher level of comprehension, whereas only 36 non-drama students demonstrated a higher level of comprehension. Another study that tested student comprehension through a written test as opposed to an oral test showed similar results. The control group participated in a group discussion and vocabulary drills related to the story they read; the treatment group acted

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out the story they had read. Of those 200 students participating, 74 drama students exhibited a higher level of comprehension in comparison to only 26 non-drama students.

A third study measured the reading achievement of both students participating in drama treatment and those not. Their reading achievement was measured through unrelated standardized tests on stories they did not act out. This study hoped to measure students' ability to "transfer any reading comprehension skills they had gained during the drama instruction" (Podlozny, 2000). This study revealed that 60 of the drama students participating, or 9%, showed improved reading achievement. A meta-analysis of 18 studies measuring the reading readiness of young children also required that students transfer their comprehension skills from drama to unrelated tests, but this analysis also showed an increased reading readiness in students who participated in the drama treatment. Sixty-two drama students showed higher reading readiness in comparison to the 38 non-drama students, equating to 12% of students who benefited from drama treatment. Similar analyses also found that drama treatment contributed to higher vocabulary achievement in 7% of students participating.

Music Education Linked with Development of Spatial Intelligence

Frances Rauscher, University of Wisconsin (1999), compiled research regarding the neurological changes that can result from music instruction from a young age. Particularly affected are spatial-temporal reasoning, which help children visualize aspects of a problem and connect them to solve it, a skill that is especially helpful in math. Rauscher conducted a few different studies to analyze the impact that music education had on young children. The results were measured with a standardized intelligence test: the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence: Revised (WPPSI:R). When

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comparing test results of 10 three-year-old subjects from before and after nine months of music training, the spatial-temporal skills of those participating improved 47% more than national norms (Rauscher, 1993). A similar study conducted one year later using the same intelligence test revealed similar results. A control group of 14 three-year-old subjects received no music lessons while a treatment group of 19 three-year-old subjects received 8 months of piano lessons. The music group had intelligence scores “significantly higher” than those in the control group (Rauscher, 1994). The same researchers conducted another study in 1997, this time comparing WPPSI:R scores of 78 preschoolers in one of four conditions over the course of 8 months: piano lessons, singing lessons, computer lessons, and no lessons. Again, the spatial-temporal skills of children who received individual piano lessons were higher than those of any other group in the study.

These results were then compared to students who received group piano lessons in a “hectic classroom environment” to see if the context of the lessons played a role in the scores. Rauscher tested the spatial-temporal skills of 62 kindergarten students, 34 of whom received group piano lessons and 28 of whom received no lessons for 8 months. Student performance on two spatial-temporal tasks, puzzle solving and block building, were compared from the start of the 8 months, 4 months in, and at the end of the 8 months. The puzzle building task was assessed in terms of how many puzzle pieces a student joined per minute. Both groups started with between 3-6 joins per minute, however the piano lesson group showed remarkable improvement by the end of the study. The music group joined between 12-15 pieces after 8 months, while the no music group joined only between 6-9 pieces. The block building task was measured by the number of

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seconds a child required to complete a structure. Again, although both groups started out with taking over 75 seconds to build the structure, the music group decreased that time by 66%. The music group could complete the building in just over 25 seconds by the end of the 8 months, whereas the non-music group still took close to 60 seconds (Rauscher et al., 1997).

The researchers continued the study into first grade, and students who received consistent music lessons continued to have significantly higher scores on the spatial-temporal tasks. The study was also repeated at different schools using different intelligence tests, and all showed the same results that students with music lessons had higher spatial-temporal abilities. Such abilities are extremely beneficial in students' mathematical skills and abilities as well as in other academic subjects. This provides a link between music instruction and general intelligence, meaning that students who participate in music education are likely to do better academically in school. Rauscher (2003) states that "music may act as a catalyst for cognitive abilities in other disciplines".

Beyond Quantitative Achievement Data

Arts education helps students develop deeper learning skills, defined by the Arts Education Partnership as "skills and knowledge students need to attain success in college, career and citizenship" (Workman, 2017). These skills include critical thinking, the ability to collaborate with others, and better communication skills. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) outlined several of the reasons the arts are crucial to child development in the elementary school years—it helps with motor skill development, decision making skills, and cultural awareness, among other things (Lynch, 2012).

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The Music Center of Los Angeles incorporated workshops with artists in residence in local elementary schools to analyze the impact of the arts on students there. Student questionnaires and comparisons of pre- and post-workshop report cards show that students had increased academic knowledge and skills after their participation in the arts workshops. Writing portfolios, interviews, and classroom observations showed evidence of students “learning how to express themselves better in writing, by speaking in front of others, and by acting out their feelings” (Redfield, 1990).

Social Skills

A study by Lobo & Winsler (2006) examined the impact that a dance and movement class had on Head Start preschool students’ social skills (Lobo & Winsler, 2006). The study compared cooperation, communication, belonging to a group, leading, following, and awareness of others in two randomly assigned groups of students at the preschool, one participating in an eight-week instructional program in creative dance/movement, and the other not. Lobo and Winsler’s research found that students participating in the dance/movement program showed significant gains in their social skills and significant reductions in their behavior problems by the end of the program (Lobo & Winsler, 2006). One student in particular started the program withdrawn and refusing to participate, but by the end of the third week was fully participating and “dancing freely.”

School Readiness

A study conducted in Philadelphia examined the impact of arts integration in Head Start preschool programs on school readiness (Brown, Garnett, Velazquez-Martin, & Mellor, 2018). The study compared the school readiness of students attending two

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preschools. Both were Head Start certified schools, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Head Start curriculum requires that there be some arts integration in homeroom classes, however one of the schools in the study offered 1-3 additional 45-minute long arts classes a day, taught by credentialed arts teachers. School readiness was measured using the Bracken Basic Concepts Scale, 3rd edition, Receptive (BBCS:3-r), which was “designed to test concepts necessary for children to effectively communicate about their world, follow directions, and succeed in formal schooling” (Bracken, 2006). The BBCS:3-r is administered in 30-40 minutes to individual students once in the fall and once in the spring of a school year. The assessment is broken into 10 subtests that measure everything from letters and numbers to self/social awareness and time/sequence, the scores of which are combined to make a general school readiness composite (SRC).

According to the results of the BBCS:3-r, students at the arts integrated preschool showed “significantly greater growth than would be expected from a normative sample” in overall school readiness, direction/position, and self/social awareness. Children at the non-arts-integration preschool, however, showed “significantly less growth than would be expected” in self/social awareness and understanding of texture/material and time/sequence. The authors conclude that “the arts may hold value not only for art’s sake but also for advancing children’s overall school readiness” (Brown, Garnett, Velazquez-Martin, & Mellor, 2018).

Solutions to Increase Arts Education

So what can be done about the detrimental decline in arts education? The vast majority of public schools in the United States have little to no choice in what they teach;

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they have to follow the Common Core standards outlined by their state. Common Core curriculum developers realize this, however, and have released some methods for schools to use to ensure that students are still getting exposure to the arts in their general classroom education. A ‘curriculum map’ was published with ideas for teachers to incorporate the arts into English Language Arts lessons from Kindergarten to 5th grade. These ideas include things such as having students choose a painting and write an opinion piece on why they like it, or listening to songs relevant to the lesson content and discussing them (Common Core, 2012).

The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) published “Integrating Arts Learning with the Common Core State Standards” (2014) provides practical tips for successful integration of the arts into Common Core curriculum (Taylor, 2014). The report states that “The connections made between disciplines are based on mutual concepts being taught” (Taylor, 2014). This is an essential understanding for teachers to have if they want to integrate subjects effectively, and it reminds teachers to use students’ prior knowledge as a starting point for any lesson as a foundation for students to make interdisciplinary connections. The article also emphasizes the importance of clear and reachable objectives; it supplies examples of such objectives and provides additional resources for teachers to explore. Beyond curriculum resources, the paper encourages general classroom teachers to work with arts specialists within their school to build on each other’s different strengths. It also mentions the benefits of technology and gives ideas for how teachers can incorporate various technologies into arts integrated lessons if it is available to them. The report reminds teachers of the importance of assessment—it provides various summative and

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formative assessment methods that can serve as evidence of student learning—which is critical to ensuring that students are being taught effectively.

Project based learning is one specific model for arts integration, as mentioned in the CCSESA paper as well as numerous other sources. Project based learning provides students with a challenging task or problem and allows them to direct their own learning to solve it. Students then work individually or in groups to pull knowledge and skills from all disciplines in order to solve the problem in a comprehensive way. Various art forms can serve as an “entry event,” or way to engage and motivate students for larger, interdisciplinary tasks (Miller, 2013). The arts can also serve as a valuable method to scaffold content for students. Allowing students to learn and represent information in a way that makes sense to them, whether it be visually or dramatically, can deepen their understanding in an authentic way (Miller, 2013).

The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) under President Barack Obama provided recommendations for ensuring that arts education remains a part of America’s schools. The first is to “build collaborations among different approaches” (PCAH, 2011). One approach is arts integration, or “using arts strategies to build skills and teach classroom subjects across different disciplines, including reading, math, science, and social studies” (PCAH, 2011). Other approaches include the standards-based approach to teaching art, a more traditional style with isolated instruction of subjects, and the use of teaching artists programs. These different ways of teaching the arts are strengthened when used in tandem with each other. PCAH warns that schools should avoid limiting themselves to using only one method of teaching the arts and pull from the strengths of various approaches.

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PCAH also emphasizes that federal education agencies can play a significant role in guiding arts education. State and local governments need guidance in regards to the extent, methods, and content of arts education; national policies can and must provide that guidance. To shape those policies, PCAH heralds the importance of continued research and data collection on topics relating to arts education. This type of information could not only identify the impact that arts education has on students as a whole, but could also serve as an accountability measure to ensure that schools are meeting their educational requirements.

Another method to increase high quality arts education in schools is through arts-based community-school partnerships, as suggested by Kappan Magazine, the RAND Corporation, and Education Week, among others. Teaming up with local artists and cultural institutions can provide schools with much-needed funding and arts resources. Several publications provide advice on how to make partnerships successful. The RAND Corporation emphasizes that in order for a partnership to be successful, it must “address the goals of both schools and arts organizations” (RAND Corporation, 2004). One suggestion is to build a solid and broad foundation of support for the partnership. Looking beyond the subject of the partnership to local government officials, donors, families, business owners, and others can help develop the needed support to keep the partnership functioning (Bowen and Kisida, 2017). Because all of those parties may have differing opinions on certain things, it is important to have a system in place to address and resolve any conflicts as soon as possible. Education Week emphasizes the importance of using data-based assessments. Data can “identify gaps in access and equity” and track progress, among other things (Perille, 2016). Data can be used to

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provide solid proof of the success of partnerships, which can often result in an increase in funding and further strengthen the partnership. This data is also beneficial for the general public to have in supporting the case for arts education.

Interviews with Arts Educators and Specialists

I had the opportunity to interview local educators and specialists who are leaders in the music education community. Mr. Michael Copen is a theater teacher and director for the Visual Performing Arts Program (VPA) at Governor Thomas Johnson High School (GTJHS) in Frederick, MD. The VPA program consists of high school students from across the county attending intensive arts classes every morning at GTJHS before returning to their ‘home school’ for academic classes in the afternoon. The VPA program offers concentrations in visual arts, dance, music, and theater. Copen has spent his entire 25-year career teaching for Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), 10 years in middle schools and 15 years in high schools. He considers himself to be a ‘humanities teacher’— He has taught English and Film and currently teaches Theater in the VPA program. Copen sees humanities subjects as crucial for examining the human condition; he is interested in exploring “how society and the arts impact each other”. He also places a certain responsibility on art educators to create things that speak to the human condition, but says that it is a two-way street between the teachers and administrators to show the importance of the arts. Unfortunately, many audiences do not see the arts as worthwhile unless it is meaningful and relevant to them and are less likely to participate in any community arts events.

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Copen has attended a county-wide high school band showcase for many years, despite the fact that he does not teach any music courses, yet he has never seen any employees from the FCPS central office attend those events. He believes that acknowledgement and support from administration would show more people that there is value in the arts education. Education today has moved so much in the direction of testing that even the arts are being tested in schools, making it seem like another subject that isn't inherently valuable, but serves a purpose to provide achievement data. This often results in administration, who likely have little to no experience in the arts, trying to assign a "scorable number" to arts classes, which Copen says does not exist. Increased academic graduation requirements are also pushing students away from taking arts classes, especially with high school programs allowing students to finish high school with an associate's degree through a dual-enrollment program in partnership with the Frederick Community College. Many parents and non-arts educators see an associate's degree as more valuable than taking so-called non-essential arts electives, resulting in fewer students participating in arts classes, Copen says.

The emphasis on academic subjects that are considered to be more practical is leading to a decline in students pursuing an arts education. Unfortunately, Copen has witnessed that most schools in Frederick County and across the nation do not adequately prepare students who want to pursue a degree in the arts after high school. If students go on to attend a conservatory or enter a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) program at a university, they are often unprepared for the rigor required by those programs. This often leads to students dropping out of majors in the arts and instead pursuing more mainstream academic degrees. The VPA program aims to prepare students with passion and talent for

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the arts for that type of intensive post-graduation education. If students see further education and a career in the arts as attainable, they are more likely to spend time studying it in high school.

In terms of the impact the arts have on academic achievement, Copen has seen that arts education helps develop “incredible critical thinkers” who are able to apply those skills to academic subjects. Theater especially helps students understand subtext in books students are reading in English classes and even perform better on tests like the ACT, which is reading-based. Copen shared a very interesting insight that this impact goes the other direction, too. Because students are focused so much on academics and getting test scores and grades, they are losing their ability to create and innovate. Copen has noticed that the state of academics in the county no longer encourages free thinking. Students in his theater classes are afraid to take creative risks when rehearsing or improvising because they want to know what the ‘right answer’ is. Students perform aspects of a scene almost as if following a checklist to reach what they believe is the single right way to do it; they are programmed to think that way because that mindset is true to get good test scores and grades. Of course, Copen says, there is no one right way to perform in theater. He believes that you can’t teach students to be great artists if they can’t think on their own, and this score-based achievement mindset is detrimental to students’ free-thinking skills.

Despite this, Copen says that students involved in the VPA program and other arts programs that they enjoy have better attendance because “the arts become a happiness in school”. Although Copen worries about the impact of long-term underappreciation of the arts in our society, he believes that the arts will never truly die; he says they are the only

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thing worth saving in a culture. The arts allow humans to “share connections through their souls”, Copen stated. Programs like the VPA one help make students better both as individuals and in the context of their home schools once they leave GTJHS each day. He believes that the arts can help develop leaders who are interested in improving themselves and the world around them, which can help the world become a better place.

Mrs. Susan Thomas, Elementary Art Education Curriculum Specialist for Frederick County Public Schools, considers herself to be an “advocate, champion, and coach” for FCPS arts educators. Mrs. Thomas is a lifelong musician who has taught in Pennsylvania, Baltimore County, and FCPS. She has been in her current position as arts curriculum specialist for six years. Despite the overall nationwide decrease in time spent on arts education, Thomas has not seen a specific decline in arts education within Frederick County. She believes that is partially due to the rich artistic background that the city of Frederick has and the emphasis it places on the arts. This results in students getting more time in arts classes, she believes, which greatly benefits arts instruction in the county.

One thing that helps ensure this time in arts classrooms is that classroom teachers get a mandated amount of planning time each day, which takes place while students are in ‘specials’ classes, such as music and visual art. These arts subject areas in elementary school are not enrollment-based like they are in middle and high schools, so the time allotted to the arts does not change. Every FCPS students in Kindergarten to 5th grade receives 80-90 minutes per week of both visual art and general/vocal music, usually split into 40-minute blocks twice a week. Unfortunately, there is no formal arts curriculum for

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Pre-Kindergarten in FCPS; Pre-k arts curriculum is dependent on the individual schools that students attend.

One beneficial change that Thomas has seen is that arts educators are being given more freedom in their assessment. In the past, 5th grade students took a county-mandated test, part of the Criterion Referenced Evaluation System (CRS) in their second semester. This test assessed everything arts-related they had learned in all of elementary school. It has since been split up into several smaller assessments that are spread out from 3rd-5th grades. Thomas described these types of assessments as largely “not authentic” in that the skills and information being assessed did not match up to the way it was taught and the experiences students had with it. For example, a reading-heavy paper and pencil test does not authentically test a student’s ability to create art.

However, recently those assessments have become more free-form and often times students don’t even realize they’re being tested. There is still a pacing guide that gives arts educators a general outline for when to assess students, and the county mandates one test in the arts subjects per semester, but there is more flexibility within each quarter and semester for when teachers can administer those assessments. There is also more flexibility in the tests themselves. In the past, arts assessments in the paper and pencil format would have one correct answer, which is unrealistic for the arts. Thomas says that now the assessments are more based on the act of creating, meaning there can be many different results on an assessment that are all correct. The curriculum is moving away from every student creating the exact same project using the same colors and having that be seen as the only correct way to do things.

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Despite these testing improvements, especially in regards to flexibility with testing, Thomas says arts educators are still facing a variety of problems. Many pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students entering schools do not have basic skills that are necessary in arts classes. Thomas said that many students in their first years of elementary school do not know how to correctly hold and use scissors, or have never touched a musical instrument before. Thomas suggests that increased screen time could be contributing to this lack of entry-level skills, and that sets educators back in terms of what they can teach if they are starting from square one.

When asked about any changes she would like to see in arts education today, Thomas expressed that she wishes that there was a way to access the earliest learners before they enter school so they are better prepared for the arts education they will receive. Because the youngest students often enter school without baseline skills and knowledge, arts educators face challenges in helping students develop those skills while also staying on track with curriculum pacing. Thomas also mentioned that she would like to see more consistent access to supplies, tools, and other resources given to arts educators. It is much more difficult for educators to follow curriculum and do the projects they want to do if they are constantly having to work with limited supplies and tools. Arts educators are always being tested in their creativity and flexibility in teaching; they often have to adapt lessons and projects in accordance with the supplies available to them. This provides challenges for administrators, as well; they need to know that arts educators have the ability to adapt lessons in creative ways out of necessity, but that skill is incredibly difficult to judge when hiring teachers.

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Thomas mentioned another struggle arts educators and their advocates face is that arts skills are seen as less valuable and practical in our society. Thomas says that the emphasis placed on ideas surrounding the programming of digital applications and software takes precedence over artistry and intrinsic skills. Thomas stated that life for children is getting increasingly complicated, especially with the emphasis placed on testing. This puts pressure on students to achieve and is “trying to turn the world into black and white”, according to Thomas. There is little value placed on creativity in academic subjects, so it is hard for students to access their creative side when they are in their arts classes. Thomas hopes that this reevaluation from rigorous standardized academic testing will help nurture creativity, collaboration, and communication in students again and encourage students to truly express themselves.

I also had the opportunity to speak with Dawn Getzandanner, who is the arts integration specialist at Butterfly Ridge Elementary School, a new public arts integration elementary school in Frederick County. Starting this brand new school was a lengthy process, Getzandanner told me. The leadership team was hired in January of 2018, about eight months before the school was set to open. The principal, Dr. Patty Hosfelt, who already had some experience in arts integration, came from the nearby Spring Ridge Elementary School.

Teachers were hired knowing that they would have to reinvent their teaching practices to fit them into the arts integration model, but that did not happen without training.

The school provided a five-week long afterschool paid internship program to help teachers build the background they needed to successfully educate within an arts integration school. Over the summer before school started, teachers also attended two-

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day intensive workshops focusing on one particular art subject area such as visual art or dance. In August, close to the start of the school year, teachers attended a 3-day workshop; one day was dedicated to arts education, one to thinking routines, and one for training in teaching English Language Learners (ELL). The thinking routines, started by Harvard's Project Zero, were a central component in training teachers. These thinking routines help teachers and students learn to think about and discuss topics on a deeper level. Butterfly Ridge is also guided by three hallmark words: create, integrate, and transform.

Training and educating the teachers is an ongoing process, though. Mrs. Getzandanner said that teachers participate in a weekly 1-hour professional learning block with the arts integration team leaders that focuses on one content area. Many teachers are hesitant in including the arts into their classrooms, but Mrs. Getzandanner said that they found it helpful to have an arts integration director to help guide them in their teaching. Many teachers struggle to take risks for fear of a lesson not turning out how they wanted it to, but the administration team at Butterfly Ridge is very encouraging of risk-taking, as long as teachers analyze the lessons that they teach to find ways to improve them in the future. It takes time to build trust between teachers and administrators, though, so staff at the school is constantly working on developing and strengthening those relationships to make the school be as cohesive and collaborative as it can be.

Mrs. Getzandanner gave me an overview of how arts is integrated into all subjects at Butterfly Ridge. Scheduling can be tricky because it has to leave space for any students who receive special education or ELL services, but the most intensive arts integration

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takes place during the science/social studies block. During those times, classes often get to go to what is called a ‘maker space’, which looks like a science lab/art studio hybrid. I was able to visit one of the maker spaces at Butterfly Ridge. It has large workspaces and different materials available for students to use on various projects. Lessons taught in maker spaces are often co-taught by an academic teacher and an arts teacher.

Mrs. Getzandanner showed me a science lesson on photosynthesis and the water cycle that students had been working on. Groups of students worked to make a 3-D tabletop model of the process of photosynthesis that looked almost like a maze, and then digitally program a small robot to navigate through the model. Students also had to choose another form of art (dance, drama, music, visual art) to demonstrate their understanding of the water cycle, but they could choose their own method. Getzandanner said that she enjoyed being able to attend maker space workshops to see how engaged students were in exhibiting their creativity. The arts are also incorporated within general education classrooms. Getzandanner said teachers will incorporate drama into their language arts lessons and have students act out what they are reading to deepen understanding and keep them engaged in learning.

Because Butterfly Ridge is in its first year, there is little numerical data from just the first two quarters. The school is still in its infancy; students were redistricted from a range of different schools and the teachers were not previously trained, so the school is only focused on taking “small steps forward” in the words of Getzandanner. Dramatic changes in academic achievement are not expected in the school’s first year, however Getzandanner and other staff members at Butterfly Ridge have seen changes in the

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students—they are more engaged, they don't give up as easily, and behavior and attendance has improved.

I asked Getzandanner about any changes in arts education she had noticed throughout her career as an educator, and she focused on the positive changes seen at Butterfly Ridge. Creativity is encouraged there. Students are encouraged to demonstrate their understanding in their own creative way, and emphasis is placed on the fact that not all projects have to, or should, look the same way. Getzandanner also appreciates that arts instruction is moving away from uniformity, meaning that students are told to express what they know through their own methods. However, she also had some suggestions on how to improve arts education even further. Like most arts educators, she wishes there was more time for the arts in all schools, and to have adequate materials and resources to facilitate increased arts education. To go along with that, Getzandanner would like to see general classroom teachers getting more training in the arts and in turn being given more freedom to utilize the arts as a learning tool in their classrooms.

I also got the opportunity to speak with Lori Rossio, a visual arts teacher at Valley Elementary School in Frederick County to get some opinions from an active elementary school arts educator. Mrs. Rossio places great value on visual art as an outlet for students; she says it provides a creative way for students to show what they know. This is especially important for English Language Learner students because a student who struggles to articulate their ideas in a written response gets a chance to do so visually in art class.

Mrs. Rossio expressed concern over a few aspects of arts education, however. The state of Maryland has a maximum amount of time that students are allowed to spend

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taking state- and county-mandated standardized tests. Fifth graders at Valley Elementary have already used all of their allotted test-taking time for academic tests, so art, physical education, and music assessments were supposed to be cut. However, despite the fact that these tests are no longer mandated, the administrators reserve the right to make students take them anyway. Rossio, as well as many other teachers, believe that this amount of testing can be detrimental to student success and their outlook on arts education. Another concern Rossio has is decreased funding for arts education. Throughout her career, she has seen funding for the arts drop at both a district and school level. Without proper resources and materials, the lessons and activities educators can teach is limited and can often result in decreased engagement from students.

Rossio did have some recommendations for how to improve arts education. She is an advocate for implementing the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), a choice-based approach to teaching visual arts. She also has background in the Studio Thinking Project, a Harvard research project that studied habits of mind implicitly and explicitly taught in strong visual arts programs. Rossio believes that these approaches are a way of “teaching art and basic life skills that are no longer taught in the early grades because of time”. Some of those skills include teaching students to embrace problem solving, persevering to the end of a project, and incorporating mistakes into projects as opposed to trying to fix them. Rossio says these are skills that can be applied in many different situations both inside and outside school, and make visual art class more relatable and purposeful to students.

One thing that all of the professionals agreed upon was that arts education is incredibly beneficial to students’ success at school. Both Mr. Copen and Mrs. Thomas

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stated that many students feel that the only subjects they thrive in at school are arts subjects; Mr. Copen even stated that the arts classes students take through the VPA program may be the only thing that motivates students to come to school. Mrs. Getzandanner had the same views, and even said that participation in the arts has decreased disciplinary problems at school.

All of the educators also agreed that they would like to see more time and resources dedicated to arts education in schools. Although these individuals did not notice a decline in arts education as other research shows, they still see the value in having students spend increased time with the arts.

Implications

As a future educator, I will take into consideration the information gathered throughout this project. Although I have always believed in the importance of the arts in classrooms, I now have research to support that belief and methods to effectively incorporate the arts into my future classroom. Although there may be limitations on the time allotted specifically for the arts in schools, I have learned ways to integrate artistic aspects into academic content. I discovered many resources that can guide teachers in successfully using the arts as a learning tool in their classrooms.

It would be beneficial to continue to track the academic growth of students at arts integration schools such as Butterfly Ridge Elementary School. There is evidence supporting the positive impact of arts education thus far, however further hard data supporting that idea could help increase the time and resources spent on arts education.

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Comparing and contrasting performance data from arts integration schools to traditional schools could provide further insight into the impact of the arts.

Research Limitations

Throughout my extensive research of this topic, I found that much of the data regarding the benefits of arts education is ‘soft data’, or data that is subject to interpretation, such as student engagement. Some studies that did include numeric data did not take into account all factors that influenced that data. There may seem to be a link between arts education and higher test scores, however factors such as family background that influence both extracurricular activities and test scores may have not fully been considered.

Many schools and districts also do not have arts education requirements or offerings posted in their curriculum if they are not considered core academic subjects, so it was difficult to gather data on the content and frequency of arts education in some schools.

Due to winter weather and conflicting schedules, I did not get the opportunity to interview as many arts educators and specialists as I had hoped. The information I gathered was limited in that it came only from within Frederick County Public Schools employees who largely only had experience within the county. Data collection and discussion with educators and specialists outside of Frederick County would provide a more comprehensive view on arts education. In summary, it would be beneficial to

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supplement the research and interviews I already have collected with further information from outside of the state.

Conclusion

After examining and compiling extensive qualitative and quantitative research, I have determined that there is strong evidence supporting the positive impact that arts education has on student success. This evidence is expressed through higher grades and test scores, increased school attendance and graduation rates, and decreased disciplinary action in schools associated with higher arts participation. Educators and arts specialists that I interviewed also noted that the arts provide means to increase student engagement in school and improve overall student attitude and happiness, in part because the arts give students a positive way to express themselves and communicate with others. These benefits have been especially evident in school-wide arts integration programs such as Turnaround Arts and A+ Arts Integration Schools. Despite an overall decline in funding and time dedicated to arts education in schools, there are many ways for teachers to incorporate various forms of the arts into their classrooms on a daily basis to more deeply engage students in learning. For example, drama can serve as a comprehension tool in language arts, and visual art can be used in various subjects to display student understanding in a creative way. There are numerous studies showing the effectiveness of

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these strategies, and others. In conclusion, arts education plays a very important role in student success, both academic and beyond, and should be featured in all schools for all students.

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