

# Preparing Students for the Next America



*Cover artwork by Muriel Stockdale*

## The Benefits of an Arts Education



# Introduction

Every young person in America deserves a complete and competitive education that includes the arts. America's global stature, culture of innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit depend on the strength of a world-class education system. Perhaps now more than ever—as the country becomes increasingly diverse, the world more interconnected, and the workplace more oriented around technology and creativity—arts education is key to such a system and to ensuring students' success in school, work, and life.

For this reason, the **Arts Education Partnership (AEP)** created **ArtsEdSearch.org**—the nation's first clearinghouse of research examining the mounting body of evidence on the benefits of an arts education. Drawing on the research in **ArtsEdSearch**, this bulletin offers a snapshot of how the arts support achievement in school, bolster skills demanded of a 21st century workforce, and enrich the lives of young people and communities.



## About the Arts Education Partnership

The Arts Education Partnership, a division of the Council of Chief State School Officers, is dedicated to securing a high quality arts education for every young person in America. A national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business, and philanthropic organizations, AEP was created in 1995 by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

# The arts prepare students for success in **school**.

Arts instruction and arts integrated instruction—lessons teaching skills and content of an art and non-art subject in tandem—engage students and increase learning and achievement. **Arts education:**

- 1 **Boosts literacy and English Language Arts (ELA) skills.** Arts education helps students become better readers and writers. Drama instruction, for example, increases reading readiness and word fluency in early grades and continues to improve reading comprehension and writing skills throughout middle and high school.<sup>1,2</sup> When the arts are integrated with literacy instruction, all students benefit, especially English Language Learners and students from low-income backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>
- 2 **Advances math achievement.** Students who study the arts, especially music, outperform their non-arts peers on mathematics assessments.<sup>4,5</sup> Arts integrated math instruction also facilitates mastery of computation and estimation skills, and challenging concepts like fractions.<sup>6,7</sup>
- 3 **Engages students in school and motivates them to learn.** Arts education helps make learning matter to students by giving them a medium to connect new knowledge to personal experiences and express what they have learned to others. Students who are typically disengaged in school are more likely to participate in arts and arts integrated classes than in classes where the arts are absent, and students who receive arts integrated instruction have higher attendance than those who do not.<sup>8,9,10</sup>
- 4 **Develops critical thinking.** In a world where students must frequently wade through a sea of information to determine which facts are trustworthy and relevant to a particular topic, critical thinking skills are key to college readiness and lifelong learning. Arts education develops students' critical thinking skills—including skills for comparing, hypothesizing, critiquing, and exploring multiple and alternative viewpoints.<sup>11,12</sup>
- 5 **Improves school culture.** Arts education helps foster a positive culture and climate in schools.<sup>13</sup> When schools integrate the arts across the curriculum, disciplinary referrals decrease while effectiveness of instruction and teachers' ability to meet the needs of all students increase.<sup>14,15</sup> Arts integration also contributes to increasing teacher satisfaction and lowering teacher turnover rates, often challenges for low performing schools.<sup>16</sup>



# The arts prepare students for success in **work**.

Arts education develops thinking skills and capacities key to success in the 21st Century workforce. **Arts education:**

- 1 Equips students to be creative.** Arts education develops creativity, one of the top five skills employers prize for the 21st Century.<sup>17</sup> Students receiving an arts-rich education perform better on assessments of creativity than do students receiving little or no arts education.<sup>18, 19</sup> Performing arts students, for example, show greater flexibility and adaptability in thinking than their peers.<sup>20, 21</sup>
- 2 Strengthens problem solving ability.** The arts develop reasoning skills that prepare students to solve problems. Students who study the arts, for example, score higher than their peers on tests measuring the ability to analyze information and solve complex problems, and are more likely to approach problems with patience and persistence.<sup>22, 23</sup>
- 3 Builds collaboration and communication skills.** In the arts, students learn to articulate their intentions, receive and offer constructive criticism, and listen actively to others' ideas. Art making allows students to experience what it feels like to be active members of a community and to work as a team to determine and achieve common goals.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>

- 4 Increases capacity for leadership.** Students who participate in the arts develop leadership skills, including decision-making, strategy building, planning, and reflection.<sup>27, 28, 29</sup> They also prepare to use these skills effectively by developing a strong sense of identity and confidence in their ability to affect the world around them in meaningful ways.<sup>30, 31</sup>



# The arts prepare students for success in **life**.

Arts education prepares students to engage meaningfully in their communities. **Arts education:**

- 1 **Strengthens perseverance.** Arts education develops students' capacity to persist in the face of a challenge. Through arts study, students improve in their ability to turn barriers into opportunities, overcome difficulty in completing complex tasks, and sustain attention.<sup>32, 33</sup> In a longitudinal study of 25,000 secondary school students, those with higher involvement in the arts scored better on measures of persistence than their peers with lower arts involvement.<sup>34</sup>
- 2 **Facilitates cross-cultural understanding.** Arts experiences foster pro-social behaviors and social tolerance that help prepare students for life in an increasingly global and culturally diverse world. Ensemble performance, community mural painting, and other group arts experiences in which participants are from diverse backgrounds demonstrate particular value for developing cross-cultural understanding.<sup>35, 36</sup>
- 3 **Builds community and supports civic engagement.** Arts programs foster a sense of community among participants that supports their personal, artistic, civic, and social development. They also offer a vehicle for effecting change in the surrounding



community.<sup>37, 38</sup> Students who have had an arts-rich education volunteer more often and exhibit greater civic engagement than other students.<sup>39</sup>

- 4 **Fosters a creative community.** Students who study the arts in their school years are more likely to engage with the arts in later life as consumers, performers, or creators than their peers who receive no arts education. Additionally, researchers find that the more art forms students study, the greater their arts participation in adulthood.<sup>40</sup>



# What's Next

Aware of the importance of the arts in a complete and competitive education, what can you do next? Here are a few ways to secure an arts education for every child:

- **Stay informed**—Follow education efforts in your local media, learn about local arts education offerings and the position of arts education in school and municipal budgets, and continue to explore the research in *ArtsEdSearch.org*.
- **Connect with others**—Attend school board meetings and community forums, set up meetings with state, school, and city leaders, find out what is important to local stakeholders, and identify groups with like-minded goals.
- **Get involved**—Share this bulletin with state, school, and community leaders, join parent and other community groups, lead public discussions, make presentations at school board or city council meetings, and, in general, build a dialogue on the significance of the arts to a complete and competitive education.
- **Tie it all together**—Identify public policy goals that are supported by research and work with state and community leaders to ensure that they are enacted.

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