



Arts Education

Context

Arts instruction is considered a core subject area by the federal and state departments of education and is widely believed by parents to be essential to a well-rounded education (Americans for the Arts 2005). There is growing recognition that we need high school and college graduates who are critical thinkers, creators, innovators, entrepreneurs, and collaborators – skills developed through quality instruction in the arts.

Despite strong public support and a growing body of research about the positive influence of dance, music, theater, and visual arts learning on student and school outcomes, the arts are too often marginal to public education. Though many New York City schools provide a world-class arts education, others provide little if any at all. Budget constraints, space considerations, and an emphasis on high-stakes testing have made it increasingly difficult for even those principals who understand the value of arts education to provide the instruction required under New York State education law.

Evidence

Recent prominent reports by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities, and the U.S. Department of Education demonstrate the positive impact of arts instruction on student success, particularly for at-risk students, as well as the persistent inequity in access to arts instruction at public schools across the country (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson 2012; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities 2011; Parsad & Spiegelman 2012;).

The NEA's study of more than 22,000 students over a twelve-year time span found that students of low socioeconomic status with a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do youth with less arts involvement. Students with intensive arts involvement were five times more likely to have graduated high school than students with little arts involvement; they also earned better grades and demonstrated higher rates of college enrollment and attainment.

These findings build upon a growing field of research that shows the positive influence that arts learning has on student outcomes, including attendance and graduation rates, academic achievement, literacy development and potential for career success (Heath 1998; Barry, Taylor & Walls 2002). A recent study of more than 200 New York City high schools conducted by The Center for Arts Education found that schools in the top third of graduation rates had the most well-developed arts education programs, including more arts teachers on staff, more partnerships with cultural arts institutions, and more space dedicated to the arts. Conversely, those in the bottom third in terms of graduation rates offered the

least opportunities to participate in quality arts programming. These findings highlight the educational disparities across the city and reinforce the findings that the arts are a central component of the highest-performing public schools (Israel 2009).

While New York State has a well-developed set of learning standards and course requirements for arts education, little accountability and support are provided to schools to ensure they meet the minimum requirements. According to New York City Department of Education's most recent data, approximately half of all city elementary schools are not providing the arts instruction in grades one through five required under state education law. At the middle school level, 40 percent of schools are failing to ensure that all of their eighth-grade graduates meet the State Education Department arts requirements (New York City Department of Education 2010, 2011). (Comparable data at the high school level is not available.)

Consistently, three of the biggest challenges school leaders cite to providing arts education are budgeting for the arts, scheduling arts instruction into the school day, and maintaining space for arts classes (New York City Department of Education 2010). Funding has been on the decline over the past several years in two key areas of arts education, according to data collected by the New York City Department of Education. Budgeting to hire arts and cultural organizations to provide arts education services directly to students has declined by \$12.8 million, or 50 percent, since the 2006-2007 school year. Funding for arts supplies, musical instruments, and equipment declined by \$8.6 million, more than 80 percent, during this same period. However, there was an increase of \$24 million, or about nine percent, in money spent on arts personnel expenses over the past five school years.

According to a 2008 survey of principals, 25 percent reported losing their art, music, dance, drama, or foreign language spaces to general education classrooms during their tenure (Horowitz & Haimson 2008). And according to a study that same year by the national Center on Education Policy, since the implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools were increasing instructional time on math, reading, and related testing and test preparation and decreasing their teaching time on the arts and other subject areas (Center on Education Policy 2008). Addressing these challenges will require collaboration among various levels of government and the active support of parents and the public. While education policy is primarily set at the local and state level, principals maintain significant autonomy over the content of the instruction within their building. Therefore, policy and programmatic changes will need to be complemented by efforts to develop school leaders who understand the value of arts education and have the skills and experience to integrate quality arts instruction into the school community.

Bottom Line

A growing body of research presents compelling evidence linking student learning in the arts to a wide spectrum of academic and social benefits. In order for our students to reach their full potential and develop into productive members of society who can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy, it is crucial that all city public schools provide a well-rounded and rigorous education that includes quality instruction in the arts.

Related Research

Catterall, J. S., Dumais, S. A., and G. Hampden-Thompson. 2012. *The Arts and Achievement in At-risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts. Downloadable PDF available at: www.nea.gov/research/arts-at-risk-youth.pdf.

Israel, Douglas. 2009. *Staying in School: Arts Education and New York City High School Graduation Rates*. New York, NY: The Center for Arts Education. www.caenyc.org/arts-education-report

Parsad, B., and M. Spiegelman, M. 2012. *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999–2000 and 2009–10*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Downloadable PDF available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012014.pdf>.

President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. 2011. *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future Through Creative Schools*. Washington, DC: President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Downloadable PDF available at: www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/PCAH_Reinvesting_4web_0.pdf.

Examples of Best Policy and Practice

NYC Department of Education Blueprints for Teaching and Learning in the Arts

<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/blueprint.html>

New York State Instructional Requirements for the Arts

<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/nysartsrequirements.html>

A Blueprint for Art Education: 2011–2014

<http://bit.ly/QnWp9o>

Arts and Cultural Education: A Survey of Model Programs

http://arts.3cdn.net/505a3c1ded6b4923f6_f5m6iydng.pdf

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A+ NYC is a coalition of parents, advocates, youth-service, and community-based organizations that have come together to build a vision for New York City public schools under the city's next administration. We aim to focus the next mayor's attention on supporting teaching and learning that prepares all students for fulfilling college and careers, and collaborating with parents, students, teachers, and communities to ensure that every child is guaranteed an excellent education. For more information, visit www.aplusnyc.org or call 212.328.9271.