

# Arts in Education: Critical to Developing Well-Rounded Students

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**"During the past quarter century, literally thousands of school-based programs have demonstrated beyond question that they can not only bring coherence to our fragmented academic world, but through the arts, students' performance in other academic disciplines can be enhanced as well."**

*—Earnst L. Boyer, Former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*

In today's public school system, test-driven accountability has become the norm, thanks in large part to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and fifteen years of standards-based reform. School districts across the country have made significant changes to curricula to meet the growing demand for improved performance in reading and math. As a result, there has been a significant decrease in academic focus on the arts and their integration into educational programs. School districts have substantially reduced the amount of time students study music, theater and visual arts, at the expense of a well-rounded approach to education.

More than 70% of the nation's 15,000 school districts reported having to reduce instructional time in at least one other subject to make more time for reading and math.<sup>1</sup> In a 2004 teaching survey, the amount of time first through fourth grade students spent on reading and math increased by 96 minutes a week.<sup>2</sup> This shift has recently been termed "curriculum narrowing" and has prompted many policymakers and education officials to express serious concerns about the future of arts programs in public schools.

Teachers, parents, students, lawmakers and officials across the country continue to advocate for the importance and integration of arts in education, as they have done for decades. They cite results from several studies demonstrating the significant positive effects arts studies have on cognitive development, performance on standardized tests, creativity, and preparation for the workforce. Some studies indicate that a well rounded curriculum, with integrated arts programs, may reduce dropout rates for high risk students and encourages them to become involved in their communities. Despite the fact that at-risk populations stand to benefit the most from the arts, because these programs keep high risk students engaged in school and provide a pathway to a non-academic route after high school graduation,<sup>3</sup> arts instruction has decreased 38% since 2003 in schools with large populations of at-risk students.<sup>4</sup> Further, the achievement gap in America's schools continues to widen, because more affluent students have access to outside art and cultural experiences, leaving many low and middle income students at an academic disadvantage.

Nearly 93% of all Americans believe that arts are an integral part of a well-rounded education, yet arts programs are continuing to diminish. Studies clearly show that students involved in programs integrating or featuring arts programs were four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement and three times more likely to win an award for school attendance.<sup>5</sup> Also, those students who participated in



an arts integrated education for four years scored almost 103 points higher on their SAT than those who did not.<sup>6</sup> And a survey conducted in January found that 53% of adults in the job market believe that imagination and creative skills gained through the arts are critical components to a successful worker in today's economy.<sup>7</sup>

Organizations across the country have worked hard to highlight how essential arts education is to developing a "work-force ready" high school graduate. Arts programs provide students the skills they need to be productive participants in the global economy. Accordingly, forty-nine states have established content and/or performance standards that outline what students should know and be able to do in one or more art forms. And 43 states require schools or districts to provide arts instruction. But, despite those facts, 22% of the nation's school districts have had to reduce arts programs and arts integrated work in their schools for the past six years due to cuts in funding by the federal government. Without those funds, school districts are unable to support programs students need to complete the requirements.<sup>8</sup>

Colorado is one of the states with content standards in arts education, but as a local control state, districts are only required to meet the state's minimum content standards.<sup>9</sup> Many districts in Colorado have been struggling to keep arts programs alive, but the need to score well on standardized tests places the emphasis on math and reading. The result: those subjects divert the funding and the class time necessary to offer art and music classes.

While there are many organizations, both at the national and local levels, working hard to ensure the arts do not fade out of American schools, there is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done to ensure the arts are not lost in the standardization of the American educational system.



"When we teach a child to sing or play the flute, we teach her how to listen. When we teach her to draw, we teach her to see. When we teach a child to dance, we teach him about his body and about space, and when he acts on a stage, he learns about character and motivation. When we teach a child design, we reveal the geometry of the world. When we teach children about the folk and traditional arts and the great masterpieces of the world, we teach them to celebrate their roots and find their own place in history."

—Jane Alexander  
*Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts (1993-1997)*

#### • Colorado Art Education Association

The Colorado Art Education Association (CAEA) is an organization with the prime directive of advancing and improving the quality of art education through the state of Colorado. CAEA encourages the development of current and future professional art educators and advocates for the implementation of national, state, and local visual arts standards. CAEA provides a variety of services and programs that strengthen existing art programs and nurture the development of art education in schools and communities without art.  
[www.caea-colorado.org](http://www.caea-colorado.org)

#### • Think 360 Arts Complete Education

Think 360 Arts is the leading statewide provider of arts education programs and services in Colorado. The group was formed in January 2007 after a merger between the Colorado Alliance for Arts Education and the



Young Audiences of Colorado. Together the two have more than 70 years of experience in the arts education field, and strong national affiliations with the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network and Your Audiences, Inc. The group offers comprehensive programs, services, and support to educators, parents, policy makers, schools and entire districts to ensure sustainable results.

[www.think360arts.org](http://www.think360arts.org)

For more information about national programs and research:

- **The Arts Education Partnership**  
[www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org)
- **National Art Education Association**  
[www.naea-reston.org](http://www.naea-reston.org)
- **The National Endowment for the Arts**  
[www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov)

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act. Center for Educational Policy. March 2006.  
<http://www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=feature.showFeature&FeatureID=29&C:\CFusionMX7\verity\Data\dummy.txt>

<sup>2</sup> Jerald, Craig D. *The Hidden Costs of Curriculum Narrowing*. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. August 2006. [www.centerforcsri.org](http://www.centerforcsri.org)

<sup>3</sup> Jerald, Craig D. *The Hidden Costs of Curriculum Narrowing*. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. August 2006. [www.centerforcsri.org](http://www.centerforcsri.org)

<sup>4</sup> Ruppert, Sandra S. *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. 2006.

<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/critical-evidence.shtml>  
<sup>5</sup> Bianchi, John. "Harris Poll Reveals that 93% of Americans Believe that the Arts are Vital to Providing a Well-Rounded Education". American for the Arts. June 13, 2005.

[http://www.americansforthearts.org/services/arts\\_education](http://www.americansforthearts.org/services/arts_education)  
<sup>6</sup> "Art Facts... SAT Scores and the Arts". 2006. Americans for the Arts. [www.americansforthearts.org](http://www.americansforthearts.org)

<sup>7</sup> Ruppert, Sandra S. *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. 2006.

<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/critical-evidence.shtml>  
<sup>8</sup> Ruppert, Sandra S. *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. 2006.

<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/critical-evidence.shtml>