

There Is More: **Supporting Arts Education in Our Schools**

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(Title Page)

Photo: Woman and baby

We begin educating our children when they are born. They hear our voices, they begin to see the world around them, to speak the languages of our families, our cultures, our countries, our hearts.

Photo: School building

They grow, they begin school. And across America – in rural, urban, inner-city or even one-room schoolhouses – the goals are the same:

Photo: Leaf-stamp painting with quote.

“It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person.”

- Montana Code Annotated 2003, Art. X, Sect. 1, Education goals and duties

To teach students what they will need to know in order to be productive, intelligent, and contributing citizens of the world around them. We teach them to read, to write, to add, subtract, multiply.

Photo: Raku residency, with quote. “Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.” - WB Yeats (1865-1939)

We teach them about history and geography, rocks, plants, and animals. And through the ages, we’ve come to know certain truths about education itself in the process: That there is more.

Photo: Girl listening, poetry residency

Born in every child is a desire to reach deeper into the world, to see what’s underneath, to feel connected, and to make a difference. And the purpose of educating children is to help them find what they’re looking for.

Photo: Leonardo da Vinci painting, “La Scapigliata,” with quote.

“Art is the Queen of all sciences communicating knowledge to all the generations of the world.” – Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Historically speaking, there is one subject that has been at the core of every known civilization: the arts. What every society has ever deemed important has been preserved in its art and the arts have been around even longer than the sciences. We have yet to discover any culture that didn’t have art – even those that did not have a written language.

Photos (2): Lascaux cave paintings (France), Helena graffiti art, with quote.

“The artist is the antenna of the race.” – Ezra Pound, poet

Indeed, entire cultures have been judged by their art.

Photo: Bucking horse and rider sculpture

The music, stories, dances, paintings, jewelry, buildings, sculptures, and even the homes of all who have lived before us remain the best tools we’ve ever had to define ourselves: Who we were, who we are, and who we might become.

Photo: Hide painting

The arts provided a way for us to leave the mark of our own existence.

Photo: York schoolhouse

As we have evolved as a people, so too have the ways we teach. Public education in its current form emerged during the Industrial Revolution of the mid-to-late 1800’s...

Photo: 1800’s classroom

... A time when most civilized countries began educating the masses, finally taking young children out of the factories and putting them into school.

Photo: Mural project, Lane Deer classroom

We built public schools believing that it was an inalienable right of citizenship to give every child a basic education, rejecting the idea that schooling was something only the wealthy could afford.

Photo: Violin in man’s hands

But we learned that if we truly meant to educate the masses, no education, public or private, could be complete without the arts – the one subject that enables EVERY student, rich or poor, at any age or skill level, to explore, express and gain understanding in all other subjects taught in school.

Photo: Yellow-headed blackbird

The arts are what allow us to say what we think, believe or suppose, and even to say things that cannot be said.

Photo: Fiddler performing with students

Most adults living in America today had some form of arts education during their early schooling, a music teacher, a visual arts teacher, sometimes even a theatre program. But it’s important to understand that much of that has changed, and the level of arts education in schools today has drastically diminished over the past decades.

Photo: Boys and their artwork, with quote.

“All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent.” – John F. Kennedy

Funding for arts learning is constantly dwindling and school boards have to make tough decisions that often result in diminishing the arts. And yet, since 1950, more than 11,000 studies have been conducted in English-speaking countries alone, on the effect that arts education has on school-aged children.

Photo: Artist with student

And all the mountains of evidence simply corroborate what we’ve known all along: that arts instruction both by itself and by integrating it with other core concepts...

Photo: Turtle girls in puppet parade

... (Math, reading, science, and history) helps students to more fully comprehend what they're learning, retain information longer, decode the world around them and have a better chance at overall academic success.

Photo: Mural on building

Arts education develops the whole child by giving not just facts and figures, but more complex ways of learning, remembering, relating to and retaining those very things we want them to know most.

Photos (3): Students singing; theatre school; dance residency, with quote.

“The primary aim of education is not to enable students to do well in school, but to help them to do well in the lives they lead outside of school.”

– Elliot Eisner, Stanford University professor

Although much research points to what the arts can do to enhance other learning, the main objective is what the arts teach that no other subject can teach. We know that with the understanding of music often comes a better understanding of math and science. That by not just reading a text, but actually acting it out, students gain a deeper understanding of history, writing and language and hone their verbal skills. The arts play a central role in early cognitive, motor, language, and emotional development.

Photo: 3 girls and their artwork

Across the board, the arts build self-confidence and self-esteem: universally acclaimed benefits that aid the very act of learning. They engage students who are *already* successful and in need of greater challenges...

Photo: Photography residency student

... And also those who might otherwise become disconnected, never realizing their own potential for success.

Photo: Artist with classroom students

Studies also show us that schools that make room in their schedules for the arts, even when that involves taking time from other academic disciplines, do NOT suffer declines in standardized test scores, including SAT and college entrance exams...

Photo: Poetry Out Loud champion

... Rather the opposite. Schools that treat the arts seriously also tend to incorporate other innovations that promote academic excellence.

Photo: Photography residency students

At-risk students have often cited their participation in the arts as a reason for staying in school. In response to a year-long photography residency on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana, science teacher Mark Rochin said simply, "It builds self-confidence and motivates the students to keep walking through the door."

Photo: Shakespeare actors

Environments for arts learning tend to be supportive places where it's safe to take risks, and in them students often gain more self-control, more empathy, and better conflict-resolution and social-tolerance skills.

Photo: Folk artist with girls

Arts education has always been one of the best ways to foster an appreciation for cultural and ethnic diversity.

Photo: Classroom poetry residency

After a 2-week poetry residence, one Montana middle school teacher wrote that one student who had refused to complete most of her work, answer any questions, or do any homework, came alive during poetry. She wrote two poems for every class assignment and is still bringing in poems for her teacher to read. Poetry showed her how to be a successful student and she will now pass 7th grade.

Photos (2): Doll-making residency with quote.

"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." - Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC)

The arts also teach subtlety, to see details instead of just outlines. Unlike many other core subjects, where there are definite rules and answers, the arts teach us how to rely on our own judgment. They help us to find answers where there are no answers.

A study published in the Journal of American Medical Association found that looking at paintings and sculpture improved the observational abilities of medical students.

Photo: Sculpture of Myrna Loy

Now Yale, Stanford, Cornell and other top medical schools have added humanities to the usual course line-up of physiology, pathology and microbiology, having realized how important the art of LOOKING is to the practice of medicine.

Image: “Globalization – Innovation – Creativity – The Arts”

As our world moves toward globalization entire countries including the United States are recognizing that the future of national economics now depends upon a steady flow of innovative ideas – in fact, innovation is becoming a national initiative. Businesses seek employees who can figure out problems, exercise individual responsibility, work as a team...

Photo: Graduating college students, with quote.

“A grounding in the arts will help our children see... In short, it will help them as they grow smarter to also grow wiser.” – R.E. Allen, former Chairman and CEO, AT&T Corp

...think creatively and who exhibit confidence. They must also be able to communicate and articulate ideas. The arts consistently provide a proven way for students to develop those very skills.

And the Montana Board of Public Education agrees and its Content Standards for the Arts read, in part:

(Spoken and onscreen) “The arts enable students to make decisions and seek multiple solutions. They improve perception, reflection, and creative thought. They advance higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The arts provide powerful tools for understanding human experiences and cultures – past, present and future. Arts education engages students in a creative process that helps them to develop self-motivation, discipline, cooperation and self-esteem necessary for success in life.”

Strong words.

Photo: Ceramics residency students

And yet, studies reveal that less than half of our nation’s 8th graders are being taught the arts.

Photos (2): Young family at art gallery, and an artist with his pottery

We know that arts learning also encourages students to become lifelong learners after they reach adulthood, creating awareness that learning is a never-ending process.

Photo: MT Powwow, with quote.

“One of the most important purposes of a powwow is to pass traditions onto the younger generation. A young child can only become a good powwow dancer if they study the older, experienced dancers.” - Manuella Well-Off-Man

Throughout human history, art has been one of the best ways to help our children to be the keepers of our cultures. Inviting local folk- and traditional artists into Montana classrooms helps teach our students about the rich cultural heritage within our own communities, helping them to understand where they came from, and how to carry what is important from their past into their future.

Photo: Oil painting

And at the end of the day, the arts speak for themselves, quite eloquently and convincingly – and it comes down to this: Just as math, science and reading are non-disputed, budgeted core subjects, so too must be music, visual and performing arts.

(Onscreen and spoken)

“Let’s remember why societies have always included the arts in every child’s education. The reason is simple. The arts are a fundamentally important part of culture, and an education without them is an impoverished education leading to an impoverished society.” - Translations: Winter 2001, Harvard, Project Zero.

Photo: Photography residency student photo

We must stop allowing the arts to be marginalized or cut from our school curricula. It’s the only way we can avoid a society where only the well-to-do are able to provide study in the arts for their children, while their poorer peers only fill in bubbles on test sheets.

Photo: Sculpture of newsboy, with quote. “If apple is the language of the future, then art must be the core.” – Elliot Eisner, Stanford University

Most people are aware of the resource deprivation that plagues our schools state- and nationwide: That they are suffering from funding shortages ranging from severe to staggering.

(Onscreen and spoken) 91% of all voters say the arts are necessary to build imagination, and 81% of voters believe that a greater focus on the arts alongside science, technology, and math would better address the demands of the 21st century.

Photo: Actors putting theatre makeup on students

Even though the arts are core subjects, experience shows that because they are not as rigorously tested, they are often the subjects cut first from tight schedules and budgets.

Photo: Arts residency teacher in classroom

In Montana, a mostly rural state, schools often have difficulty hiring music and visual arts teachers even if they have the funding to do so.

Photo: Rural Montana school building

The salaries are very low, communities tend to be isolated, and keeping teachers in place can be challenging.

Photo: School theatre production

But those same arts classes often act as “binders” for both students and their communities, bringing kids and families together who DON’T just live next door to each other.

Photo: Legislation being signed for Montana Arts Council

In 1967, state legislature created the Montana Arts Council to serve Montana’s artists and arts organizations, and also to provide support and guidance for arts education programs.

Photo: ArtMobile van in rural Montana

Grants through Artist-in-Residence programs help bring trained artists into classrooms, open doors to the arts and provide basic arts instruction.

Photo: Students attending arts program

This grant program has become increasingly used by schools to fill the gaps in their own budgets and demand for these grants is very high, with funding usually fully committed by mid-year.

Photo: Rural Montana landscape during an arts residency

On average, 1 in every 7 Montana students is served through this program. For some rural schools, this is the ONLY arts education received during the entire school year.

Photo: Mime artist with students

Although the Montana Arts Council Artist-in-Residence program is strong, the ultimate goal - indeed, what the Board of Education demands – is that schools have licensed and endorsed visual arts and music teachers, serving every child, every day.

Photo: Teachers’ workshop

More funding and time must also be allowed for arts training for regular classroom teachers, providing them with skills to reach every student in a more meaningful way.

Photo: Art exhibit in classroom

We can help funders, legislators, school administrators and policy makers to understand that adding the arts to the curriculum does not diminish or endanger other subjects, and the expense, in light of what it brings to the education of the whole child, is minimal.

Onscreen quote: “It’s not an education without the arts.”

- Nevada Alliance for Arts Education

The arts must not be relegated to the bottom of the pile, but be considered an important component at all levels of education, integral to every school day.

Photo: Student’s mask

A young student on a Montana Indian Reservation, who has been blind since birth, was part of an outreach art program at his school. He was able to participate in every aspect of the program, with help, and he created this self-portrait in clay. He wrote the following description of it in Braille:

(Onscreen and spoken)

“My face has a nose, a mouth, eyes, cheeks and a heart over the lips. I made it even though I can’t see. The elk teeth block everything. I can see with my hands, even my ears. There are different shapes of thoughts all over my face. My favorite is the heart over the lips. I have to talk nice. The feathers are dancing on my head.”

Photo: Theatre camp students

It’s time to secure a place for the arts in our education system – to let this message be heard and understood: That arts education is the best tool we have to create well-rounded, civically engaged, highly employable, inclusive, intelligent and creative members of our society.

- The End -