



# Re-Investing in Arts Education: Winning America's Future Through Creative Schools

## Summary and Recommendations

### REPORT BACKGROUND

In his 2008 Arts Policy Campaign platform, President Barack Obama argued for reinvesting in American arts education and reinvigorating the American hallmarks of creativity and innovation.

It has been more than a decade since any federal entity comprehensively examined arts education data in the United States. During this time, there have been important developments in arts education research, as well as major shifts in the landscape of American education—including the impact of *No Child Left Behind* and increasing economic pressure.

Taking on this challenge, the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) spent the last 18 months conducting an in-depth review of the current challenges and opportunities facing arts education. It sought out educational leaders around the country, visited schools, surveyed recent research, and talked to stakeholders all over the country working in this area.

The President's Committee emerged from the process inspired both by robust data that clearly shows the effect of arts education on student academic achievement and creativity, and by firsthand observations in neighborhood schools across the country. These schools are improving test scores and fostering their students' competitiveness in the workforce by investing in arts education strategies, even in the toughest neighborhoods.

The results also reaffirmed PCAH's conviction that an arts education provides a critical benefit to the private sector. In order to effectively compete in the global economy, business leaders are increasingly looking for employees who are creative, collaborative and innovative thinkers. A greater investment in the arts is an effective way to equip today's students with the skills they will need to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow.

The value of arts education is often phrased in enrichment terms--helping kids find their voice, rounding out their education and tapping into their undiscovered talents. This is true, but as President's Committee saw in schools all over the country, it is also an effective tool in school-wide reform and fixing some of our biggest educational challenges. It is not a flower, but a wrench.

## EDUCATIONAL BACKDROP

At this moment in our nation's history, America's schools are facing huge challenges, including:

- A dropout rate that approaches 50% in some demographics.
- A narrowed curriculum and strict focus on standardized testing that teaches students to fill in multiple choice bubbles instead of how to think creatively and problem solve, skills that are essential for helping them to compete in today's economy.
- An achievement gap between our highest and lowest performing students that is ever-widening.
- Teachers who want to reach out and engage their students, but lack the tools with which to do so.

## RECENT RESEARCH

Research over the past decade reveals that these are the areas where effective arts education strategies, especially arts integration techniques, have yielded practical and impressive results. While many may be familiar with these studies, a brief recap as it folds into the Report's updated findings:

## LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

- Two seminal studies with large sample sizes from the late 1990s showed that low income kids who participated in arts education were ***4 more times likely to have high academic achievement and 3 times more likely to have high attendance than those who didn't***, and that these students were more likely to be elected to class office and participate in a math or science fair.
- Updates to these studies in the past few years, tracking the same kids well into their mid-twenties, showed that these advantages only increased over time, and that arts-engaged low-income students are more likely than their non-arts-engaged peers to have attended and done well in college, build careers, volunteered in their communities and participated in the political process by voting. The conclusion of these recent studies is that on average, ***arts-engaged low-income students tend to perform more like higher-income students*** in the many types of comparisons that the studies tracks.

## BRAIN RESEARCH

In the last five years researchers also have begun to explore the benefits of an arts education on a child's mind. In particular, the field of neuroscience is beginning to unravel the many ways that the arts can influence cognitive development. Their findings include:

- Music training is closely correlated with the development of *phonological* awareness—one of the most important predictors of early reading skills.
- Children who practiced a specific art form developed improved attention skills and improved general intelligence. Training their attention and focus also leads to improvement in other cognitive domains.
- Arts Integration techniques, which use multiple senses to repeat information, cause more information to be stored in long-term—as opposed to short-term—memory, and may actually change the structure of the neurons.

## ARTS INTEGRATION STUDIES

Arts integration is a field particularly promising area for further development. Recent research has shown impressive results in reaching the lowest performing learners, and raising test scores without narrowing the curriculum.

- CAPE (*Chicago Arts Partnership in Education*) was a school-wide model for arts integration. The 19 Chicago elementary schools operating the CAPE model showed consistently higher average scores on the district’s reading and mathematics assessments over a six year period when compared to all district elementary schools.
- Last year, Montgomery County, Maryland compared three arts integration-focused schools (AIMS) to three control schools over a three-year period.
  - They found that AIMS schools with the highest percentage of minority and low-income students **reduced the reading gap by 14 percentage points and the math gap by 26 percentage points over a three-year period.** In the control schools, the number of proficient students actually **went down** 4.5%.
  - The Montgomery County evaluation also closely tracked the experiences of classroom teachers as they learned how to integrate the arts. Almost all teachers (79%) agreed that they had “totally changed their teaching” and (94%) that they had gained “additional ways of teaching critical thinking skills.”
- North Carolina’s and Oklahoma’s network of *A+ Schools* is a whole-school reform model. Everybody participates in professional development in arts integration, from the principal to the cafeteria lady. It incorporates Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, recent brain research findings, and dance, drama, music, visual art, and creative writing. **These school tracked consistent gains in student achievement as compared to state and district averages.**
  - Importantly, years of research in both NC and OK *A+ Schools* show that A+ students consistently score as well or higher on statewide reading and mathematics assessments as students from more advantaged schools.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States has a long proud history of innovation and creativity. This is one of our greatest assets and what will give our workforce an edge in an increasingly competitive global economy. But to do this, we need to prepare the next generation of inventors, designers and creators. Business leaders are already asking for this. They recognize that this is essential for our schools to be teaching children how to think outside the box and to address challenges with creative solutions. And policy makers and parents are concerned because they see how the current education system is failing to give our children the tools they need reach their full potential.

Arts education is a solution to many of these problems that has been hiding in plain sight. This is largely because it remains siloed, from the macro to the micro level. At the policy level, arts education advocacy is

seen as something different and separate from the larger conversation of educational reform. And in schools, arts specialists classes are too often marginalized as something that gives the classroom teachers a planning period, while teaching artists are asked to parachute in and out in two or three week residencies, without ever being able to build relationships and integrate into the school community. But in fact, the potential of arts education lies in exactly the opposite—a seamless marriage of arts education strategies with overall educational goals, a vibrant collaboration between arts specialists, classroom teachers and teaching artists to create collaborative, creative environments that allow each child to reach his or her potential, using all the tools at our disposal to reach and engage them in learning.

The report makes the following recommendations to facilitate that vision:

**Recommendation 1: Build robust collaborations among different approaches to arts education**

- Almost every community—indeed, almost every school—that tries to address the difficult challenge of how to get more arts into schools does so differently. This results in a complex patchwork of arts education services across the country, representing a mix of delivery models that includes standards-based sequential arts curricula; formal and informal arts integration strategies; and short and long term teaching artists residencies.
- It also involves a wide array of organizations, school and state officials whose roles and initiative vary from place to place. There is no one model that works best for every community, and no single solution for the host of economic, pedagogic and logistical challenges faced by arts education advocates.
- However, too often an undue focus by advocates on the *method* of delivery of arts instruction, rather than the *quality* of that instruction and the *flexibility* to adapt to the needs of the community has hindered effectiveness of those advocates, and the overarching cause of getting more arts into schools. Small successes—such as a visiting artist leading a two-week dance workshop—can often be the gateway to more arts, and more learning, and more engagement.
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**CASE STUDY:**

*Benton Heights Elementary School for the Arts is located in Monroe, North Carolina. It's a Title 1 neighborhood K-5<sup>th</sup> grade school with around 700 students. 90% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches, with a high population of ESL students.*

*The school was struggling with student achievement, but when their P.E. teacher, Michael Harvey, became their new principal, he was determined to find new ways to raise student test scores. In 2004, Benton Heights became a partner school with the local Blumenthal Performing Arts Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Seeing promising results from that partnership, in 2007 Benton Heights Elementary became an A+ School: a North Carolina statewide reform model in which the whole school embraces the arts as*

*fundamental to how teachers teach and students learn in all subjects.*

*Pretty immediately, measurements showed significant improvement in the students' test scores. Over three years (2007-2009), the test scores of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class went from 45% to 71% in Reading, and from 68% to 84% in Math. Also, the school's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class' scores leapt from 25% in Science in 2008 to 62% in Science in 2009.*

*Over this time, the school hired more arts specialists, valued them more highly, deepened their relationships with some key teaching artists, and invested in their identity as an arts-rich school, even though their student population is one of the most transient, at-risk demographics.*

*If you walk into the school today, there is music and art everywhere, but also teachers who are inspired and excited about lesson planning every year with both arts specialists and teaching artists. The students are incredibly energized, and motivated—and their test scores show it.*

## **Recommendation 2: Develop the field of arts integration.**

- Arts integration relies on classroom teachers, usually working in concert with teaching artists and/or arts specialists, who incorporate arts into the teaching of other subjects, such as math, science and reading and vice versa.
- The statistics on its efficacy in raising test scores, the morale of students and teachers, and the increases in attendance, are persuasive. Observing arts integration in action is even more compelling. There's a pride and a collegiality in an arts integrated school. Learning seems more fun; students and teachers are more engaged, and the whole school seems like a more creative place.

### **EXAMPLES:**

- *A 3rd grade math class in Baltimore building Calder mobiles out of coat hangers and buttons to understand the concept of linear equations, in which one set of buttons were balanced by a different but equal number on the other side.*
- *A 5th grade dance class of ESL students in Chicago, largely Polish and Russian, learning a rigorous dance number using physics vocabulary. ("Use your momentum to get you into the turn." "What slows our arms down here?" "Inertia!" "Now focus on lowering your center of gravity.") The dance lesson was immediately followed by a science class where they would be using those terms in a lab experiment.*
- *A 4th grade social studies class in Kennsington studying The Great Migration*

*of African Americans at the turn of the century, using a theater “tableau” method and the paintings of Jacob Lawrence. The students were each assigned a painting, grouped into threes and given five minutes to come up with a title, a character and to arrange themselves into a frozen tableau representing the meaning of the painting. They worked independently in their groups with no further instruction or intervention by the teacher and formed their tableaus representing African Americans at different stages on the road from bondage to freedom. In turn, each student described their title, character and “inner thoughts” with a strong grasp of history and nuance. When we asked the classroom teacher how she would have taught this curriculum segment without arts integration training, she said she probably would have assigned a reading and then tried to get the students to discuss it, which would engaged a relatively small percentage of the class who liked to speak up.*

- Currently, models for training teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists in this approach are spread all over the country. There is promise in creating communities of practice among model arts integration programs to identify best practices in arts integration, organize curriculum units, bring together training approaches, and create a common frame for collecting evaluation results.

### **Recommendation 3: Expand in-school opportunities for teaching artists.**

- Teaching artists are an untapped and important resource for enriching our schools with the arts. This is particularly true when they are given the resources and the time to build real collaborations with schools, classroom teachers and their students. As important is rigorous training in curricula and pedagogy.

#### **CASE STUDY:**

*Horace Greeley, a Title I school in Chicago with over 90% free and reduced lunch kids, was struggling with test scores in 2004. Hoping to engage all of its students, especially the large body of ELL students, Horace Greeley’s principal turned to the arts. He started a partnership with the Urban Gateways Center for Arts Education, which helped coordinate and train teaching artists in different disciplines to work comprehensively within the school. We observed a classroom in which visual teaching artist Miss Sonia has been working with the same 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom teacher for 4 years. They meet at the beginning of the school year to co-design visual arts projects that support key curricular objectives for the year. When we visited, she was teaching a lesson on Native American culture through a multi-week project where each student designed a Kachina doll with two animals that represented their inner and outer*

*selves. They were fully engaged in learning history and culture, developing fine motor skills and connecting the academic unit to their own personal stories.*

*The school began to show significant improvement in its test scores shortly after the arts partnership began, and in 2007, Horace Greeley was declared a No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School.*

#### **Recommendation 4: Utilize federal and state policies to reinforce the place of arts in K-12 education.**

- District superintendents and principals who determine school priorities need to hear simple, focused statements from leaders in federal and state education agencies about how the arts fit into their current priorities. They ask for policy guidelines and explicit examples of the efficacy of the arts in initiatives that increase the rigor of the curriculum, strengthen teacher effectiveness, and improve low-performing schools.
- To do this, achievements and outcomes of arts-rich schools should be highlighted in the larger dialogue on successful school-reform strategies, as with Blue Ribbon Schools, and arts education organizations need to be asking what goal posts are important for their state decision makers, and then devoting resources to helping address those.
- It is also important for teachers to get information about how to address the new *Common Core Standards* through the arts, just as the *Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Arts Map* illustrates how to use the arts to develop critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. With this report, and the compelling foreword by Secretary Duncan, PCAH has begun to make such a statement at the federal level and should do so much more.

#### **Recommendation 5: Widen the focus of evidence gathering about arts education.**

- Over the last decade there has been increasing emphasis and rigor in establishing linkages between arts education and student test scores—especially in math and reading. This is understandable, especially given the considerable impact of No Child Left Behind over the last 10 years. However PCAH found much less sustained research on the connections between arts education and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as creativity and innovative thinking, as well as the effect of arts education on engagement, attendance, behavioral problems and other factors that are early indicators of a student’s likelihood of dropping out.
- PCAH recommends support for research on arts education and its effect on innovative thinking and creativity, and on engagement, motivation, focus, and persistence. While it is hard to find the resources for these evaluations, they are vital to demonstrating the ability of the arts to solve a number of problems at once.

**CASE STUDY:**

*MS 233 in the South Bronx, located in the poorest Congressional district in the country, used to be the most violent middle school in the city. Taken over by Principal Ramon Gonzalez in 2003, the school is now a safe, productive, creative space for his students. Among his numerous reforms, he has committed himself to making sure his students receive rigorous arts instruction at every grade level. MS 233 students now learn music and math together in an integrated curriculum, take visual arts classes several times a week, and have a band that won the Northeast Championship last year. He told us he deliberately schedules all the art and music classes for Mondays and Fridays, so that all the kids come to school on those days. Traditionally the days of the week with the highest truancy rate, he now has consistent high attendance rates for both.*

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For press inquiries, scheduling media interviews, including press contacts for specific programs highlighted in the report, please contact Jody Arlington, 202.316.4316 or [jodyarlington@mac.com](mailto:jodyarlington@mac.com). All other inquiries please contact Lindsey Clark at [LClark@pcah.gov](mailto:LClark@pcah.gov) or 202.682.5560. **The full report is available online the morning here: [www.pcah.gov](http://www.pcah.gov).**