

Ten Reasons Why Arts Education is Critical in a 21st Century World

By
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Due to the impact of K-12 education budget cuts across the country, it is expected that arts programs (e.g. music, visual arts, dance, theater) in many schools and districts will be reduced or eliminated in the coming years. The arts are often the most vulnerable because they are not considered as important as other subjects and are not evaluated through a high stakes, standardized testing process.

Here are ten reasons why, in a 21st century world, we should STRENGTHEN and EXPAND arts education, not reduce or eliminate it:

Reason 1: Many children come to school and stay in school because of the arts.

Let's face it – for the most part, children like arts education!!! It is “hands on”, has immediate rewards, focuses on positive achievements, develops concrete products, and fosters collaboration. There are many opportunities to “show off” and demonstrate skills through authentic performance. The arts enable children to grow in confidence and think positively about themselves and learning.

Reason 2: Children learn positive habits, behaviors and attitudes through the arts.

Learning a musical instrument, creating a painting, learning to dance, or singing in a chorus teaches that taking small steps, practicing to get better at something, being persistent, and being patient, even in the face of adversity, are important for growth and improvement. The arts give many students the confidence to try other things that don't come easily, but often have great rewards (like reading). In other words, the arts teach “character” -- habits, behaviors and attitudes that are necessary for success in any field of endeavor.

Reason 3: The arts enhance creativity

Imagine an art class in which students create an original canvas filled with color and creative use of space; a music class where they develop their own rhythms; a theater class where they create and produce their own plays. The arts are a wonderful arena for fostering creativity, an important skill to have in a rapidly changing world.

Reason 4: The arts help students develop critical intellectual skills.

The arts foster critical higher levels of thinking that carry over to learning other subjects and in life. Through the arts, children learn to observe (What do you see in a painting?), interpret (How should we play this music?); see different perspectives (What is the artist's perspective? What is your perspective?), analyze (Let's take apart this play and study each part separately.) and synthesize (How do all the parts of the dance fit together to create a “whole”?).

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Reason 5: The arts teach students methods for learning language skills.

As students learn to read notes, compose music, play an instrument, learn dance steps, create a painting, act in a drama, they are also learning how to develop new concepts, build vocabulary, and learn a new language.

Reason 6: The arts help students learn mathematics.

The arts require measurement, number manipulation, and proportional thinking, all of which foster mathematical thinking. Students also learn patterns (e.g. musical rhythms and dance patterns); spatial and geometric relationships (visual art patterns); and three-dimensional skills (making models of clay).

Reason 7: The arts expand on and enrich learning in other subjects.

Artworks provide a visual context for learning about historical periods. Music, painting, drama, and dance help literature come alive. Graphic designs and drawings, such as those made by inventors and engineers, complement learning about scientific and technological principles and innovations.

Reason 8: Aesthetic learning is its own reward.

The arts teach about beauty, proportion, and grace. They help to examine conflict, power, emotion, and life itself. The power of the arts is in its wondrous ability to give us joy, to help us understand tragedy, to promote empathy, and to make the written word come alive.

Reason 9: Children’s arts talents and interests are developed.

The arts provide an important avenue for developing a passion to learn, grow, improve, and do something productive with one’s life. Many children discover their talents and interests through the arts: they develop talents in acting, drama, painting, music, dance, sculpture, or creative writing.

Reason 10: The arts teach teamwork!! Children learn tolerance and understanding of others.

Through the arts, children learn how to work together to achieve great things. As they work together, they learn to understand differences and diversity. They learn how teamwork contributes to great performance. By teaching students how to live and work together, the arts contribute to making schools safer and more peaceful learning environments.

These are ten powerful reasons for keeping and strengthening school arts programs. By reducing or eliminating the arts from our educational programs, we are reducing the likelihood of student success. We are likely to lose more children and create a system that “fails” more students. We lose a significant part of the educational experience that enriches lives and helps our children to examine what it means to be human.