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- [POLICY AND ADVOCACY](#)
- [RESEARCH AND INFORMATION](#)
- [PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT](#)
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- [VISIBILITY](#)



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- [Arts Research](#)
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- [Advocacy Awards](#)
- [Arts Action Fund](#)
- [PSA Campaigns](#)
- [Funding Resources](#)
- [Partners](#)
- [Staff](#)

POLICY AND ADVOCACY



Steps to Art Early Childhood Arts Education Initiative

Fact Sheet About the Benefits of Arts Education for Children

Benefits of Arts Education

Source: Americans for the Arts, 2002

- Stimulates and develops the imagination and critical thinking, and refines cognitive and creative skills.
- Has a tremendous impact on the developmental growth of every child and has proven to help level the "learning field" across socio-economic boundaries.
- Strengthens problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, adding to overall academic achievement and school success.
- Develops a sense of craftsmanship, quality task performance, and goal-setting—skills needed to succeed in the classroom and beyond.
- Teaches children life skills such as developing an informed perception; articulating a vision; learning to solve problems and make decisions; building self-confidence and self-discipline; developing the ability to imagine what might be; and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.
- Nurtures important values, including team-building skills; respecting alternative viewpoints; and appreciating and being aware of different cultures and traditions.

Source: *Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections*, 1998, Introduction

- Plays a central role in cognitive, motor, language, and social-emotional development.
- Motivates and engages children in learning, stimulates memory, facilitates understanding, enhances symbolic communication, promotes relationships, and provides an avenue for building competence.
- Provides a natural source of learning. Child development specialists note that play is the business of young children; play is the way children promote and enhance

their development. The arts are a most natural vehicle for play.

The Need in Preschools

Source: Americans for the Arts, 2002

- Preschool care and education, except for certain low-income programs, is considered a private service and receives little or no federal funding.
- While the importance of early childhood arts education has received greater attention in recent years, the majority of funding and programming is directed to grades K–12, with preschools being largely underserved.
- Arts education should not be considered a frill, but a necessity. Since preschools are not part of the public school system, funding sources vary greatly. When budgets are tight, arts programs, teachers, and supplies are often cut first.
- More than four million children attend preschool programs nationwide.

Source: Arts Education Partnership, *Children's Learning & the Arts: Birth to Age Eight*

- Preschool-age children are primed for learning and greatly accepting of most art forms.
- Compelling evidence exists that early arts experience has an impact on all aspects of a child's learning and development and that, in many ways, "earlier is better."
- Early childhood thus presents both a unique opportunity and a unique challenge; a part of that challenge is to engage and support all who care for and educate young children in making the arts an integrated and vital part of their earliest experiences.
- We know that "art," understood as spontaneous creative play, is what young children naturally do—singing, dancing, drawing, and role-playing. We also know that the arts engage all the senses and involve a variety of modalities including the kinesthetic, auditory, and visual. When caregivers engage and encourage children in arts activities on a regular basis from early in life, they are laying the foundation for—and even helping wire children's brains for—successful learning.

Adults Agree on Importance of Arts Education

Source: Americans for the Arts national public opinion survey, January 2001

- Ninety-one percent of respondents believe the arts are vital to a well-rounded education.
- Ninety-five percent of respondents believe the arts teach intangibles such as creativity, self-expression, and individualism.
- Seventy-six percent of respondents somewhat or strongly agree that arts education is important enough to get personally involved. However, just thirty-five percent of those who are closely involved in the life of a child have done so.
- Sixty-seven percent say they do not know how to get involved.
- Eighty-nine percent of respondents believe that arts education is important enough that schools should find the money to ensure inclusion in the curriculum.
- Ninety-six percent agree the arts belong to everyone, not just the fortunate or privileged.

The Social and Academic Impact of Arts Education

Source: Eisner, E. W., *Ten Lessons the Arts Teach*, (January 1998)

- Art is defined as something aesthetic to the senses. A “work of art” is both an activity and a result; it is a noun and a verb. “One of the great aims of education is to make it possible for people to be engaged in the process of creating themselves. Artists and scientists are alike in this respect.”
- Arts curricula is typically process-driven and relationship based, so its impact on academic performance is often underestimated and undervalued. The arts provide a logical counterbalance to the trend of standardized testing and should not be marginalized just because the curriculum is more difficult to measure.
- The emphasis and time given to a particular school subject sends a message to students about how important that subject is in life.
- Arts programs, especially those including trained professionals, can help draw students out of “formal” ways of approaching relationships, outcomes, and perceptions.
- The arts can play a crucial role in improving students’ abilities to learn, because they draw on a range of intelligences and learning styles, not just the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences upon which most schools are based. (*Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning*, President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, talking about Howard Gardener’s *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1995)

The Physical and Sensory Impact of Arts Education

A student making music experiences the “simultaneous engagement of senses, muscles, and intellect. Brain scans taken during musical performances show that virtually the entire cerebral cortex is active while musicians are playing.” (*Learning and the Arts: Crossing Boundaries*, 2000, p. 14)

“Dramatic play, rhyming games, and songs are some of the language-rich activities that build pre-reading skills.” (*Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connection*, 1998, p. 1)

“Preschoolers who were given music keyboard lessons improved their spatial-temporal reasoning...used for understanding relationships between objects such as calculating a proportion or playing chess.” (*Education Leadership*, November, 1998, p. 38)

“Creative activity is also a source of joy and wonder, while it bids its students to touch, taste, hear, and see the world. Children are powerfully affected by storytelling, music, dance, and the visual arts. They often construct their understanding of the world around musical games, imaginative dramas and drawing.” (Hamblen, Karen A., *Theories and Research That Support Art Instruction for Instrumental Outcomes*, 1993)

“Regular, frequent instruction in drama and sign language created higher scores in language development for Head Start students than for a control group.” (*Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections*, 1998, p. 1)

“Listening to music for just an hour a day changes brain organization...EEG results showed greater brain coherence and more time spent in the alpha state.” (Malyarenko, et al., 1996)

Art Experiences that Promote Preschool Learning

Source: *Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections*, 1998, pp. 11–12

- Dance helps build motor control, body relationships, and a sense of direction.
- Drawing, sculpting, and other visual arts develop spatial acuity.

- Group activities, such as learning dance steps or singing songs, build social skills.
- As children describe people and things in their world using pictures, body movements, and mime, they enhance their descriptive, nonverbal, cognitive capabilities.
- Repeating stories, poems, and songs strengthens memory.
- The art supplies children choose for their work reflects their approach to process and outcomes.

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