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The Importance of Having Properly Funded Art Programs and The Benefits it Brings to Public Schools

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**The Importance of Having Properly Funded Art Programs and The Benefits it
Brings to Public Schools**

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The Importance of Having Properly Funded Art Programs and The Benefits it Brings to Public Schools

This paper is to help raise awareness towards arts education in schools and how these programs are losing their funding. The main focus is to present information on how the arts benefit people in both a school and in more public settings. Politics affects how much money is given to the arts and schools that are not arts-rich, it may be because they have a poorly funded arts program. The arts provide cognitive, health, and social benefits that can help children learn. The arts can also help people who participate in community programs. Students who participate in art, music, theater, or dance are more likely to succeed in school and are at a lower risk of getting involved in drugs and alcohol. The influence of an arts instructor or mentor can help students live positive lives and allows for them to have a chance to succeed in school and in their future endeavors. Each presidency in the past 20 years has had an effect on arts education in public schools. Presidents have brought little positive influence for the fight to keep the arts alive. If there are no arts programs in schools, there is no chance for children to obtain the benefits arts programs provide and no chance to experience the pleasure and engagement that comes with participating in the arts.

The fight for arts funding has been going on since before George Bush's administration. School administrations place emphasis on the STEM subjects, and it leaves little room for arts programs. Music, art, theater, and dance are not the top priority, especially in funding. There are many benefits for students when participating in the arts and in order to gain what the arts give, there must be proper funding for the arts in public schools. The issues of funding begin with the decisions that are made by the federal government and then the decisions are dispersed to the local government, where it is then required for school administrators to implement the

legislations. If there is no funding, there are no opportunities for students to receive the benefits that come with arts education.

Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts

Gifts of the Muse was written by Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks and was published by the RAND Corporation in 2004. Dr. Kevin F. McCarthy (1945-2015) served as a senior social scientist at the RAND Corporation and was the leading author of *Gifts of the Muse*. McCarthy conducted research on domestic policy issues with an emphasis on immigration and trends in California. He also conducted studies on municipal finance and demographic trends and their connections with education (Nauffts, 2002). In the book *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, Dr. McCarthy and his team demonstrates that the arts bring benefits to school systems and to the general public through organizations that teach and promote arts education. The book defines the “instrumental benefits” and the intrinsic, cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral, social, health, and economic benefits of arts education. The book explains each of these benefits and how they affect the way children learn in school (McCarthy et al, 2004).

The RAND Corporation supports the funding of arts in schools and since the funds of arts programs have been reduced, the corporation has researched and investigated how arts education enriches a child’s academic experience. The RAND Corporation reviews the effects of arts education and includes the effects as a stance for why arts programs must be funded. RAND research also looks at the role of arts policy in improving the approach to arts education in the United States (RAND Corporation).

Cross-Curricular Benefits

Arts-rich schools provide more opportunities for students. The authors label the benefits that affect test scores and school performance as “instrumental benefits.” This can also be called cross-curricular benefits of arts-rich schools on how their arts programs are more likely to provide better learning opportunities for students in comparison to schools that are not arts-rich (McCarthy et al 2004, 23).

Arts programs provide cross-curricular and intrinsic benefits. Research shows that students who participate in the arts are likely to achieve higher test scores on the SAT and other standardized tests than the students who do not participate. According to McCarthy, the cross-curricular benefits of arts education support economic growth. The intrinsic benefits help to create social bonds. When combined, arts education promotes cognitive growth and improved self-efficacy (McCarthy et al 2004, 4).

Arts-rich school environments provide an assortment of opportunities for students. The students in schools with arts programs develop positive attitudes towards the arts and toward school more broadly. Students who may have difficulties in conventional school subjects often benefit from arts education. These benefits include an improved attitude towards arts and school, new role models or mentors, and growth in self-confidence and self-efficacy (McCarthy et al 2004, 23).

Improved attitudes toward the arts and school occur when students have a combination of experiences, associations, and positive reinforcement in the school environment. Involvement in school-based arts programs influences a student’s attitude towards both the arts and the institution they associate with the arts experience (McCarthy et al 2004, 23). That is, when a student has a positive experience in a school-based arts program, they have a reason to look

forward to attending school. If a student is excited to learn about the arts in school, they are more likely to be excited about attending school.

Arts instructors serve as role models and mentors as well and help boost the attitudes of their students. When a young person has a faculty member or teacher serve as a mentor or role model, the student has opportunities to learn and grow beyond those of the traditional school environment. Mentors can help improve a student's attitude toward both the arts and the school as well as other institutions that play a formative role for youth, such as youth groups and after school learning programs. Role models can help form and mold other pro-social behaviors as well by teaching the students how to have positive interactions with one another (McCarthy et al 2004, 23).

Growth in self-confidence and self-efficacy are evidence of success in school and not simply in terms of the conventional school measures, like grades and test scores in standard academic courses. Arts education presents the opportunity for a student to be rewarded for success in arts experiences and be included in arts-centered social groups. Being successful in art classes and activities allows students to develop self-confidence and have a sense of well-being while involved in the school environment (McCarthy et al 2004, 23).

Self-efficacy is an individual's perceived ability to overcome an assortment of challenges. It is vital in motivating the behavioral changes. Self-efficacy has been analyzed in educational and behavioral settings as a crucial component to successful learning and to pro-social behaviors. Self-efficacy helps to improve a person's ability to learn and it develops confidence in a student's ability to problem solve; it helps the student predict success and to apply that success to future tasks. Self-efficacy helps students cope with stress and frustrations that are often involved in the learning process and it allows students to engage in academic

activities both where they are likely to be successful and where they might fail (McCarthy et al 2004, 24).

The cross-curricular benefits of arts education provide students the opportunity to grow and develop into well-rounded adults. Arts programs teach students how to be confident and how to expect the best out of the challenges they face. The cross-curricular effects of the arts allow students to be the best person they can be. Arts education also provides mentors to help the students in achieving success at school.

Intrinsic Benefits

Intrinsic benefits include pleasure and emotional well-being. Intrinsic effects are the reason why most people are drawn to the arts more so than the instrumental benefits. This benefit of the arts allows participants to feel rewarded and a sense of pleasure and emotional stimulation. Kevin F. McCarthy states that the “intrinsic benefits are the fundamental layer of effects that lead to many of the instrumental benefits...” (McCarthy et al 2004, 3). In learning environments the intrinsic benefits include the development of social bonds and learning how to use personal expressions in a public setting. A student might experience engagement and pleasure as an intrinsic effect. An expanded capacity for empathy and cognitive growth are intrinsic benefits that stem from the individual and group instruction that is elemental in arts education (McCarthy et al 2004, 4).

Engagement is the immediate response to a fascinating work of art and is often an unusual sensation. Engagement inspires feelings of captivation, admiration, and wonder. When one has an encounter with the arts, they are often struck by something extraordinary and often they are amazed by the ones who created the piece of work. When we as humans enter this state of fascination, we are able to acknowledge the particularity of the work of art in front of us with

enhanced participation and intensity. In the words of McCarthy, “we appreciate specifics in a way that is rare in everyday life, where we tend to cling to the things exclusively in terms of their relation to practical needs and purposes” (McCarthy et al 2004, 45). The arts allow us to feel a sensation that we don’t necessarily feel on a daily basis and these feelings allow us to dig deep inside of ourselves and feel emotions some of us have never felt before. Engagement with the arts allows us to find our inner emotions and we are allowed to feel the sensations that come with arts appreciation and participation. Pleasure is one of the most important intrinsic values of the performing arts and is a necessary element that helps one appreciate the arts (McCarthy et al 2004, 46-47).

Pleasure is an important factor to take into consideration as an arts educator. Pleasure is a happy feeling and if the students do not feel happy while performing, painting, or dancing then the educator has failed in instructing the students properly. When a student feels pleasure, it could be because they were once nervous about performing, and once they begin to perform, they feel the pleasure and confidence needed to successfully execute their performance. Educators and law makers should take pleasure into consideration because it is for the benefit of the student. There are some children who do not experience pleasure in conventional schoolwork and providing the arts allows the students to know what it is like to feel pleasure.

According to Carol S. Jeffers in the article “Within Connections: Empathy, Mirror Neurons, and Art Education,” the function of empathy is vital to the human community, as well as the arts classroom. Jeffers states that the arts classroom is “where the capacity can be developed.” Empathetic social exchanges thrive in arts classrooms. Empathy is the openness to others and their ideas and is first and foremost important to arts education. Through the arts,

students learn to cross political, cultural, and religious boundaries, and they are better able to understand important global concepts (Jeffers 18-19, 2009).

In the article “What Is Music Education For? Understanding and Fostering Routes into Lifelong Musical Engagement,” Stephanie Pitts states that “Musical activities can lead one to a sense of accomplishment, persistence and an enhanced determination.” Participating in the arts allows one to better cope with anger and allows them to effectively express themselves. This behavior is especially important for younger children and that is why learning the arts can help mold a child into a more positive and well-behaved person in their future. The arts also help with relaxation, coping with struggles, and working with others (Pitts 2017).

Cognitive Benefits

Arts programs promote cognitive development. The most researched benefits are improved academic performances in both test scores and grades. Learning opportunities in the arts contribute to the growth of academic skills. There are explicit forms of arts instruction that enhance and accompany fundamental reading and writing skills, as well as language development. The use of dance helps develop reading readiness in young children, and the study of music helps provide a context for teaching language skills.

When children begin to learn how to read and write, they must be able to associate letters, words and phrases with sounds, sentences and meanings. In *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, Sandra Ruppert describes a scenario where drama helps young students develop literacy skills. In the example, Ruppert notes that one of the most common approaches to teaching students how read is to have the teacher read the story to students. The use of drama in the classroom helps provides a secondary approach. Another beneficial approach

is to let the children act out their favorite stories. This approach helped motivate the students to learn (Ruppert 11-12, 2006).

There are different types of music instruction that help develop the capacity for spatial and temporal reasoning, which is important for learning and applying mathematic skills. Spatial and temporal reasoning is defined as the ability to acknowledge the relationship of ideas and objects in space and time. The book *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement* includes evidence that students who participate in band or orchestra during middle school and high school are more likely to perform better in math by grade 12. The students that were involved in band or orchestra were twice as likely to succeed in the highest levels of mathematics compared to their peers who were not involved in musical activities (Ruppert 12, 2006).

Cognitive growth is what ties the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits together. The arts draw us out of ourselves and redirect our attention to the object or performance, collaborators, and audiences. Engaging with a work of art challenges us and analyzing or making art contributes to our intellectual growth. Arts education helps us welcome new experiences that will expand our knowledge in other disciplines such as mathematics and reading (McCarthy et al 2004, 9).

Attitudinal and Behavioral Benefits

Arts programs help students develop attitudes that improve school performance by increasing rates of motivation and self-discipline. Arts programs support the development of social behaviors among children who are considered to be at-risk. Arts education mentoring programs that work with at-risk students work on acceptable behaviors and also provide positive role models. The mentors help students stay out of trouble, mitigate drug or alcohol use, and support them in making beneficial life choices (McCarthy et al 2004, 11).

Social Benefits

The arts present opportunities for people to come together both through collaboration and their participation in arts events and classes, including arts festivals and fairs. Participation in these arts activities can promote social solidarity and social cohesion through the development of community. Arts activities also help to develop community identity. The arts allow for a development of social capital through community interest and participation in the arts (McCarthy et al 2004, 28). This can be applied to the school environment as well: if a student enjoys the community of band or other arts activities and the environment is positive and engaging, their interest and participation will be strong, and they will become life-long supporters of the arts in their community.

Music Education Benefits

Music education brings a wide range of benefits to students. It allows students to feel a sense of accomplishment and it can improve one's health. In schools, music education can provide an outlet for students to better cope with anger and express their emotions more effectively. There are also documented benefits in terms of discipline, time management, relaxation, and coping with difficulties. According to Stephanie Pitts, music education is part of a rounded and creative curriculum. Yorke Trotter states that "an education with music at its heart will transform society," meaning that music gives people opportunities for fulfillment and creativity. Music education and related activities gives students a sense of accomplishment and determination and gives children skills for coping with emotional issues. Through music, says Pitts, children are able to express their emotions in a more effective way rather than throwing tantrums (Pitts 2017).

Funding and the Government

The benefits of arts education were not questioned until the early 1990s. From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, art programs had access to public funding that created a flourishing cultural sector in the United States. The recession that occurred in the early 1990s made it difficult for the government to maintain proper funding at both state and federal levels (McCarthy et al 2004, 1). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 was a vital piece of legislation for music and arts education in the United States. The legislation received more praise by the practitioners in the field of music education over any other major public law in American history. The Goals 2000 Act was promoted by both music and art educators as a way to provide support and awareness for arts programs. The Goals 2000 Act was the first education law to include the arts as a core subject in American public schools. After the Goals 2000 Act was passed, the National Standards for Music Education worked hard to create awareness and support for music education (Elpus 2013).

Once the Goals 2000 Act was passed, schools were invested in adding arts courses to graduation requirements. This meant that in order to graduate high school, students needed to complete courses in the arts, whether it was an art, theater, or music class. According to Kenneth Elpus, there was no significant effect on the average number of music classes offered as a result of Goals 2000, but there was an increase of high schools that mandated arts courses for graduation (Elpus 2013).

Although the Goals 2000 Act had the support of arts educators, politicians began to argue that implementing the standards would gain unnecessary political attention. According to Elpus, the National Standards and Goals 2000 Act received toxic political attention, which resulted in President Bill Clinton reducing the funds for the Goals 2000 Act and National Standards. The National Education Standards and Improvement Council was the body that the Goals 2000 Act

created and was supposed to have certified the National Standards and the local versions throughout the fifty states but since President Clinton and his administration did not appoint members for the National Education Standard and Improvement Council, the Goals 2000 Act failed to lend proper support and funding to arts programs (Elpus 2013).

In April of 1996, President Clinton signed a spending bill that would eliminate the NESIC and all of the provisions in Goals 2000 that correlated to the development of opportunity-to-learn standards. Despite this setback, in July of 1996, the American Music Conference (AMC) reported that twenty-four of the fifty states adopted state-level content standards in the arts that were replicas of the National Standards for the Arts (Elpus 2013).

Although the Goals 2000 Act was an important legislation for arts education, it ultimately failed since there was not enough support and funding for the legislation to succeed in funding arts programs.

The No Child Left Behind Act

When George Bush and his administration enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, the Act focused on prioritizing the subjects that are included on standardized testing. The subjects include math, science, English, and history but excluded music and the other arts. According to the article, "U.S. Arts Education Requirements" by Kevin Tutt, there has been little opportunity for school administrators to improve their arts programs after the No Child Left Behind Act was passed (Tutt 2014).

In Marci Major's article, "How They Decide: A Case Study Examining the Decision-Making Process for Keeping or Cutting Music in a K-12 Public School District," she states that "In an age of increasing accountability and educational standardization where there are tighter budgets and hardly any funds, the core subjects such as math and reading are gaining more

funding, while noncore subjects like music face the loss of budgets and programming. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 placed focus on the subjects that are assessed on the standardized tests, such as math, science, and English but left little funding for the fine arts” (Major 2013). School districts had to get students ready to achieve higher scores on the common core tests and left little instructional time for teachers to focus on the subjects that were not under the standardized testing requirements (Major 2013).

Race to The Top

When President Barack Obama and his administration passed the Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation, there was even more focus placed on the sciences and math, allowing for the arts to lose further financial and administrative support. The RTTT was created to reduce the NCLB issues of driving untested subjects out of the curriculum, but it also puts more focus on the STEM areas (Tutt 2014). The Obama administration pushed towards the inclusion of arts education in the school curriculum, but since Congress placed a higher concern for standardized testing in the STEM subjects, there was no room to fund and include arts programs. In the schools, educators and students were too focused on testing and there was little time to include the arts. Tutt states that education policies have “led to the decline of financial and administrative support for the less assessed areas.” Since the government had a strict emphasis on testing, there was no room to financially support arts in schools. Tutt states that the decline would continue and that administrators would have to rethink how the arts should be handled as well as how future legislation would affect not only the arts but all curriculum decisions (Tutt 2014).

Trump Administration

Arts programs have suffered for the past twenty years, beginning with the Clinton administration and the Trump administration has made funding even harder. In 2017, President

Trump proposed his fiscal budget for the 2018 year, that requested an elimination of the nation's independent cultural agencies. According to Felicia Knight in the article "The Ultimate Calamity Scenario in US Arts Funding: Elimination the National Endowment for the Arts," the president needed and lacked the support of Congress in order to successfully pass the bill (Knight 2017).

The President then ordered the resignation of the members of the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities. Once the members resigned, President Trump stated that he was "not going to renew the executive order for the committee anyway." The resignation of the group put an end to a cultural institution that was founded by Ronald Reagan in 1982. According to Knight, President Trump showed very little support for arts programs in general and even made it known in 2017 that he would not be in attendance at The Kennedy Center Honors, an event that every president since Jimmy Carter has attended. Trump also refused to host the Kennedy Center honorees at the White House, another expectation the President. Knight stated that President Trump was disassociating himself from the arts programs that this country holds dear. Knight included a quotation from art critic Phillip Kennecott "Mr. Trump may have effectively killed the tradition of presidential involvement with one of the country's highest profile arts awards." President Trump did not want to support arts programs, and intended to further reduce funding, making it even harder for schools to financially support arts programs (Knight 2017). Without support and funding, these programs cannot flourish.

The National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities was proposed by President Lyndon Johnson in March of 1965. Arts funding was to be divided among separate foundations for the arts and humanities. Douglass Starr quotes President Lyndon Johnson "we must recognize and encourage those who can be pathfinders for the nation's imagination and understanding. Arts

legislation can seek to build conditions under which the arts can thrive.” President Johnson appreciated the arts and wanted it to serve as a component to America’s greatness. President Johnson believed that a program for the arts would give a heart and soul to his Great Society (Starr 43, 1983).

The National Endowment for the Arts legislation was passed by the Senate in 1965 through a voice vote. The House had opposed it and claimed that the act would decrease the nation’s cultural level and could potentially lead to “attempts at political control of culture.” The political powers of the country were divided because they had different opinions and beliefs on how arts programs would influence the future of America’s culture and politics. Members of the Senate believed that the arts would bring great opportunities while members of the House thought that it would play a more political role in our culture (Starr 43, 1983). Public Law 89-209 to establish a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities was given by the eighty-ninth Congress to the President who signed it into the law on September 29th, 1965. The first grant for the foundation and its two self-governing subdivisions was 10.7 million dollars. The arts received 5 million dollars while the humanities were granted 5.7 million dollars. This funding remained constant from 1966 through 1968. Since the NEA donates to institutions and groups, their funds must be matched two or three to one from private sources. The budget began to grow from 5 million dollars in 1965 to 159 million dollars in 1981 (Starr 43, 1983).

Since the establishment of the National Endowment for Arts, the country has witnessed the openings of national and regional ballets, orchestras, and opera companies. The development of arts foundations has allowed the nation to flourish culturally (Starr 43, 1983). The NEA is the main source of income for arts programs across the country.

President Trump asked for the termination of the governments independent cultural agencies when proposing his fiscal 2018 budget. This elimination would affect the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). After President Trump's proposal, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies proposed a budget that would fund the NEA and NEH at 145 million dollars each. This number included a 5 million dollar cut to each of the agencies. The funding that goes into the NEA is required to disperse 40% of its program dollars to the nation's six Regional Arts Organizations (RAOs). The NEA also donates millions of dollars annually to arts agencies around the country. This includes well-established organizations such as the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the LA Philharmonic Association in Los Angeles, California (Knight 2017).

If the National Endowment for the Arts were to be defunded, many organizations would lose direct grant support from the NEA but also NEA money that would be re-granted through their state and regional arts agencies. The NEA is required to donate forty percent of its funding to larger arts agencies, but they are also required to dispense funds to the medium to small agencies. 40% of the NEA-supported projects are located in high-poverty areas and 65% of NEA grants go to these small to medium sized institutions. The NEA desperately needs to be given proper funding since they are the source for so many art institutions. Without the NEA, programs would not able to run successfully and provide their benefits. (Knight 2017).

The locations that would suffer the most from the elimination of the NEA include both rural America and urban America. Many areas lack transformative foundations and grant money from other sources and the only beneficial grants are available are those from the NEA and state and regional arts grant producers. The National Endowment for the Arts makes it possible for

people in low income areas to share artistic experiences of music, art, and theater like the people in New York City or Los Angeles experience them (Knight 2017). If the NEA were to be eliminated completely, rural and poor urban areas in the United States would suffer immensely. One part of the country experiences art in a more privileged way and the other is still fighting to earn other funding in order to experience dance, ballet, symphonies, and arts programs. Giving the NEA proper funds to help these low-income areas allows more Americans the opportunity have arts involvement like those who live in more privileged areas.

Conclusion

Arts education benefits and the funding arts institutions receive tie in together to create successful art programs in the school systems and the public community. In order for students to receive the benefits, the programs must have proper funding. If we want proper funding, we must continue to advocate and push for funds that will maintain successful arts programs. The instrumental benefits of arts education affect people throughout the rest of their lives. The involvement plays a vital role in future behaviors and attitudes toward the arts. Kevin F. McCarthy states that “most of the first-hand experiences with the arts is when young people learn how to draw, play an instrument, to sing in a choir, or maybe when they act in a play.” He states that “many young people do not continue on in the performing arts when they get older because the skills required become more advanced and are more time-consuming than the beginning curriculum.” In order for people to continue on, they must have had an experience that brought pleasure and recognition (McCarthy et al 2004, 54). Involvement in the arts begins at a young age and if participants have a stimulating experience, they are more likely to continue performing whereas people who have bad experiences tend to quit being involved. This is one reason why funding is very important because having funds allows there to be more

opportunities for people to experience what the arts have to offer. For example, in my internship, we have gained sixty new students and in order to keep these kids involved, we have to have the money to keep instruments in stock so that they can play an instrument that they are excited to play. The instructor and I want them to have positive experiences and gain the benefits of music education, but in order to do so we have to have funds to make some of the best experiences happen. If art programs want to keep recruiting new students along with keeping the previous students involved, the programs need to hold sufficient funds in order to be successful.

With President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-President elect Kamala Harris entering office, I am hopeful that they will advocate for higher levels for arts funding. From a *New York Times* article shortly before the 2020 presidential election, Robert L. Lynch, president and chief executive of Americans for the Arts is quoted saying that Mr. Biden's attitude is "less from a consumer point of view and more about the inspirational value and transformational value of the arts" (Bowley 2020). I believe that since President-elect Joe Biden wants to make a change in this country, he will also transform the issues of funding arts programs across the country.

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