

## Experience Academic Rigor

*Each art form, including music, dance, theatre, media arts, literary arts, and visual arts, offers a rigorous academic learning experience with distinct standards and outcomes, contributing significantly to cognitive development, personal growth, and societal advancement.*

## Each Art Form is an Academic Discipline

Each art form provides a rigorous academic learning experience. The arts are research-based academic fields that advance knowledge and practice in each art form. Music is a discipline, like math or science; dance is a discipline, like social studies or English language arts; theatre, media arts, literary arts and visual arts are all content subjects with learning standards in many state and national elementary and secondary school curriculums.

While it is wonderful to integrate a lesson on note value to study fractions and guide student achievement of math learning outcomes, the study of note value is also important as a singular subject of study. A study of music notation is as foundational to the study of music as the basic multiplication and division facts are to a study of mathematics. Each art form is a distinct content area with an accompanying set of standards and learning outcomes. Students developing physical skills for expression and communication and learning to connect the elements, principles, and practices of dance to make meaning of their individual life experience and their relationship to the world is a valuable and worthy task. Teaching dance, drama, visual art, or theatre as a distinct discipline signifies to students that these art forms are valuable subjects to study without attachment to learning goals in other disciplines held in higher esteem by our society such as math, reading, and writing.

Many arts educators assure their students that they are in the business of human development, using their art form to help students become better humans, not necessarily professional artists. However, a career as a professional artist is viable. Arts educators and generalist classroom teachers (whether they know it or not) are training the next generation of innovative, creative, and influential artists who will contribute to our society, culture, and economy in the coming decades. The world does not function without the knowledge and skill of artists. "The value of arts and cultural production in America in 2019 was \$919.7 billion, amounting to 4.3% of gross domestic product. The arts contribute more to the national economy than do the construction, transportation and warehousing, travel and tourism, mining, utilities, and agriculture industries."

Source: National Endowment for the Arts, [The U.S. Arts Economy in 2019: A National Summary Report](#), and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, [National Data for 1998-2019](#) (2021)

Learning in dance, drama, media arts, music, literary arts and visual arts introduces essential information and cultivates lifelong abilities. Whether engaging in folk arts or fine arts activities for personal development or social interaction, or

experiencing the arts as a creator or an observer, participation in the arts strengthens individuals and communities. As discussed above, arts skills, habits, and dispositions such as critical thinking, collaboration, character, citizenship, and communication may transfer to success and deep learning in other disciplines. When appropriate connections are explicitly made, these skills also apply to additional life experiences when appropriate connections are explicitly made. A focused study of these rigorous art disciplines is valuable in understanding how the arts benefit the health, economics, academic rigor, and connectedness of our global landscape.

## ACADEMIC ARTS PROGRAMS

### Elementary School Arts Programs

Elementary schools may have a dance, drama, media arts, music, or visual arts teacher who teaches discipline-specific content to some or all of the students at their assigned school. Many elementary programs don't offer a distinct program for each art form, but may have one or two art-form programs represented in their school. Some elementary schools may not offer art-specific programs at their school; instead, they may employ one or two arts educators in one or two disciplines that may be specifically assigned to focus on arts integration rather than discipline-specific lessons. However, our experience shows that a focus on discipline-specific lessons before integration enhances student learning in arts-integrated lessons.

After-school or before-school programs are other ways elementary schools provide arts programs. For example, some elementary schools have an orchestra practice for 45 minutes before the start of school or an after-school choir practice several times a week.

### Secondary School Arts Programs

Some public secondary schools provide a program for every art form in their school; in many cases, some offer only one. But if you live in an area where music, dance, theatre, and visual arts programs exist in local middle and high schools, consider how you, as an educator, can help with the vertical alignment of these programs: how can elementary school experiences prepare students for their next experiences in middle school, and then onto high school? When programs exist in all grade levels in a single art form, students benefit when teachers are well-connected, share opportunities, and collaborate to align their standards and lessons to build upon each other. Think about ways you can orient learning experiences to prepare students for the next academic opportunity in their arts education journey.

Oftentimes middle school arts programs are designed as introductory programs because students did not receive basic arts instruction in elementary school. But even with introductory classes, middle school arts programs often branch into leveled classes for students to help them improve and expand their talents and abilities. Take, for example, the inclusion of a beginning band class, an intermediate band class, and a more advanced group.

In the high school setting, programs begin to differentiate even more, showing the breadth of academic skills and rigor that exists within each art form. Each art form discipline is also made up of sub-disciplines. For example, the visual arts moves away from general classes like Visual Arts 1 and Visual Arts 2 and instead offers specific courses in ceramics, 3-D installation, photography, and drawing. Dance programs may expand from a Dance 1 and Dance 2 orientation in middle school to modern dance, urban dance, ballroom, social dance, yoga, musical theatre dance, and a fully produced dance company featuring student choreography. Music programs may evolve from general music and a general choir course to a capella choirs, madrigals, jazz singers, show choir, and others.

### Post-secondary School Arts Programs

Each artist's journey looks different. Specialization and academic training in an art discipline can continue into post-secondary learning opportunities. The traditional post-graduation route is to attend a college or university: many fine arts options exist. Apprenticeships, technical institutes, and conservatory programs offer alternative routes to becoming a professional artist. Some artists maintain a professional status throughout their career, and artistry is the

foundation of their livelihood. Other artists expand their work into other disciplines, continue to utilize their creative skills and artful perspectives, and provide value in other careers. Regardless of what route artists follow, the world benefits from individuals who apply a rigorous approach to their study of an art form at any stage of their life.

The arts develop creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, character and citizenship which are essential in other fields such as science, math, business, engineering, design, sales, marketing, recreation, medical and public service. The arts and sciences are integral to each other in life and in the work force.

## RESEARCH IN THE ARTS

The arts are academic fields supported by significant research-based literature that advances understanding, deepens knowledge, and improves practice. Relevant research in each art form, in arts education, as well as in arts integration can be found by searching specific art forms and within topics that span multiple art forms, such as creativity or literacy. Research discussing the arts in society shows specific ways that arts engagement impacts civic engagement, the economy, mental and physical health, and more. Research within each art form also demonstrates the vast benefits of arts education and arts integration, revealing improved academic achievement, cognitive benefits, and social and emotional benefits.

If you don't have access to an academic library at a local university or in your place of work, consider searching ArtsEdSearch.org and scholar.google.com to find research related to your topics of interest in the arts and education.



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