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Arts Enrichment in Afterschool

The Afterschool Alliance, in partnership with MetLife Foundation, is proud to present the second in our latest series of four issue briefs examining critical issues facing middle school youth and the vital role afterschool programs play in addressing these issues. This series explores afterschool and: arts enrichment, school improvement, digital learning and parent engagement. The briefs examine just a few of the ways afterschool programs support middle school youth, families and communities.

In 1999, the Arts Education Partnership and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities wrote, “When young people are involved with the arts, something changes in their lives.”ⁱ More than a decade later, the belief that the arts can profoundly impact children’s lives has not diminished. However, as a greater emphasis is placed on English Language Arts and math test scores, and as schools face budget cuts at the federal, state and local levels, providing a robust and comprehensive arts education during the school day becomes increasingly challenging. Afterschool programs are perfectly situated to bolster the efforts of schools and ensure that a wide breadth of arts learning experiences are available to students—offering an environment where students can build on music and art lessons learned during the school day, learn new art forms that may not be available at their schools and deepen their connection to the art world.

A Competition for Time and Resources

The importance of the arts in a child’s development is recognized by policy makers at the federal and state levels and by administrators and teachers at the school level. Earlier this year, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, “all students—100 percent—should have access to arts instruction. All children should have arts-rich schools.”ⁱⁱ And, in fact, 40 states plus Washington, D.C. require districts or schools to provide arts instruction in at least one of the arts disciplines at the middle school level.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet despite overwhelming support for the arts, challenges remain to ensuring that students’ school experiences are rich in arts education.

Schools are struggling to offer an assortment of arts programming.

One significant challenge schools face today is the ability to offer students a wide variety of arts learning experiences. In the 2009-2010 school year, music and visual arts education were available in a majority of elementary schools (94 percent and 83 percent, respectively), but just 4 percent of elementary schools—defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics as “schools with the lowest grade lower than or equal to grade 6 and the highest grade lower than or equal to grade 8”—offered drama/theater and only 3 percent provided dance instruction.^{iv} In

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addition, comparing the 1999-2000 school year to the 2009-2010 school year, the availability of dance education dropped 17 points (from 20 percent to 3 percent) and the availability of drama/theater dropped 16 points (from 20 percent to 4 percent).^v

Teachers are under pressure to increase their focus on reading and math instruction.

Classroom time is also at a premium in schools as the focus on English Language Arts and math scores intensifies. A national survey of 3rd to 12th grade public school teachers found that approximately half say that both arts instruction and music are getting less attention in school (51 percent and 48 percent, respectively). Sixty-two percent of middle school teachers state that other subjects are “crowded out by extra attention being paid to math or language arts” and 79 percent report that “more and more of teaching time is taken up with paperwork and reporting requirements to meet state standards.”^{vi} A 2007 report examining the effects of the No Child Left Behind law on curriculum and instruction time found that at the middle school level, 81 percent of school districts surveyed reported that curriculum changes were made in math and 79 percent reported changing their English Language Arts curriculum to focus more on tested content and skills.^{vii}

“To succeed today and in the future, America’s children will need to be inventive, resourceful, and imaginative. The best way to foster that creativity is through arts education.”

*—Arne Duncan,
Secretary of Education*

Four in 5 teachers (83 percent) agree that “even when students are struggling, electives are necessary—they give students something to look forward to and are essential to a well-rounded education.” However, time dedicated to the arts is lacking in schools.^{viii} Of elementary schools that offered music education, seven percent offered it less than once a week and of schools that offered visual arts, 15 percent offered it less than once a week. More than 4 in 10 elementary schools offered dance (47 percent) and drama/theater (42 percent) less than once a week.^{ix}

Students in schools serving predominantly low-income households receive less arts instruction than students in schools serving higher-income households.

Arts learning opportunities are also less likely to be available in elementary schools that serve predominantly students who are from low-income households. For instance, 92 percent of schools with less than 26 percent of their student population qualifying for federal free or reduced price lunch provide visual arts instruction. But among elementary schools whose student population is greater than 75 percent free or reduced price lunch eligible, 80 percent offered visual arts instruction—a 12 point difference or 835,000 more students at schools serving predominantly low-income households who do not receive visual arts instruction. Music education is also less likely to be offered at a school serving a high number of low-income students. Ninety-six percent of elementary schools with the lowest percentage of youth from economically disadvantaged households provide music instruction compared to 89 percent of elementary schools with the highest number of youth from low-income households—a seven point difference or close to 400,000 students.^x

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Arts education is competing for schools' time and resources, but is often coming out second best. The opportunity to leverage the arts and engage students in learning becomes vulnerable as the school day becomes increasingly focused on reading and math, and limited budgets make it difficult for schools to provide a wide variety of arts programming and dedicate sufficient classroom time to the arts. This does not mean that parents, educators and arts organizations should stop advocating for more and better arts enrichment during the school day, but cleverly designed and delivered arts education can and should be part of any quality afterschool and summer program as well.

Why Do Children Need the Arts in Their Lives?

In addition to the intrinsic benefits that they offer, the arts have the ability to influence and shape a child's development on a number of levels—academically, socially and emotionally. Involvement in the arts allows children to express themselves—tapping into their inventiveness and creativity—and is a fun outlet that helps positively stimulate and motivate students. Evaluation after evaluation demonstrates the extrinsic, in addition to intrinsic, benefits that are transferred to children who participate in the arts, such as:^{xi}

- **Academic gains:** Studies have found that students who participate in arts programs show academic progress^{xii} and have associated greater levels of engagement in the arts with greater academic gains—students with high levels of participation in the arts received better grades and higher standardized test scores compared to students who had very little involvement in the arts.^{xiii} For example, a long-term study of economically disadvantaged youth participating in community-based afterschool arts programs found that participants had higher rates of academic achievement and were more likely than non-participants to be involved in their school's student government and participate in a math or science fair.^{xiv}

“Students who have arts-rich experiences in school do better across-the-board academically, and they also become more active and engaged citizens, voting, volunteering and generally participating at higher rates than their peers.”

*—Rocco Landesman,
Chairman, National
Endowment for the
Arts*

- **Improved cognitive skills:** The arts also have the ability to help students further develop their cognitive skills—such as memory and the ability to focus—which can benefit them academically and socially. Studies examining the effects of participation in music and theater found that the two art forms helped participants apply strategies learned in rehearsals to improve memorization skills.^{xv} In addition, behavioral studies of students involved in dance suggest that participation in dance helps students with their focus and attention skills.^{xvi}
- **Positive behaviors:** A number of studies have found positive associations between a student's behavior and involvement in the arts. For example, arts learning opportunities help encourage students to stay in school.^{xvii} In Pittsburgh, PA, an evaluation of middle school students participating in a collaboration that integrated visual arts into the school

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curriculum reported that the number of suspensions and discipline referrals decreased and student attendance improved.^{xviii} A separate evaluation of afterschool programs serving middle school students found that students who participated in arts programs reported high levels of interest and motivation and were better able to concentrate.^{xix}

- **Increased engagement:** Arts have the ability to excite and motivate youth, acting as a gateway to develop their interests in other subjects,^{xx} and improving levels of engagement and lowering levels of indifference among youth. A study examining middle school students in eight afterschool programs focused on arts enrichment as well as academic enrichment, community service, sports and physical activity found students demonstrated positive engagement and development and exhibited high levels of motivation.^{xxi} A separate evaluation reviewing the 4-H Youth Development Arts and Communication Program in Wisconsin found more than 76 percent of youth stated that their involvement in the afterschool program helped them develop their motivation “quite a bit” or “a great deal” to do their best work.^{xxii}
- **Creativity:** When children are encouraged to think creatively, it lends itself to critical thinking and inventiveness, benefiting them in their adult lives. In fact, a research report found that 97 percent of business leaders and 99 percent of school leaders believe that creativity is increasingly important in U.S. workplaces.^{xxiii} A multi-year study of children participating in the Thriving Minds arts afterschool program in Dallas, TX,—a program that works with school districts and a large number of arts and science organizations to offer arts and academics in afterschool and summer programs, funded in part by the 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative and Title I grants—found that while participating in the program, children progressed from interacting with creations to becoming creators themselves. Children advanced from listening to music or singing songs by artists to composing a musical piece or writing an original song.^{xxiv}

“In both music and visual arts, the tasks, whether responding or creating, had significant intellectual content and often required academic knowledge.”

*—Stuart Kerachsky,
Acting Commissioner,
National Center for
Education Statistics*

These positive outcomes demonstrate the possibilities the arts bring to children’s lives and what’s at stake when children are unable to engage in arts learning opportunities. With these outcomes in mind, the case is strengthened to find the time and space, both in school and out, in which students can more fully involve themselves in, and benefit from, the arts.

The Role that Afterschool Programs Can Play

An individual’s introduction to the arts at an early age, particularly before they reach their teen years, is a contributing factor to developing an interest in the arts and ultimately benefitting from what the arts have to offer.^{xxv} At a time when arts education is losing the battle for classroom time in schools, afterschool programs can offer much-needed support and provide students with an additional outlet to participate in the arts. Afterschool programs across the country are finding new and exciting ways to bring the arts to children in their communities, augmenting

students' access and exposure to the variety of ways the arts can influence their lives and providing the opportunity to further develop a mastery of an art form. A few examples of the ways afterschool programs are broadening middle school students' access to and time with arts education include:

1. *Working with schools and the community to help ensure all children are able to participate in the arts.*

The **Family Dynamics Beacon Center Afterschool Program**, located at Stephen Decatur Middle School 35 (M.S. 35) in Brooklyn, NY, brings arts programming to students at M.S. 35 who have no access to arts education during the school day. The artist residency program was created in addition to the homework help, service-learning programs and recreational activities the Family Dynamics Beacon Center Afterschool Program already provided. In an innovative partnership with Material for the Arts (MFTA), a New York City Department of Cultural Affairs program, the artist residency program enlists New York City artists to lead daily art-making workshops for students. Students reuse, repurpose and transform donated materials from businesses and individuals into art projects that range from collages to costumes. Each year, the Family Dynamics Beacon Center Afterschool Program transforms M.S. 35's lobby into an art gallery, displaying student's art during the program's annual talent night.

2. *Providing an opportunity for children to build on their school-based arts education; further honing their skills and enabling them to master an art form.*

The **Latino Arts Strings & Mariachi Juvenil Program** in Milwaukee, WI, is a high-quality, skills-based afterschool music program that prepares middle school students to participate in top-level high school orchestra programs. More than 90 percent of program participants are Hispanic youth from low-income homes, many of whom would otherwise not have an opportunity to receive serious instruction in violin, viola, cello and guitar. Students are required to practice 30 to 60 minutes per day and must attend scheduled rehearsals and perform throughout the greater Milwaukee area, while parents must sign off on practice logs. The Latino Arts Strings & Mariachi Juvenil Program helps students improve their playing skills and prepares them for high-level music performances. Students in the program have performed at national conferences and on television, toured in Europe and released their own CD.

3. *Providing children expanded opportunities to interact with and learn from professional artists.*

The **Wooden Floor** in Santa Ana, CA, offers a curriculum of ballet and modern dance, bringing in leading artists from the community to teach a student body that is 96 percent low-income and 95 percent Hispanic. It is a unique program that combines high-quality dance education, collaboration with renowned

“We know that reaching our goal [to provide better arts education for our state’s students] will take many partners; we hope that with increased engagement from education partners and arts partners across the state, we can reach our goal of ongoing, in-depth, and consistent, arts education for every student, at every school, every year.”

—Washington State Arts Commission

artists, a 10-year mentoring commitment to students, and individualized academic and social services. The Wooden Floor uses dance taught by professional artists to empower children participating in the program: strengthening their self-esteem, self-discipline and sense of accomplishment; helping them learn creative problem-solving; and encouraging teamwork, leadership, cooperative learning, well-being and joy. Professional dancers and choreographers incorporate the life experiences and perspectives of students into the art-making process, creating a stronger connection between the students and the program, and impart their professional experience to their students. Evaluations of the program found that the overall GPA of students in the program increased from 3.0 to 3.2, 100 percent of students graduated from high school on time and 100 percent of students enrolled in college.

4. *Offering a venue where children can feel safe, explore a variety of art forms and learn to more confidently express themselves.*

Sitar Arts Center in Washington, D.C., creates a safe space for more than 800 young people a year, 80 percent of whom come from low-income families. Sitar's students have the opportunity to sample music, drama, dance, visual arts, digital arts and writing—or delve deeply into one art form. Sitar Arts Center is designed specifically for the arts—with a modern theater, specially designed art rooms, two dance studios, 10 practice rooms, a band room and a digital arts lab—and creates a community environment for young people to freely express themselves and encourages students to experiment with different art forms as they observe other young artists exploring various disciplines. The program partners with some of D.C.'s premiere arts organizations—including The Washington Ballet, the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the National Symphony Orchestra—and employs more than 100 volunteer teaching artists, giving their students mentors who are both artistically exemplary and caring adults who provide guidance that carries over into their academic and social lives. Surveys of the program's students found that 96 percent of students reported that they were confident to express themselves in class, 98 percent reported feeling safe at Sitar Arts Center and 94 percent reported that their art skills have improved because of the program.

“The combination of arts and afterschool makes sense. Afterschool programs are making a difference in communities across the country by providing kids with a creative, fun and exciting environment that allows them to express themselves and ultimately grow as individuals.”

*—Lisa Lucheta, Principal,
Torani*

5. *Using the arts as a platform to teach children academic subject matter in fun and interesting ways, helping excite students about learning and become more engaged in the subject matter.*

The **Carolina Studios Music Technology program** is a one-of-a-kind afterschool program in Charleston, SC, aimed at at-risk, urban youth ages 9 to 18. The program combines music, technology, media arts and language arts, offering a structured curriculum designed to encourage and stimulate students' creative curiosity while providing training in technology skills and improving their academic performance. Appealing to the students' interest in hip-hop and rap music genres, the Carolina Studios Music Technology program offers them the opportunity to

gain proficiency in music creation software programs; create lyrics through written and vocal freelance presentations; collaboratively create CDs and participate in public performances to showcase their talent. Classroom teachers reported that program participants improved their attendance rates and performance in class, and students reported setting positive future goals for themselves.

Conclusion

The arts have the remarkable ability to positively affect a child in his or her entirety— influencing his or her developmental, behavioral, social and intellectual capacities. Afterschool programs are helping schools and communities ensure that their children have access to the arts and are able to benefit from all the arts have to offer. The role afterschool programs play in providing arts education and enrichment becomes increasingly important as the arts curriculum finds itself pitted against the pressures of standardized tests.

Afterschool and summer programs draw on the expertise of arts organizations, arts education organizations, and school arts and music educators, offering broad exposure to the variety of existing art forms and offering dedicated time for deeper learning in the arts. Opportunities for arts education and enrichment, both in school and out-of-school, can help excite children about school, engage them in academic subjects, improve their focus and spark their creativity. The absence of the arts from a student’s life is a lost opportunity to inspire change and individual growth. Across the country, afterschool programs are providing a nurturing environment and strengthening students’ relationships to the arts and thereby supporting overall student success.

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ⁱⁱ Prepared Remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on the Report. (2012). *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 2009-10*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/prepared-remarks-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-report-arts-education-public-eleme>

ⁱⁱⁱ Arts Education Partnership. (2012) *State of the States 2012: Arts Education State Policy Summary*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/State-of-the-states-2012-FINAL.pdf>

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