

Spheres of Influence

This representation of the arts education field flips the power structure by putting students at the center, and it illuminates possible relationships between stakeholders. Who is already in your network? What new connections do you see? Who can become your new partner or ally?



Image: Arts Education Field Guide, Americans for the Arts

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Barb Whitney: Advocating for Students through the Arts

[Heather Vaughan-Southard](#) [Americans for the Arts](#), [Arts Advocacy](#), [Arts Education Field Guide](#), [Arts Education for America's Students](#), [Arts Education Partnership](#), [ArtScan](#), [Barb Whitney](#), [Creative Many Michigan](#), [Critical Links](#), [Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art](#), [Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art](#), [ESSA](#), [Imagination Project](#), [James Catterall](#), [Lansing Arts Gallery and Education Center](#), [MAEIA](#), [UCLA](#)

Access to the arts for students in schools offers an avenue for self-expression and a source of inspiration. Beyond that, the arts develop students' critical thinking skills. Additionally, numerous studies prove the arts benefit academic performance, including that of standardized testing.



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A wealth of relevant data exists proving that students regularly exposed to the arts are more successful both inside and outside of school. In the landmark 2003 [Critical Links](#) publication, 62 academic research studies collectively demonstrated that arts education improves not only academic skills, but students' motivation and achievement.

Moreover, students in low-income schools are affected more significantly than their counterparts. James Catterall's large-scale longitudinal study titled "[Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art](#)" found that in particular disadvantaged students with arts involvement showed strong associations with voting and volunteerism, college enrollment, and better earning within careers.

Arts programs are proven to correlate with improved attrition rates and increased participation in school communities. In other words, schools benefit, too. Beyond the value of the arts for individual students, the arts build community within schools. Arts experiences provide students a non-traditional opportunity for academic success and often, a reason to stay in school.

Data from the UCLA's [Imagination Project](#), a longitudinal study of 25,000 participants, reported positive statistics related to arts involvement. This research recognizes the arts as a driver for increased self-esteem, as well as decreased dropout rates. In terms of application, by offering arts curriculum, schools can use the arts to effectively attract or retain families.

As illustrated by countless studies, accessibility to the arts enables individuals to succeed. However, in recent [research published in 2017](#) by Americans for the Arts in which my research was cited, statewide leaders revealed that due to narrowing of the curriculum, standardized testing, and other factors, the arts are seen as a nicety, rather than as an integral factor in student learning.

Unfortunately, the categorical devaluation of the arts is a factor when schools are faced with difficult budget decisions; cutbacks of the arts are often considered as a potential cost-savings measure. Elimination of arts specialists has occurred in many districts across the country. This trend of unequal access relates to valuation and resources, disproportionately affecting rural and inner-city youth. Critical opportunities for self-expression and upward mobility are overlooked. Unequal access to the arts underscores a need for advocacy measures to ensure arts education access for all students.

To be clear, students **do** have a right to arts instruction in schools. States are required to provide arts instruction as a part of a well-rounded education within the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), which was passed in 2015. To reiterate, the right of arts education for all youth in the USA is currently guaranteed by law, and the right to equal treatment in education is also guaranteed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



Image Credit: Pixabay vector graphic

In addition, a variety of state policies require school districts to provide students with arts instruction. However, surveys indicate discrepancies between policy and practice. Despite legal recognition and policies upholding the vital role of the arts in appropriately

educating the nation's students, a review of relevant scholarship and state surveys indicate that students throughout the country have not received equal access to the arts over the past two decades.

As an example, the Arts Education Partnership's [ArtScan](#) database currently illustrates that nearly all states have developed content standards for elementary and secondary arts education; yet oversight for the provision of arts education at a school, district, and statewide level is relatively limited, as very few states offer means to monitor policy. In other words, students across the country are not equally receiving regular, sequential, curriculum-based arts instruction, which is proven to help them succeed in school, work, and life.

In some cases, schools or districts assume that volunteers, artists, and community arts organizations will provide increased arts education programming. However, these supplemental tactics require additional resources to upscale arts and cultural programs.

Certainly students benefit from supplemental arts education through community arts education providers. As one example, the recent study of [Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art](#) in Arkansas included a large-scale randomized lottery selection of youth to tour the museum. Findings revealed causal relationships between increased critical thinking, social tolerance, empathy, and interest in the arts. However, occasional field trips or site-visits from teaching artists ideally supplement classroom coursework and instruction in conjunction with arts specialists. A model without arts specialists supporting the other roles diminishes quality arts instruction for all youth.



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Pictured you will note a guiding document provided by national partners that supported the stance on the value of each role pictured, the important providers of arts education,

including: Certified Arts Educators, Community Arts Providers, and Certified Non-Arts Educators.



Image: Arts Education for America's Students: A Shared Endeavor. Americans for the Arts.

The shared endeavor is best understood by examining the intersections of the Venn diagram. Certified Arts Educators and Certified Non-Arts Educators or classroom teachers, working together, offer students sequential, standards-based arts curriculum. Classroom teachers and community arts providers offer students standards-based connections between the arts and other content areas. Finally, community arts education providers intersecting with certified arts educators offer students deep expertise and professional experience.

As another resource for deepened understanding of our roles within the arts education ecosystem, the [Arts Education Field Guide](#) from Americans for the Arts illustrates spheres of influence. As a prescriptive document, the field guide encourages stakeholders in arts education to build more effective relationships in school, community, and statewide that will allow arts education to thrive. By viewing the student as the primary stakeholder at the center of the ecosystem, examination may be made regarding current relationships and opportunities for new connections. Policy and funding decisions should ideally be made with the view of how it will affect a student's learning experience.

combat its reduction or elimination. We can identify as champions for the arts and advocates for arts education.

As a MAEIA Leadership Associate I am hoping to make a bigger impact by sharing the vital role the arts play in supporting children's learning, educational experiences, and future prospects as United States citizens. My goal is that by providing data and recommendations for how the arts can help students, communities, and our society, I will help create a new group of advocates in students, educators, administrators, and more.

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