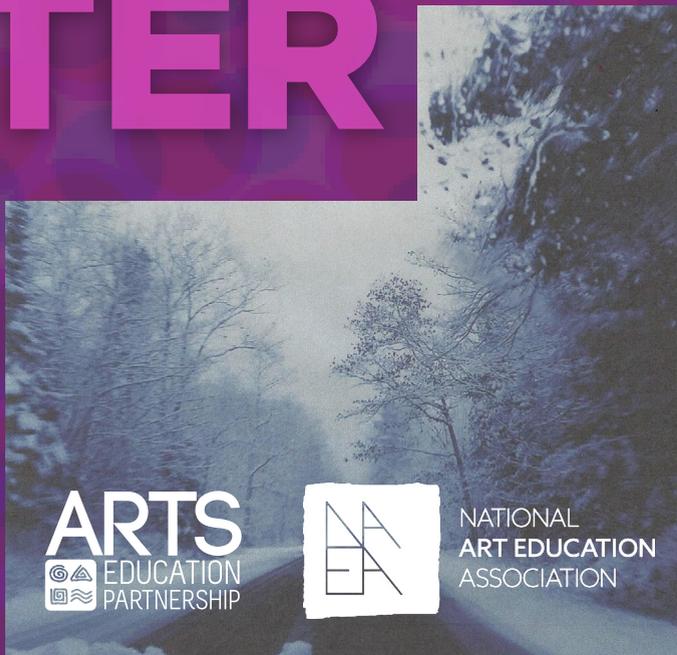


VISUAL ARTS MATTER



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How Visual Arts Education Helps Students Learn, Achieve and Thrive

Visual arts can be a powerful discipline to support success throughout a student's education, both within and outside of school settings. We experience visual arts each day, whether through our own creativity or everyday objects, such as the design of a cereal box or logo of a favorite sports team. For students, engaging with visual arts might take place during an art class, through a trip to an art museum or by participating in an arts-integrated English class. As students learn to create, respond and connect to their surroundings, experiences with visual arts help them to gain skills that positively impact their school experience. The Arts Education Partnership reviewed multiple research studies identified within ArtsEdSearch — a national clearinghouse of rigorous arts education research — to better understand the role visual arts play in student success. The body of research AEP examined suggests that participating in visual arts can:

- 1 Cultivate skills for learning.**
- 2 Boost students' academic achievement.**
- 3 Enhance the educational experience of traditionally underserved students.**

RIGHT: Abigail Rumpp, L&N STEM Academy, Knoxville, TN



Visual arts education cultivates skills for learning.

Visual arts education helps students develop critical thinking skills, which in turn lead to a deeper understanding of educational content — both within the arts and in other core subject areas. Visual arts education also fosters creativity in students and increases student engagement in the following ways:

- 1 Strengthens critical thinking.** Research indicates that when students engage with visual arts, whether in a museum or in a classroom, they make positive gains in critical thinking skills.¹
- 2 Encourages student engagement.** Teachers observed that students who participated in visual arts programs at museums or in classrooms tended to have more interest in the arts and engagement in school.²
- 3 Fosters creativity.** Researchers found that students who study the arts tend to score higher on creativity measures. Preliminary findings suggest there is a strong relationship between studying visual arts and figural or visual creativity.³



Visual arts education boosts students' academic achievement.

When students engage in visual arts education, they can experience achievement in other facets of their education that they may not have otherwise experienced. Research indicates that visual arts education can impact other areas of achievement in the following ways:

- 1 Enhances writing quality and early reading skills.** In one study, drawing before writing helped students formulate ideas and led to better quality of writing and storytelling.⁴ Researchers also found a correlation between visual arts training and awareness of spoken language in young readers.⁵
- 2 Contributes to postsecondary success.** Arts students are more likely than their non-arts peers to graduate, attend a postsecondary school and earn a four-year college degree. In college, engagement with visual arts can have a range of positive impacts, from better performance on geometry tasks to increased observational accuracy for medical students.⁶
- 3 Improves test scores.** In one study of fourth-grade students in four Ohio elementary schools, researchers found that students participating in an arts-rich curriculum performed better on proficiency tests in math, science and social studies than students with less access to the arts.⁷



FAR LEFT: Savana Olivas, Xavier College Preparatory, Phoenix, AZ

LEFT: Joanna Zhu, Walton High School, Marietta, GA

Visual arts education enhances the educational experience of traditionally underserved students.

English learners and students who come from low-income backgrounds experience positive achievement results from participation in visual arts in the following ways:

1 Helps students acquire English skills. English learners who engage in arts programs at their schools increase their listening, writing and speaking skills.⁸ This process occurs through discussing their personal artwork aloud and writing about art.⁹

2 Increases academic achievement of teenagers from low-income backgrounds. Teenagers from low-income backgrounds who have a high level of engagement with the arts are more likely to complete high school, have a higher GPA and attend college at higher rates than their peers with low arts engagement.¹⁰

3 Impacts students positively outside of academics. When students from low-income backgrounds participate in the arts, their civic engagement increases compared with peers who don't engage in the arts. Students with a high level of arts engagement are also more likely to participate in extracurricular activities.¹¹



ABOVE: Blossom Omeje, Alief Hastings High School, Houston, TX

RIGHT: Desiree Dobbins, L&N STEM Academy, Knoxville, TN

Visual Arts Matter

The current body of research demonstrates the far-reaching and lasting impact of visual arts education, including increased math scores, language acquisition and many other positive outcomes. By investing in visual arts education from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education, education leaders, policymakers and practitioners can support student achievement and build a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Acknowledgements

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About the Arts Education Partnership

AEP at Education Commission of the States is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business and philanthropic organizations that was created in 1995 by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education. AEP maintains ArtsEdSearch. All studies cited in this brief are vetted by a panel of arts education experts and curated in ArtsEdSearch.

COVER PHOTOS:

TOP LEFT: Ania Johnson, Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts, West Palm Beach, FL

TOP RIGHT: Olivia Warren, Aurora Christian High School, Aurora, IL

BOTTOM LEFT: Emily Desmarais, Fairhaven High School, Fairhaven, MA

BOTTOM RIGHT: Maria Acosta, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School, Hayward, WI

ENDNOTES

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11. *Ibid.*

Artwork featured in this document is provided by the National Art Education Association and created by student members of the National Art Honor Society.

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