

High Achieving Schools Have Great Arts Programs

Good morning. I'm John Prins. I live in Branford. I have served for 12 years - and I was just reelected to another 6-year term - on the Branford Board of Education; 8 yrs on the CAFE Board of Directors. I'm here today as a founding board member of the CT Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE), a future state affiliate of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network.

I am speaking on behalf of an extraordinary group of CT arts organization leaders who include Arts Administrators; Music Educators; Art Educators; the Theater; and Dance.

They represent thousands of educators and many thousand CT school children.

They are eager to apply their professionalism and passion to improving the lives of children across all socio-economic strata by infusing in them a love for all that the arts have to offer, and by helping our children develop their voice and what they are truly capable of and who they can become.

Included in the packets we've prepared and distributed to you are materials that explain in depth the things that I'm going to mention briefly in my short time before you. Please note how current the research and articles are.

Design, sell, produce, fabricate, interpret, improvise, create, build, adapt, collaborate. These are terms that describe skills, qualities and characteristics that could appear on the job descriptions, help wanted ads, and performance appraisals of just about any workplace. There isn't a CEO or a principal or school board member that hasn't heard a presentation or read countless articles about what we have come to know and love as "21st century skills."

It is easy to read about or be told/taught about these skills. But nothing can come close to the real experience of making something from nothing; working with others to solve a problem on the stage or in the practice room; interacting with adults and community members to create something out of an idea and watching it become something of value to that community – often in profound ways.

Children who participate in the experiences that are intrinsic to the arts when they first enter school have an advantage in terms of the repertoire of skills and competencies that carry across disciplines and that will be with them for life – the kinds of skills and competencies that are vital to learning and that are so highly sought after by employers of all kinds.

Because students learn so much more by 'doing' an activity than by simply being lectured to about it, our teachers do not simply talk about the arts, but have their students produce an art form. Teachers don't talk about Beethoven, but rather have students study, play, perform one of his symphonies. Teachers don't talk about Van Gogh, but work at producing and understanding Van Gogh-like art.

In many children, one or more of the arts represent their best or maybe only path to success in learning, because that's how their brains work best. Call it the intellectual "home" for so many children who might otherwise be headed on an unfortunate journey to failure. Is there really any reason why the arts should not be an integral part of the differentiated instruction that is so important to teaching and learning today? Frankly, we know anecdotally, and increasingly the research supports the fact that for children at all points along the achievement spectrum, the arts is the reason they keep coming to school.

Other states, e.g., Missouri, are finding that higher levels of participation in fine arts correlate significantly to –

- Lower rate of the kinds of infractions that require student removal from the classroom
- Higher attendance rates
- Higher Math scores
- Significantly higher standardized test scores in Communication Arts for students in the sixth through eighth grades
- Positive correlation with high school graduation rates
- The positive relationship between fine arts participation and student outcomes is true for districts across the socioeconomic spectrum, i.e., the study findings apply to districts with high percentages of children in poverty and of those from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds

[Included in your packets are examples of scientific studies and brain research that explore and validate the neurobiological benefits of early exposure to quality arts education.]

In our zeal to increase student performance, we often find ourselves cutting the very thing that is actually the key ingredient for making learning what we all want it to be. Therefore...

We recommend -

- Expanding levels of fine and performing arts in CT schools and including fine and performing arts offerings as part of the core academic curriculum, taught by highly qualified, certified arts educators
- Providing high quality administrative and instructional leadership to support the integration of the arts disciplines in the core curriculum
- Assuring that funding is provided to support research to develop a more comprehensive picture of the state of arts education in CT, and to raise awareness of the importance of the arts to a quality education [by convening policymakers, educational leaders, community leaders, representatives of public and private funding sectors, administrators, teachers, parents and students across the state] and to provide specific information to schools and districts for strengthening the quality and availability of fine arts education to students across the state.

We have no doubt that a high quality arts education will dramatically reduce, and perhaps even eliminate, the achievement gap by ensuring that learning for each and every child becomes a lifelong, joyful habit, one that connects all the component parts of a healthy, productive human existence. We believe that a quality arts education can help restore CT's schools to their place as the highest performing public education system in the nation.

Thank you.