

# AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

## ISSUE BRIEF

Issue Brief No. 21



August 2005

## Arts and Afterschool: A Powerful Combination

*We work hard every day alongside our community partners to inspire, empower, and unite children and communities through education, arts and culture. We do this because we believe that a community, working together, can lift children up to better their lives using arts and culture as tools and catalysts...Our programs help them to achieve academic success, develop essential life and learning skills, and learn alongside their parents and families.*

Big Thought, Dallas

In this increasingly competitive information age and creative economy, knowledge and skills in the arts and music are important in their own right. However, when done well, the integration of the arts into afterschool programs helps build and reinforce important student learning. Not only does it help strengthen teamwork, responsibility, persistence, self-discipline, and presentation skills, but arts education also can promote learning in core subjects such as reading, writing and math. “By working with half notes and quarter notes in a musical exercise, for example, students get a better understanding of fractions and ratios. Many educators who incorporate the arts in classroom instruction say it promotes interdisciplinary learning, engages students who would not otherwise excel and helps reveal students’ hidden talents.”<sup>1</sup>

Most engaging and successful afterschool programs have well-designed art and music components. The arts provide a certain excitement and vibrancy that students need in general, but particularly in the afterschool and summer hours. The arts are a key element to attracting young people, especially middle and high school students, to afterschool programs because they allow for individual expression and demonstration of their work. This is essential because regular attendance is the only way afterschool and summer programs can impart their positive effects. An additional bonus is that the arts also can attract family members to the programs with events such as “family arts nights,” where families can both watch and participate in performances and projects with their children.

### Creative Achievement

The arts enhance educational experience for a variety of reasons. First, there is intrinsic value in having the opportunity to express oneself creatively. Plus, the fun and engaging nature of the arts can provide opportunities for “stealth learning,” with drawing as an exercise in geometry, mixing paints as chemistry, dance and music as counting and drama as reading comprehension and public speaking. In addition, there now exists a great deal of research on the mental stimulation and life lessons provided by arts education, which help youth succeed in school and later in life. Afterschool arts programs across the country are bearing this out. (For examples of what afterschool art students are producing, visit [www.afterschoolscene.com](http://www.afterschoolscene.com))

- “Original writing of plays by high school drama students made them more cooperative and confident learners in terms of valuing their own ideas and valuing their contribution to the group through improved attendance...These confident attitudes and behaviors led to more sustained activities of learning rather than giving up in the face of doubts or complex problems.”<sup>2</sup>

- “Many students in a theater acting program reported that the intense review of Shakespeare texts in preparation for performing helped them not only master that difficult material but also improve their reading of other complex material such as math and physics texts.”<sup>3</sup>
- “High school music students score higher on SATs in both verbal and math than their peers. In 2001, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 41 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework/experience in the arts.”<sup>4</sup>
- The Comic Book Project, an afterschool program that uses comic books as a path to literacy, is improving kids’ ability to read and their enjoyment of it. In the project evaluations, both youth and staff reported improved reading and writing skills, as well as increased enjoyment of reading.<sup>5</sup>  
*The art and the writing in a comic book are very naturally wedded. The idea is to forge an alternative pathway to literacy through the arts, and children love comics.*  
 –Michael Bitz, creator, The Comic Book Project<sup>6</sup>
- Sarasota Ballet of Florida runs a free dance program that uses the discipline of dance and classes on the history of dance, social etiquette and nutrition to build students’ confidence and improve their behavior. The program, Dance--The Next Generation, has been able to take youth with discipline problems and turn them into honor roll students. Students who successfully complete the seven-year course are guaranteed a scholarship to the University of South Florida, a program partner.<sup>7</sup>
- In 1968, Dr. Walter J. Turnbull founded the Boys Choir of Harlem as an alternative to the despair he found in the streets and schools of Harlem. In 1985, the Choir established a formal afterschool music education and tutoring program. 55 percent of the boys who participate in the Choir live below the poverty level, but 98 percent of its graduates go on to college. Many alumni say the program changed their life, and they frequently come back as instructors and counselors.<sup>8</sup>  
*We instill in these kids the belief that they can be the best at any thing they choose. Music lifts every voice, not just children who can sing and dance well but also those who are not blessed with natural talent yet still have a dream of becoming somebody.*  
 –Dr. Walter J. Turnbull, founder, Boys Choir of Harlem<sup>9</sup>

## Uniting Communities

Arts education provides a number of creative, academic and developmental benefits to individual students, but those benefits do not stop there. Afterschool programs are often excellent venues to build partnerships with the local arts community, such as dance companies, theater troupes, music groups, cultural associations and museums. Strong partnerships are a key to not only long-term success for afterschool programs, but also sustainability. These partnerships bring students important, often missing, connections to caring adults and community groups and institutions that can build the students’ repertoire of skills and linkage to people for the future.

One of the more successful community/school/arts partnerships going is Big Thought of Texas. It partners with more than 70 community agencies including school districts, library systems, child care centers, recreation centers and juvenile detention facilities to deliver arts programs that inspire and empower children, from preschoolers to teens, and help them become successful and productive adults.<sup>10</sup>

Its ArtsPartners program in Dallas coordinates programming both during and after school that supports curriculum goals and links to core subjects. Serving every public elementary school in the city (101,000 children at 156 schools), ArtsPartners provides professional development and curriculum guidance for teachers and student programs such as in-school performances, field trips, artist residences, master classes and workshops. As a result, student achievement is on the rise. For example, ArtsPartners fourth-graders’

average gain on the Reading Texas Learning Index is more than 6 percentage points higher than those students who did not receive ArtsPartners enrichment.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from bolstering student achievement and creativity, another measure of ArtsPartners' success is its reciprocal relationship with the city of Dallas. Because of its extensive partnerships, ArtsPartners is firmly embedded in the community, spreading both the costs and benefits of widespread arts education so the entire community feels a sense of ownership in the programs. By connecting cultural organizations, city government and schools, ArtsPartners is able to respond to community needs, share support services such as fund raising and marketing, share ideas, and create a stable system of funding.

*[R]eading scores as measured by TAAS went up 12.3 percent in five years. Writing scores increased 14 percent, and math scores shot up a remarkable 61 percent...There is no doubt in my mind that our enthusiastic and full immersion in comprehensive arts education has been a major reason for the school's sharp turnaround.*

—Principal Russ Chapman, Shady Brook Elementary in Bedford, Texas<sup>12</sup>

### **Creating the Future, Preserving the Past**

The arts define our culture and are embedded in our history. Through painting, writing, music, filmmaking, dance and other art forms, students in afterschool programs are able to express themselves, learn about their history and bring the past to life.

- Located in the heart of the Appalachia, Appalshop is a multi-disciplinary arts and education center with a variety of programs, such as “Holler to the Hood,” a weekly hip-hop radio program that combines rural and urban musical traditions. As part of its traditional music program, Appalshop offers the Passing the Pick and Bow afterschool music education program, which teaches traditional mountain music to about 100 students a year. Twice a year, the students gather with kids from across the region for Old Time Days for Youth, a day of music, storytelling, dancing and games.

Appalshop also runs the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), which provides media literacy and production training year-round. The core program is a six-week summer session, in which high school sophomores and juniors make their own media pieces about their communities' unique traditions and issues, including documentaries that have aired on television. In eastern Kentucky, where Appalshop is based, two out of every five students who reach ninth grade drop out of high school and more than 29 percent of households exist on an annual income of less than \$10,000. Of the 105 former AMI interns who are now college age, 95 percent have either entered college or have committed to doing so, this in a region where only 7.6 percent of the general population holds a college degree.<sup>13</sup>

- The Save the Children After School Program in the Zuni Pueblo School District in New Mexico brings in local Native authors to work with the youth on literacy and writing. Students also make and publish their own books of stories, some of which are oral histories and fables passed down from elder family members. By employing the afterschool staff during the regular school day as well, this program stays connected to the school-day curriculum. As a result of this program, students are improving their self-esteem by improving their literacy skills in both English and Zuni. In fact, during the 2000-2001 school year, 84 percent of high school participants published work in student publications.<sup>14</sup>
- The Alaska Native Heritage Center High School Program offers Anchorage area Alaska Native and American Indian youth a chance to celebrate their culture in guided after-school classes five days a week. Through classes in dance, technology and leadership, participants are able to earn school district credits if they complete 120 hours per semester. The center runs the Alaska Native Heritage Center Dance Group, in which students learn traditional Yup'ik Eskimo dancing and perform at local events and festivals.<sup>15</sup>

## The Arts as an Outlet

Youth today face a variety of difficult issues that affect their development, from divorce to drugs to violence in their communities. The arts provide an opportunity for youth to express their feelings in a creative and constructive manner, rather than through risky behaviors.

- College-age musicians are emotionally healthier than their non-musician counterparts. A study conducted at the University of Texas looked at 362 students who were in their first semester of college. They were given three tests, measuring performance anxiety, emotional concerns and alcohol related problems. In addition to having fewer battles with the bottle, researchers also noted that the college-aged music students seemed to have surer footing when facing tests.<sup>16</sup>
- Little Kids Rock started out as one teacher's afterschool guitar lessons and now provides musical instruments, instruction and enrichment to thousands of kids across the country. Their mission is to "inspire children to express themselves through music, building the creativity, confidence, and self-esteem that are critical to success in school and beyond."

*Before I started producing music and writing songs, I was depressed. By being able to put emotions into my lyrics, I've been able to express myself in new ways. Music is like the key to the soul; it means everything to me. Everybody should have music in their lives.*

Dee, Little Kids Rock student, age 14<sup>17</sup>

## Making Room for the Arts

Education reforms that emphasize achievement in math and reading and drastic budget cuts are squeezing arts education out of school curricula around the country. News stories from across the country tell this tale of dwindling arts budgets and program downsizing. Afterschool arts programs are essential to filling this gap in education.

**Palm Beach, FL:** "Arts School Seeks \$600,000 to save 10 teaching posts"<sup>18</sup>

**Chicago:** "3 schools, but just 1 will have yearbook; Cash-strapped Thornton district cuts clubs, sports"  
*All three schools have dumped fall plays, choral music, vocational clubs and other activities.*<sup>19</sup>

**Clifton Park, NY:** "Funds sought for school piano; Friends of Music of Shenendehowa wants to buy concert instrument"

*Budget cuts eliminated the \$20,000 in funds the district had set aside to buy the piano.*<sup>20</sup>

**Columbus, OH:** "Musicians play to save their strings; Proposal would eliminate 10 music specialists to trim \$704,000 out of budget"<sup>21</sup>

**Brookfield, WI:** "Elmbrook group wants orchestra restored; Program victim of district budget cuts"<sup>22</sup>

## The Power of the Arts

Part of the mission of our educational institutions should be to produce well-rounded citizens who are capable of thinking in a variety of ways, and arts education is an important means to that end. Students of all ages benefit greatly from having robust arts opportunities in the school, afterschool and summers, and in the community. Uniting the schools, nonprofits, and cultural resources of a community in delivering arts education is a win-win partnership. Afterschool and summer programs can and should develop these partnerships to provide youth with positive, fun learning experiences that will keep them inspired for a lifetime.

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<sup>1</sup> Ford Foundation Report, Winter 2005, [www.fordfound.org/publications/ff\\_report/?report\\_year=2005&issue=Winter](http://www.fordfound.org/publications/ff_report/?report_year=2005&issue=Winter).

<sup>2</sup> "Highlights from Key National Research on Arts Education," Americans for the Arts, [www.americansforthearts.org/public\\_awareness/pac\\_article.asp?id=613](http://www.americansforthearts.org/public_awareness/pac_article.asp?id=613).

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- <sup>3</sup> “Highlights from Key National Research on Arts Education,” Americans for the Arts, [www.americansforthearts.org/public\\_awareness/pac\\_article.asp?id=613](http://www.americansforthearts.org/public_awareness/pac_article.asp?id=613).
- <sup>4</sup> “AMC Issue Brief—Did You Know?” American Music Conference, [www.amc-music.org/research\\_briefs.htm](http://www.amc-music.org/research_briefs.htm).
- <sup>5</sup> Harvard Family Research Project, A Profile of the Evaluation of the Comic Book Project— New York City Pilot, April 2002, [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org).
- <sup>6</sup> Delfiner, Rita, “Teacher Offers Kids Comic Relief,” *New York Post*, August 23, 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> 2002 Coming Up Taller Awards Program Profiles, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, [www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr175dance.htm](http://www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr175dance.htm).
- <sup>8</sup> “Boys Choir of Harlem Teacher Resource Guide,” University Musical Society Youth Education Program 2001; “The Boys Choir of Harlem Sings a Song of Hope,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 1999; 2002 Coming Up Taller Awards Program Profiles, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, [www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr32music.htm](http://www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr32music.htm).
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- <sup>10</sup> Big Thought website—add link.
- <sup>11</sup> *Arts and Cultural Learning: Changing Achievement and Expectation*, Dallas ArtsPartners, Three-Year Longitudinal Study Interim Report, Spring 2003, [www.dallasartspartners.org/AP\\_assessment/DPWFinal.PDF](http://www.dallasartspartners.org/AP_assessment/DPWFinal.PDF).
- <sup>12</sup> Dallas ArtsPartners, [www.dallasartspartners.org/Advocacy/stats\\_and\\_quotes.htm](http://www.dallasartspartners.org/Advocacy/stats_and_quotes.htm).
- <sup>13</sup> Appalshop, [www.appalshop.org](http://www.appalshop.org); 1998 Coming Up Taller Awards Program Profiles, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, [www.cominguptaller.org/awards/program1.html](http://www.cominguptaller.org/awards/program1.html).
- <sup>14</sup> [www.afterschool.org/search/online/story.cfm?submissionID=319](http://www.afterschool.org/search/online/story.cfm?submissionID=319)
- <sup>15</sup> [www.alaskanative.net/65.asp](http://www.alaskanative.net/65.asp)
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- <sup>17</sup> Little Kids Rock, [www.littlekidsrock.org](http://www.littlekidsrock.org).
- <sup>18</sup> Kopkowski, Cynthia, “Arts School Seeks \$600,000 to save 10 teaching posts,” *Palm Beach Post*, February 7, 2005.
- <sup>19</sup> Napolitano, Jo, “3 schools, but just 1 will have yearbook; Cash-strapped Thornton district cuts clubs, sports,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 23, 2004.
- <sup>20</sup> Yusko, Dennis, “Funds sought for school piano; Friends of Music of Shenendehowa wants to buy concert instrument,” *The Times Union* (Albany, NY), September 28, 2004.
- <sup>21</sup> Marx, Matthew, “Musicians play to save their strings; Proposal would eliminate 10 music specialists to trim \$704,000 out of budget,” *Columbus Dispatch* (Ohio), February 24, 2004.
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