

Exploring How Arts Education and Cultural Experiences Help Students Learn

Part of a series exploring issues from The Community Foundation's *Aspire Arkansas* report.

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Can the Arts Improve Student Performance in Other Subjects?



For the past two decades, education policymakers nationwide assumed time away from core subjects like math and reading would adversely affect test scores. As a result, the time students spend studying and participating in the arts has diminished.

But a recent article in *Forbes* magazine reports several studies that suggest arts education and exposure to the arts help students with mathematical problem solving and processing language. One study of students in Houston who went on multiple cultural field trips found an increase in reading and math scores.

Research by University of Arkansas Professor Jay P. Greene was cited in the *Forbes* article indicating arts field trip experiences “increase students’ tolerance, empathy and ability to understand life in another time and place, as measured by survey questions. The effects are strongest for disadvantaged students, perhaps because it’s their first exposure to a museum or live theater.”

Our *Aspire Arkansas* report provides data on core competencies like math and reading. But we wanted to delve into the idea that arts education and cultural experiences can help students become better all-round learners. In this issue of *ENGAGE*, we explore how Arkansas educators and arts institutions work together to help improve student performance.

Best regards,

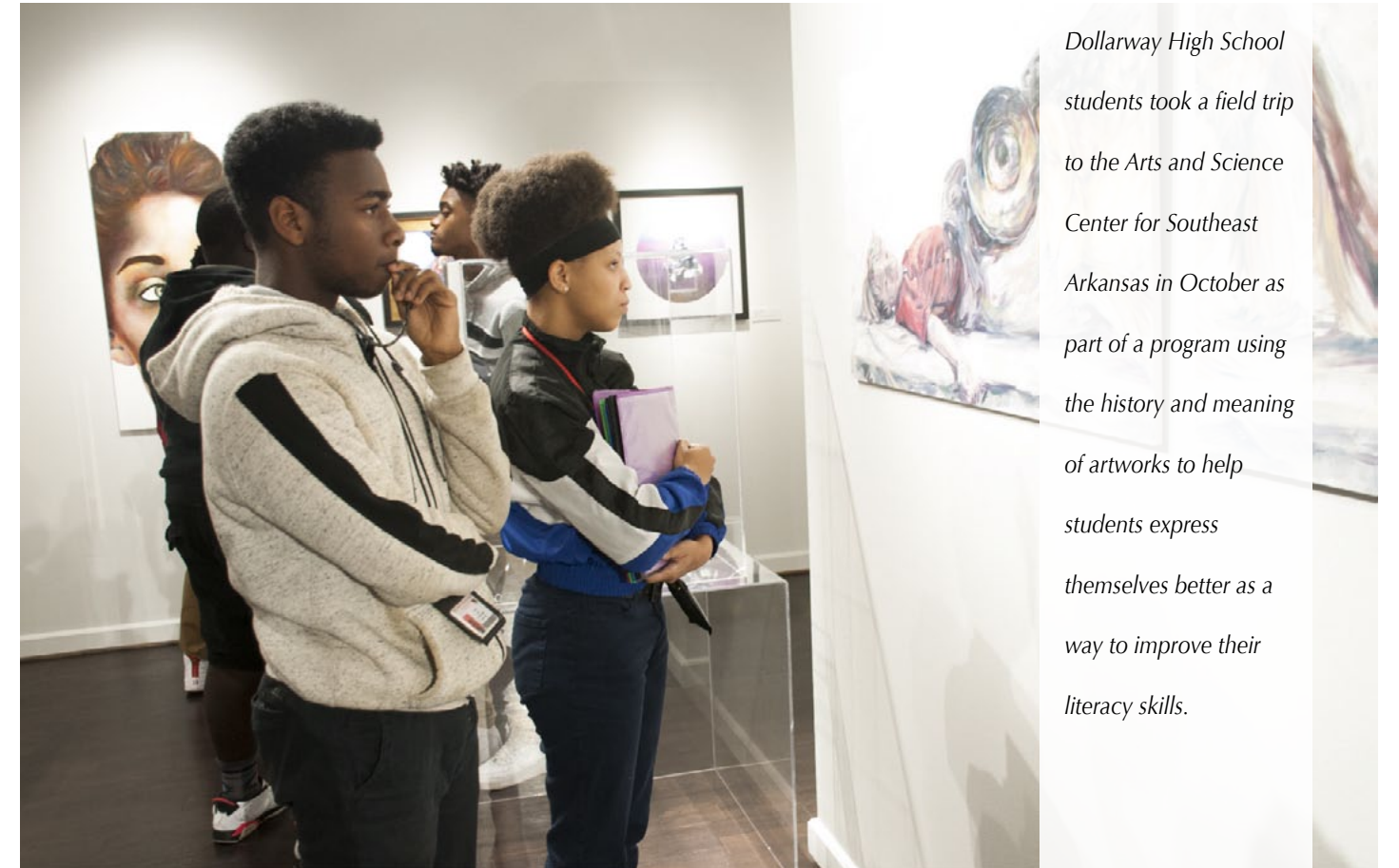
Heather Larkin
President & CEO, Arkansas Community Foundation



Find out more about education trends in the education page of aspirearkansas.org.

Inspired to Learn: Arts Exposure Aimed at Boosting Dollarway Test Scores

By Kim Dishongh



Dollarway High School students took a field trip to the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas in October as part of a program using the history and meaning of artworks to help students express themselves better as a way to improve their literacy skills.

Artists have long known that creativity flows easier with the inspiration of a muse. For students in Dollarway High School, art is the muse — and so far it’s drawing favor from their teachers.

Dollarway students were at the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas in Pine Bluff recently to see the work of Forrest City artist Chrystal Seawood in preparation for a weeklong dive into some arts-integrated lessons geared toward boosting their literacy scores.

“It’s really new for our students. It’s not something they have had a lot of exposure to. So I think there’s still an amount of ... well, they don’t know what to make of it,” says Sarah Sutton, who teaches sophomore and junior Spanish and English at Dollarway. “But I think that, in and of itself, is good because it’s something they’re thinking about.”

Earlier this year, students looked at photos from the Eviction Quilts series done by Little Rock documentarian James Matthews, who created quilts out of materials found in homes and apartments from which people had been evicted.

“When it comes to Pine Bluff, Jefferson County and Southeast Arkansas, we have a very high poverty rate, and eviction is something that some of these kids are very familiar with,” says Rachel Miller, executive director of the Arts and Science Center. “A lot of times the topics are very tough, but that’s what our community is dealing with. We mainly work with single-parent households, low income youths and families.”

April Gentry-Sutterfield, a consultant working with the Arts and Science Center through a National Endowment of the Arts grant, does quarterly professional development workshops with Dollarway High teachers showing them how to incorporate theater techniques to engage students.

As part of a team-teaching exercise, Gentry-Sutterfield discussed with students the idea that the quilts told stories — fabric from scrubs might mean that someone in that household was a nurse, material from work pants might indicate that someone worked hard — and talked through the etymology of the word “ghetto.”

She had small groups of students work together to demonstrate the meaning of that word, and saw students

IN THIS ISSUE

Inspired to Learn: Arts Exposure Aimed at Boosting Dollarway Test Scores 2

Statewide Arts Organizations Collaborate with Teachers to Integrate Arts Education 5

Thea Foundation Gives Funding, Resources to Incorporate Arts into the Classroom 9

Arkansas Viewpoints 12

Arkansas Learning Through the Arts Inspires, Invigorates, Excites Students..... 13

Arts Advocate Insalaco Is Man of Many Passions.....Back Cover

On the cover: Laila Baker and Nicholis Roberts visit the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas to see the work of Forrest City artist Chrystal Seawood.

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come up with images of girls patting their hair and people hanging out of cars. Eventually she moved them on to the word “gentrification” as it pertains to people investing money and time into Pine Bluff to build its economy.

“That final day, we looked at one of the eviction quilts, and we talked about how this family lived in this area that had traditionally been called a ghetto and is going through this process of gentrification,” she says.

Informational writing is an area students at that school need to work on, so she had them write about what the artist was trying to say with the quilt — and she was impressed by their results.

“They were citing parts of the quilt and saying ‘this makes me think that this was going on’ and ‘this says this,’ so that’s kind of a lot,” she says. “I was really pleased.”

Nicholis Roberts, 17, says though the topic of eviction isn’t a nice one, he did see the benefit of the exercises.

“The exercises definitely increased some of the skills we used,” he says. “Seeing what you are writing about, the thing that is driving you to write would push someone to be able to write about it much better than they would if they were to just be told that it existed.”

Laila Baker, 16, liked seeing the artwork, hearing about its history and relevance and sharing how it made her feel.

“It helps you get a deeper understanding and that helps you write about it easier,” says Baker, who wants to be an entrepreneur in a business involving art, technology, writing and music after graduation. “It helps you understand the stories behind them better than just having to read from the visuals. It’s more writing than looking at art, unlike usually there’s more art than writing.”

Sutton says, “I think they really liked being able to express themselves, so it’s still a new thing with them but we’re getting some interest. It’s a little uncomfortable still, so there’s still a little bit of resistance. They’re not used to doing this kind of thinking. But we’re getting there.”

Many of the Dollarway students hadn’t visited the Arts and Science Center of Southeast Arkansas before a field trip there last year. Laila, back for her second trip this fall, was elated to find that the exhibits had changed. Now that she knows there are always new things to see, she hopes to return more often.

“I love art. Any type of art is interesting to me,” says Baker. “Sometimes you see it, but you don’t see the purpose of it. When you hear the backstory of it, that just makes the artwork even better.”

That’s what Miller likes to hear.

“I’m really focusing on not only going beyond our museum’s walls, and not only just being an institution where we have a permanent art collection, but also being

an institution that collaborates with our schools and comes up with innovative ways to engage our students and also find ways to improve literacy and numeracy scores,” says Miller.

The museum offers a Second Saturday Family Fun Day each month, inviting families to come and meet working artists, hosts an afterschool program through the Boys and Girls Club and community centers, and activities in conjunction with the science club at Jack Robey Junior High.

That club, predominately made up of young girls, learned coding and then integrated art and technology to create a kinetic bike sculpture with LED coded lights.

There are weekly activities at the museum for pre-kindergarten aged kids in the museum’s Creative Construction Zone, where big blue blocks are used to teach architecture and engineering concepts.

The Arts and Science Center doesn’t have data yet to show whether their work is moving the needle. But in El Dorado, the executive director of the South Arkansas Arts Center is seeing promising results with an all-ages after-school program paid for in part by a violence intervention grant through the SHARE Foundation. The program includes classes in music, drama, graphic design, ballet and more. Some students attend only one class each week while others go multiple times weekly.

“In the spring 2018 semester, 63% maintained or raised their grades; this rose to 69% in the fall 2018 semester, and 78% in the spring 2019 semester,” says Laura Allen, executive director. “Citizenship grades have balanced in the 92-94% maintained or improved range throughout the three semesters, and parent interaction has steadily grown to a 2019 spring semester high of documented interactions with 100% of students’ parent or guardian.”

In contrast to the Pine Bluff area, most students have been exposed to arts in El Dorado, either through the South Arkansas Arts Center, the Murphy Arts District or other cultural venues.

“I think that it just changed the way that the community views art and that they see it as you know, not something that is special or separate, but something that is in every part of their lives,” says Allen. “It’s something that has value economically and scientifically and in all these other ways rather than just aesthetically.”

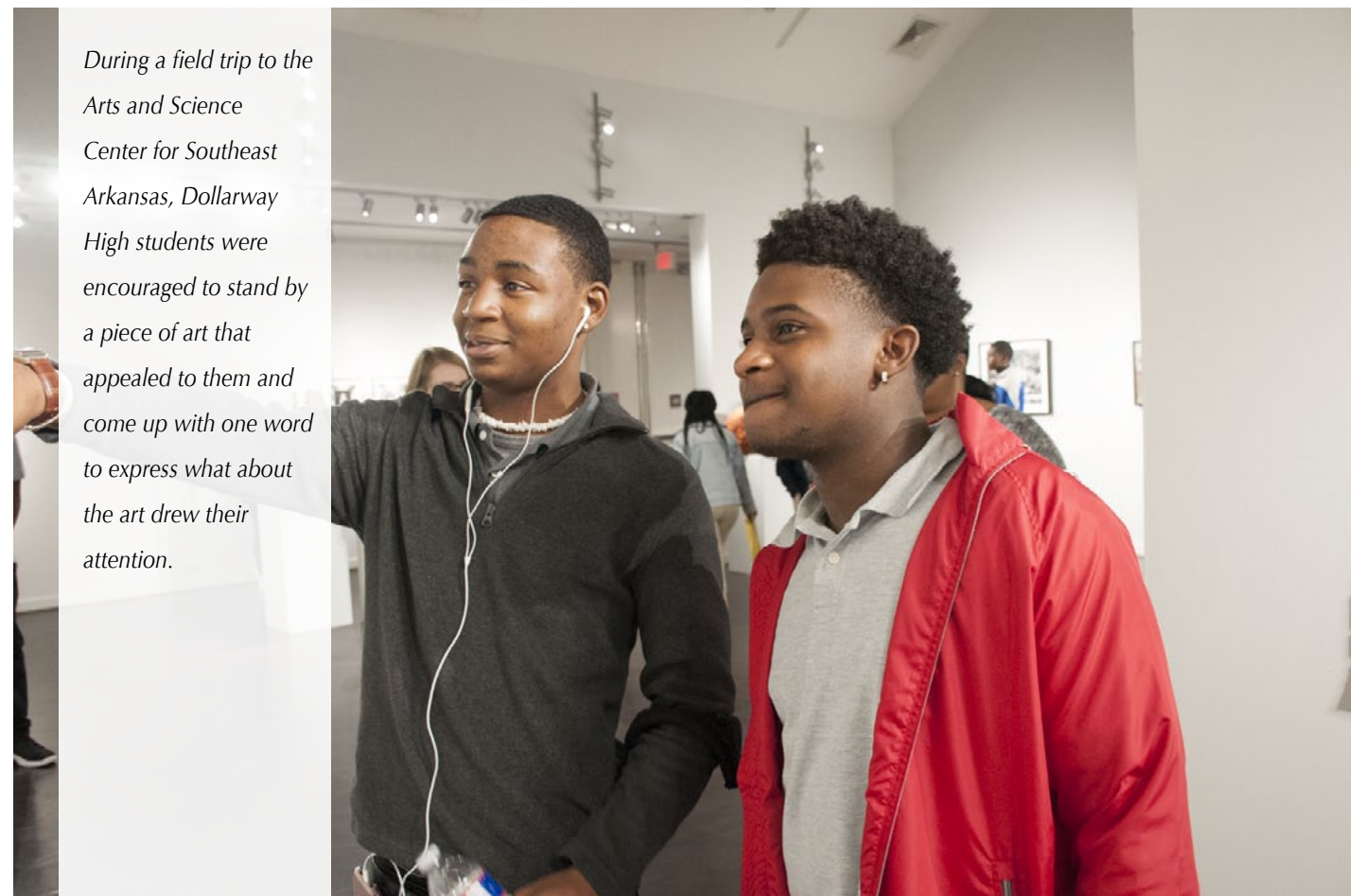
Anecdotally, she sees El Dorado students opting not to miss school because that would mean missing their after-school art classes, and she sees them being more engaged in their classes because of their connection to the art they see, create and discuss after school.

Miller hopes to see similar results in Pine Bluff.

“If we’re able to engage the students in a way that is interactive, that engages a different part of the brain, that shakes things up, then we’re more likely to be able to see a result because it’s something completely new and it changes the environment,” she says.



Students from Dollarway High School traveled to the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas in Pine Bluff recently as part of an effort by their school and the Arts Center to boost their literacy skills. They analyzed artwork and chose one word to describe a piece on display that caught their attention. Then they created an artistic interpretation of their own using the word they chose.



During a field trip to the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, Dollarway High students were encouraged to stand by a piece of art that appealed to them and come up with one word to express what about the art drew their attention.



Statewide Arts Organizations Collaborate with Teachers to Integrate Arts Education



"Art has the power to lift a lesson from a page and make it a full sensory experience," says Anna Kimmell of Arkansas Repertory Theatre. (Photo courtesy of The Rep.)

"I come from a family of teachers, so education was always a core value for me," says Anna Kimmell of Little Rock.

"I grew up in a city where the arts were accessible and celebrated, and I was lucky to have amazing arts teachers throughout my life," says Kimmell, a native of Atlanta who received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theater at Elon University in North Carolina. "I recognize my privilege in having life-changing artistic experiences as a young person. I feel it's my social responsibility to share those skills and joy with the next generation."

Joining the staff of Arkansas Repertory Theatre in 2016 as director of education for the state's oldest nonprofit professional theater, Kimmell is now helping The Rep build and expand upon its educational programming in ways that take the arts off the stage and into the classrooms of communities across the state.

"Education has always been an integral part of The Rep's mission," explains Kimmell. "We believe theater is transformative, and everyone deserves the opportunity to experience professional theater no matter their age, ability or economic status."

The Rep now serves more than 7,000 Arkansas students each year through classes, camps, workshops, student matinee program, community outreach, in-school workshops, classroom residencies and scholarships.

"So many of the life skills I use on a daily basis at home, at work and in the classroom can be attributed to my artistic experiences," says Kimmell. "Communication skills, listening, the ability to connect meaningfully with others, creativity, flexibility...the list goes on and on."

"Art has the power to lift a lesson from a page and make it a full sensory experience," says Kimmell. "Whenever possible,

art should be integrated into all kinds of classrooms. When students really connect with the material creatively and have a visceral learning experience, that's when the lesson is lasting."

Kimmell points to a recent Rep residency at Landmark Elementary in southern Pulaski County which focused on language and literacy as an example of how The Rep takes its program into communities throughout Arkansas.

"English was a second language for many students in that school, so our teaching artists decided to use poetry as the foundational text," explains Kimmell. "Through voice, body and theater exercises, students were able to learn new vocabulary, analyze rhyme and meter and engage with language in a new and exciting way."

The Rep will continue expanding its educational outreach this year through the support of the Windgate Foundation by offering residencies in partnership with various community programs that are designed to provide at-risk teens with the opportunity to write and perform their own theatrical work to be shared in their own community spaces as well as in a special performance at The Rep.

Additionally, as part of The Rep's upcoming Main Stage production of the classic musical "Bye Bye Birdie," Kimmell says the theater plans to reserve spots in the youth ensemble for at least one student from every high school in Pulaski County with the intent of recruiting and training students to participate in the production. Rep education staff members will provide complimentary audition workshops at each of the high schools to help prepare students for the auditions and is also hopeful to secure

funding to provide transportation access to and from the theater.

Education also figures prominently as part of the overall mission of Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville according to Laura Goodwin, vice president of learning and engagement.

"As a matter of fact, yellow buses featured prominently into the initial campaigns that helped to excite people in the area about the possibilities having an art center would bring to the community," says Goodwin.

Tracing its roots back to 1986 as a collaborative effort between the Walton Family Foundation, the University of Arkansas and the City of Fayetteville, Walton Arts Center first opened its doors in 1992 and has since become a mainstay for the cultural community in Northwest Arkansas.

"We now bring in approximately 30,000 students annually in our field trip programs to experience theater, dance and music productions," says Goodwin.

Partnering as one of nine founding members of the Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts "Arts in Education" program, Walton Arts Center has long been committed to increasing student access to the arts through in-depth professional development and training for teachers.

Goodwin sees professional development for classroom teachers as one of the pivotal ways in which Walton Arts Center is having an impact on not only arts education in Arkansas but across the entire core curriculum.

"The key to integrating arts into education lies in



Student performers bring a scene from "Willy Wonka Jr." based on the Roald Dahl children's classic to life for audiences at Arkansas Repertory Theatre. (Photo courtesy of The Rep.)



exceptional training,” says Goodwin. “It involves more teachers implementing new strategies and developing lesson plans designed to inspire in-depth learning.”

“By providing teachers with the opportunity to work with teaching artists, what we are hopefully doing is building a cohort of educators who can take what they learn back into their schools to work with students and share with fellow teachers and staff,” explains Goodwin.

Arkansas History Through the Arts, a Walton Arts Center initiative using visual and artistic mediums to celebrate and educate the traditions and culture of the Natural State, has proven particularly beneficial to educators statewide.

“When we began hearing from educators that they experienced a challenge in teaching Arkansas history in a way that was interesting and engaging for students, we decided to look at how we might use the arts to assist them in doing that,” says Goodwin.

Partnering with professional youth company Trike Theatre in Bentonville, the two arts organizations collaborated to create “Digging Up Arkansas,” a 45-minute play by Mike Thomas that explores and highlights significant, defining moments in the history of the Natural State. The joint venture was first presented in 2010 and has since toured all 75 counties and been seen by more than 50,000 Arkansas elementary students.

The play’s success would later inspire a second production, “Bear State of Mind” by playwright Ashley Edwards and songwriter Shannon Wurst. Framed within the tale of an Arkansas black bear and his journey to reunite with his family, the play leads the character through an exploration of the various regions of Arkansas and the unique wildlife, folklore and symbols native to the Natural State.

“When you use the arts to connect with students in a creative and cohesive way that sparks their imaginations, they get it quickly,” says Goodwin. “You can see it in their faces, and that’s when sustained learning begins.”

“The key to integrating arts into education lies in exceptional training.”

— Laura Goodwin



Laura Goodwin of Walton Arts Center says using the arts to spark imagination helps students connect quickly. “You can see it in their faces, and that’s when sustained learning begins.” (Photo courtesy of Walton Arts Center.)



Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville brings in approximately 30,000 students annually as part of its educational outreach field trip program. (Photos courtesy of Walton Arts Center.)





Since 2007, the Thea Foundation has provided more than \$1.5 million to supplement underfunded arts programming in Arkansas schools. (Photos courtesy of the Thea Foundation.)

Thea Foundation Gives Funding, Resources To Incorporate Arts Into the Classroom

Nick Leopoulos describes himself as one of those “art for art’s sake” kind of guys.

No doubt that comes in handy in his role as executive director of the Thea Foundation, a North Little Rock nonprofit organization promoting public school arts education and advocacy named in memory of his late sister, a talented student artist who died in an automobile accident in 2001 at the age of 17.

“Art is the conduit of what it means to be human,” says Leopoulos. “Art is a combination of the greatest parts of the universal human experience. It is emotive, and it helps to express what words often can’t. Art doesn’t allow us to ignore each other, but instead it helps to bring us together as people with a better sense of understanding of each other.”

“I would challenge anyone who feels that art isn’t an intrinsic part of the human experience to think of any one product you associate with,” says Leopoulos. “What if you were to omit any one aesthetic from that product — whether it’s the color or the texture, the logo or a font? It doesn’t take long to realize how many creative concepts and choices feed into how we relate to and identify with even the most seemingly inconsequential things.”

Since its inception, the Thea Foundation has awarded more

than \$2.3 million in scholarships to Arkansas students pursuing higher education in the arts and based on talent rather than test scores. The foundation currently offers 36 annual scholarship opportunities in six different categories — visual art, fashion design, performing arts, spoken word, creative writing and film.

Promoting integration of the arts across the core curriculum, though, is the fundamental premise of how the Thea Foundation approaches its underlying mission of advocating for the use of the arts in the development of youth.

“People won’t always remember what they see or hear, but they will remember how they felt,” says Leopoulos. “Art makes you feel, and that’s what makes it such a valuable teaching tool.”

Arts Reconstruction is one way the Thea Foundation is positioning itself as an active partner with Arkansas classroom teachers by providing professional development opportunities during the summer in conjunction with local universities. Presented at no cost to participating educators, teachers not only spend time receiving expert level training in various techniques but are also provided with supplies and materials to take back into their classrooms to better equip them in implementing their training.





Where some non-school-based arts organizations provide educational outreach programs or workshops to supplement student learning outside of or after school, Thea Foundation instead has a sharper, more streamlined focus bent towards programs and efforts aimed at engaging students in the classroom during the school day.

“When you use the arts for a purpose, you always increase your opportunity to reach a student in a way that is relatable,” explains Leopoulos. “Using the arts to teach allows you to engage a student in a good experience... to present information in a way that is relevant to the student.”

“Let’s say your focus is on math,” suggests Leopoulos. “Teachers can use rhythm, music, percussion to teach counting and patterns and formulas.”

“Art can also provide a foundation of understanding to serve as a bridge between cultures,” he says. “That’s why many social studies teachers are now incorporating music, visual art and storytelling into their teaching techniques to help educate and celebrate the growing population of diverse cultures now represented in their classrooms.”

Thea’s Art Closet, a grants awards program designed to equip educators with funding for necessary supplies and expenses specifically related to teaching units actively integrating arts education into classroom curriculums, has become one of the signature ways in which the Thea Foundation has had its most significant statewide impact.

“Any classroom teacher in any public school in any school district in Arkansas is eligible to apply for funding from

Thea’s Art Closet,” says Leopoulos. “There are no guidelines or criteria, there are no restrictions or limitations when it comes to what type of artistic medium is being utilized and there’s not even a requirement for what subject is being taught. All a teacher has to do to qualify is be able to demonstrate how an artistic component exists and what supplies he or she needs to make it happen.”

Arkansas public school teachers are eligible to apply and receive up to four individual classroom grants per academic year, two per semester. There is also no limitation on the number of Thea’s Art Closet grants awarded within one school district, and multiple teachers can apply and potentially receive funding to implement team lesson plans.

Last school year alone, Thea’s Art Closet provided funding for 145 classroom education units in 88 public schools. Since 2007, the Thea Foundation has provided more than \$1.5 million in art supplies to supplement underfunded arts programming in schools throughout Arkansas.

As Leopoulos sees it, however, that’s still not enough.

“More needs to be done,” says Leopoulos. “More money needs to be spent, and more time needs to be spent. It’s important that we continue creating more opportunities, more platforms for arts educators and students to become empowered to envision a future in which their creative expression can become not only their passions, but even their livelihoods.”

“How can Arkansans work together to expose students to the arts with the goal of improving performance in all subject areas?”



Rachel M. Miller, PhD
Executive Director
Arts & Science Center for
Southeast Arkansas
Pine Bluff

First step toward the goal of improving student performance through the arts is for our state policy makers, community leaders and school administrators recognizing the value of arts-integrated learning and the measurable impact that initial exposure can have not only on the student but also on the community-at-large.

According to a recent report on creativity-related occupations in Arkansas by Arkansans for the Arts in collaboration with the Arkansas Economic Institute, there are over 77,000 people within the state that work in creative industries. These jobs are diverse, encompassing occupations ranging, for example, from education and engineering to culinary arts.

However, the sentiment that the arts are for extracurricular activities or even perceived as a waste of school resources still prevails. The misconception that the arts don’t lead to real jobs denies the student the opportunity to experience the diversity and flexibility of the arts as an idea platform for hands-on engagement in any subject.

Creating thoughtful and innovative partnerships with schools, local arts organization and community leaders can provide access to enriching arts-based opportunities for a child into adulthood. Utilizing the arts as a viable tool for student engagement allows for development of technical and practical skills considered instrumental in academic and career success.

Music can help students learn about diverse cultures found in Arkansas classrooms.
(Photo courtesy of the Thea Foundation.)



Melanie Landrum
Executive Director
Arkansas A+ Schools
North Little Rock

As a principal in North Little Rock, I had pockets of teaching excellence, but it was not pervasive in the school culture. That is when Paul Leopoulos with the Thea Foundation introduced the Arkansas A+ Schools model to our district. The framework includes Arts Integration, Curriculum, Experiential Learning, Multiple Learning Pathways, Climate, Infrastructure, Enriched Assessment and Collaboration. Our school embraced this model which engaged teachers in working together to discover ways that the arts could be integrated into all areas of the curriculum. It also introduced how learning can be assessed in multiple ways, not just paper and pencil tests. Teachers got excited about teaching again, and parents noticed and wanted to be a part of the excitement.

As the Executive Director of the University of Arkansas A+ Schools which now has a growing network of over 25 schools across the state, I have seen this same pattern repeated over the past five years. The first thing that happens is attendance increases and discipline referrals decrease. Next academic achievement improves even on state tests. When students are engaged in the way that they learn best and the arts integrated, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

“Art makes you feel, and that’s what makes it such a valuable teaching tool.”

— Nick Leopoulos



Arkansas Learning Through the Arts Inspires, Invigorates, Excites Students



Mountain Pine Elementary students create paintings as a part of the Arkansas Learning Through the Arts Program curriculum integrating arts into the classroom learning experience. (Photo courtesy of ALTTA.)

When Martha Smither moved to Hot Springs Village 20 years ago, she brought experience from a Young Audiences Arts for Learning affiliate in Dallas. Her passion for integrating arts into classroom curriculum eventually led Smither to found an affiliate in our state, Arkansas Learning Through the Arts.

“Our mission is not just to put arts in the classroom but also to improve student achievement. We provide high quality dance, music, theater, poetry, storytelling, watercolor, crafts and pottery workshops in regular and specialty classrooms for schools in six counties today,” Smither says. “Our intention is to be in half the schools in Arkansas in the next 10 years. We want to concentrate on rural and underserved areas where students don’t have a lot of other opportunities for arts enrichment.”

Craig Welle, ALTTA Executive Director, was the Executive Director of Enrichment Curriculum and Instruction for the Dallas Independent School District when he met Smither. After he moved to Arkansas, Welle helped create a program

of arts education that is solidly based on the needs of Arkansas classroom teachers and students.

“Our workshop curriculums taught by teaching artists connect directly to the Arkansas Department of Education Literacy Framework, with ties to the Social Studies, Math, Sciences, Art, Music, Theater Arts and Dance Frameworks,” he says.

The first workshops were scheduled in the 2012-2013 school year, and the number of students participating has increased 20-40% annually. Last year ALTTA reached 9,225 students in 21 elementary and secondary schools. Welle visits most all the ALTTA workshops, taking photos and making sure the teaching artists have everything they need. During the early part of the school year, he helps teachers choose from the arts offerings, schedule their workshops and gathers feedback from teachers.

“The ‘a’ in the STEAM movement is what we are all about, with arts added to science, technology, engineering and math,” Welle says. “In science there is a scientific method and in the arts there is a creative process. They are actually very similar. Science can be creative, and the arts require

deep understanding to master. What we are doing is adding the creative process to STEM.” The most popular offering is poetry, according to Smither, who now serves as chair of the ALTTA Board of Directors.

“Many teachers find poetry difficult to teach. When poets can go into the classroom, they make poetry fun. The poets ask students to write poems and allow them to express themselves and share feelings in a way that is not often seen in the classroom. That makes students better acquainted and creates a more cohesive learning environment.”

“My students are much more interested in poetry and

“No matter the many differences between my students in any given classroom, bringing art into their learning process ignites their excitement...”

— Kathleen Marleneanu

different ways poetry is used, for example in music. Also, there is a bigger interest in checking out and reading poetry from the class library,” says one teacher from Garland County reviewing a recent poetry workshop.

A Phillips County educator says, “This was an awesome experience for the kids. They anxiously awaited our guest to come back each day. They showed excitement and enthusiasm each day. I look forward to being able to do this yearly and build upon what has been started.”

Dance workshops also are popular, especially among young students. “One of the things schools try to do is to get kids more actively engaged. Dance gets students out of their desks and moving,” Welle says. “Teachers tell us that the students are so engaged that behavior and class control is not an issue. The teaching artists tie the dances directly to what the students are reading in class and to their literacy curriculum.”

Kathleen Marleneanu, one of the ALTTA teaching artists, regularly goes into the classroom to teach ballet,

modern/contemporary dance and jazz. “My experience with ALTTA workshops has taught me that no matter the many differences between students in any given classroom — like background, reading level, emotional state, maturity, test scores, physical traits or personality traits — bringing art into their learning process ignites their excitement and interest to explore the stories and workshop topics in new and deeper ways,” she says.

“I believe these workshops are helpful to students because they provide a memorable way to connect what they are learning in the classroom with the joy and creative expression that inherently comes with art,” Marleneanu

continues. “Teachers appreciate this, too, and are able to use what we work on during the workshops to broaden and extend their classroom discussions on the subject even after the artist has left.”

Smither outlines three ways ALTTA brings value to the classrooms:

1. We change students’ mindset for learning — they become more interested.
2. We provide schools arts opportunities that are difficult to find in many communities
3. We give hands-on examples for classroom teachers in ways to teach.

Schools pay \$80 for each ALTTA session, plus travel expenses for artists. Mini-grants from the Arkansas Arts Council are available to cover a portion of the cost. But to operate Arkansas Learning Through the Arts, obtaining grants and raising funds are essential. Those interested in supporting this creative and results-oriented program may visit ALTTA.org.

Poet Kai Coggin speaks in an assembly at Fountain Lake Middle School sharing her experiences as a professional artist and author as a part of her ALTTA residency at the school where one of the focuses is career exploration. (Photo courtesy of ALTTA.)





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Arts Advocate Insalaco Is Man of Many Passions

Vincent Insalaco of North Little Rock is a man of many passions.

As a businessman, he founded Family Entertainment, a retail chain that grew to 45 stores in three states and became the largest video company in Arkansas.

As a filmmaker, he produced such critically acclaimed, award winning feature films and documentaries as “War Eagle, Arkansas,” “Warrior Champions” and “Back in the Hood.”

But it was his devotion to the performing arts that led him in 2010 to co-found Argenta Community Theater in North Little Rock with Judy Tenenbaum.

“The arts are as important as a baseball or football field to a child’s development,” asserts Insalaco, the 2018 recipient of the Carol Channing Award for his work in performing arts education in Arkansas.

Involved in the arts since a child in his native New York City, Insalaco moved to Arkansas at the age of 16 and studied politics, history and theater at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Married 32 years to his late wife, Sally Riggs Insalaco, he is the father of two and grandfather of five.

Insalaco recalls first becoming aware of Arkansas Community Foundation shortly after losing one of his best friends whose family established a memorial fund at the Community Foundation. Years later, Insalaco and his wife would establish an endowment to provide arts scholarships.

“The concept of Arkansas Community Foundation is remarkable,” says Insalaco. “It allows people who may not be able to give huge sums of money to charity to set up funds to help those causes most important to them.”

For Insalaco, giving is of fundamental importance to who he is.

“None of us lives this life without help,” says Insalaco. “All of us have had help along the way, and at some point, nearly all of us have the opportunity to give back.”

“I could not live my life not doing it,” he says.

