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Music and arts enhance learning for students

Music and the arts are a critical part of a well-rounded education. Not only do the arts introduce creativity and innovative thinking into day-to-day learning, they also have been found to increase students' social and emotional skills and competencies, including teamwork, confidence, communication, and leadership.

Unfortunately, deep state funding cuts and a heavy focus on high-stakes assessments have come at the expense of subjects like art and music in some Pennsylvania schools. That may be a big mistake because the study of music, drama, and the visual arts can improve students' overall academic achievement.

Researchers have found correlations, and in some cases causal relationships, between the study of the arts (including music and dance) and increases in academic achievement, standardized assessment and SAT scores, creative thinking, school engagement, motivation to learn, and problem-solving skills, according to **Solutions that Work**, a set of education policy recommendations that are research-based and classroom-proven.

March is 'Music in Our Schools' Month



Upper Merion Area High School senior Kaitlyn Lutz started playing the violin when she was 3 years old. Once she started elementary school, her school's music program turned her early interest into a lifelong passion.

"If I didn't have music, I'd feel lost," Kaitlyn said. "Music has always been a big part of my life. Thanks to the strings program at my high school, I get to start every day with music."

Kaitlyn and her fellow members of Upper Merion's Chamber Strings Ensemble traveled to Harrisburg in March to perform in the Capitol Rotunda, kicking off a month of live performances from Pennsylvania student musicians in honor of National "Music in Our Schools" Month.

The Chamber Strings players, followed by choirs, bands, orchestras, and other small ensembles, showcased their talents and reminded state legislators working in the Capitol that music education is an integral part of public schools — one that supports academic achievement and high-quality public education.

Gov. Wolf proposes historic increase in state education funding

Gov. Tom Wolf presented a 2015-16 state budget plan that, if adopted by the Legislature, will make a historic increase in public school funding. Overall, the plan increases funding by more than \$500 million, reversing deep cuts that have plunged many school districts into fiscal crisis.

Gov. Wolf's plan brings in nearly \$1 billion a year for education, starting in 2016, by enacting a natural gas severance tax.

The new funds will allow districts to restore academic programs as well as electives such as art and music that have disappeared from too many schools in recent years. The new funding will also help districts reduce the number of students in overcrowded classrooms. The educational benefits for students will pay dividends for decades.

Partners for Public Education will continue to track budget developments. Get updates at www.partnersforpubliced.org.

Inspiring a life long love of music and the arts

Arts and music are a vibrant, vital, and necessary part of the curriculum for Pennsylvania's students. We asked Pennsylvania art, music, and theater teachers to offer their tips for parents and other caring adults who want to encourage the children in their lives to think creatively and to appreciate music and the creative arts. Here are a few:

Drawing is the precursor to reading: When children make a connection between visual images and marks on a page, they are laying the foundation for lifelong learning. Encourage your kids to draw.

Keep art supplies on hand: A box of crayons and some blank paper can unlock a lot of creative potential in children. Send your child outside in old clothes to get down and dirty with paints or sidewalk chalk.

Listen to music: There is no better way to nurture a love for music than by listening to music with your kids. Bring lawn chairs and the children to hear bands and orchestras playing summer concerts at the park.

Encourage your children to be musical: Talk to your kids about joining the band, orchestra, or chorus at school. These experiences give students an opportunity to learn and grow musically, creatively, emotionally, and socially.

Keystone Exam remediation comes at a cost to students

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives is considering legislation to eliminate the Keystone Exams as a high school graduation requirement for Pennsylvania students. Currently, these end-of-course tests are given in algebra, biology, and English literature. A student who fails one must take a remedial course and retake it later. Educators say time spent in Keystone remediation often comes at the expense of elective courses in art, music, technology, and engineering.

To learn more, read Partners' primer on the Keystone Exams at www.partnersforpubliced.org/keystones.

Coalition proposes a new way to fund Pa. schools

A diverse coalition of education advocates, faith groups, and business leaders has proposed a new education funding formula for Pennsylvania that strategically directs resources to the students and school districts with the greatest needs. Leaders of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding say it will help close school funding gaps, distribute state education funding more equitably, and ensure accountability and efficiency.

The campaign's plan sets a base per-student funding amount, then adjusts it to account for student factors, such as the number of students living in poverty and learning English, and school district factors, including local tax effort, school district size, and charter enrollment. All told, the campaign calls for education funding increases of \$450 million annually over an eight-year period, ensuring students have resources to learn and opportunities to study art and music.

Partner Benefits: Save on arts and culture

Did you know that Pennsylvania is home to more than 4,000 art museums, theaters, and music and cultural organizations? Partners and their families can find discounts and savings for concerts, events, museum admission, and more through Partner Benefits discounts. Visit the **Partner Benefits** page to sign in to Access.



About Partners for Public Education

Partners for Public Education is working to provide you with resources about public education in Pennsylvania because we are committed to the success of every child. It is brought to you by the *Pennsylvania State Education Association*, an organization made up of the dedicated employees in your Pennsylvania public schools.

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