

*Full STEAM Ahead:*

Analyzing the Importance of Arts Education Programs in American Public-School Systems, and  
Why They Should be Taken as Seriously as Their Academic Counterparts

By

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## Introduction

While growing up in my small town in New Jersey, I always had easy access to arts education programs. Throughout my journey in public schooling, I was required to enroll in one art class for each school year. These art classes would touch on the fundamentals of color theory, simple shape designs, and typically take the form of multiple art classes in one – we would paint for one semester, then create ceramic and model magic sculptures in the next, etc. As a child, I thought this was perfect. At the time, my classmates' and my developing brains did not have the attention span to be able to stick to one art form for the entire school year. These classes were always entertaining and effortless, and the teachers truly cared about and loved their jobs. They provided an excellent foundation for any student wishing to pursue a life filled with art.

Because I was so accustomed to participating in these art classes, I knew that when it came to signing up for courses to participate in for my high school curriculum, I wanted to take as many arts classes as I could. I then took painting and drawing in all four years. It made sense to me to enroll in Photography and Sculpture classes because, why not? And although it was clear that my school system valued athletics above other extra-curriculars, it was still evident that they felt the need to integrate intensive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and Art programs, paired with dedicated teachers to boot. It was not until I entered a college whose atmosphere heavily revolved around the arts, where I discovered through the classes I took that not everyone was afforded the same opportunities as me.

The direction I chose to go in for this paper maps out the way I think art education programs should be represented in American public-school systems, seeing as how there is such an unequal representation of the arts in public schools across the country. I will start off my paper by discussing how the arts have been introduced and represented through American

history, starting out in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I will then go on to talk about the benefits of arts education programs, as well as the benefits of having the arts be included in STEM to make STEAM, as I feel this is an integral step towards making the arts more accessible and funded. From there, I will write about funding issues revolving around the arts, and how this is the main contender to the arts not being equally represented in school curriculums. Finally, I will conclude my paper by talking about COVID-19's effect on art education programs across the country, and if anything, what good has surfaced from these unprecedented times.

### **Methods**

For this paper, my definition of arts education will be based on the Arts Education Partnership's definition, which is "the process of teaching and learning how to create and produce the visual and performing arts and how to understand and evaluate art forms created by others"(5). Arts Education Partnership is a network of over 100 organizations that strive to advance art education programs nationwide. Their broad definition mentions the multiple different parts of arts education – creating, learning, and evaluating – that are crucial to a good program. I will also be specifically mentioning such forms of visual arts as two- and three-dimensional fine arts and architecture, as well as performing arts (dance, music, theatre), and literary arts (poetry and creative writing). When I mention the term arts education programs throughout this paper, I will specifically be referencing the act of participation in the above-mentioned subjects.

The hope for this paper is to research and better understand the American arts education system and find out why art education programs are lacking compared to other subjects in the curriculum. Although that will be the main components of my paper, I will also be including my

thoughts on why Art should be more commonly included in STEM, to make STEAM. Prior research went into this paper, including looking at the history of education in the United States, and how arts education slowly became involved in more curriculums across the country. The first half of this paper will highlight important historical events that contributed to the way arts education is perceived in America today. These events take place in different years throughout history and demonstrate the growth of understanding and execution of art education programs in this country. For the rest of this paper, document analysis and quantitative research were the key research methods used. I looked at multiple peer-reviewed documents and articles, which compile most of my research. I also looked at websites that revolved around specific art organizations that I will mention later in this paper. I will include recent news story articles, as well as my own personal experiences. There are multiple advantages of using these key research methods, including how I was able to acquire a broad understanding of multiple different resources and perspectives. It was easy to find peer reviewed papers, as well as more recent articles, on this topic because it is a topic that has been talked about frequently through history.

### **Benefits of Arts Education Programs**

Part of the reason why the arts do not receive the proper amount of recognition in school curriculums is because not many people are fully aware of all the benefits that the arts supply to students. Art education programs affect students in ways their other classes might not, such as providing cultural engagement- which has been on the decline in most mainstream educational courses (Sowden), and this needs to be more commonly understood. On the flip side, many of the skills learned in other core classes coincide with the skills learned in art education classes, which allows the student to be able to recall the skills and adapt to them faster by having double the exposure.

Paul Sowden, who is the author of *Improvisation Facilitates Divergent Thinking and Creativity*, explains this concept well in his text by using the example of “by using dance teaching to encourage spontaneity and improvisation, not just fitness and technical skill, significant benefits for divergent thinking skills and creativity could be realized.” He goes on to say that by using these types of adaptations, which can be applied to other visual and performing arts, a more effective use of time and resources is used, while also supporting the idea of creativity.

Creativity goes hand in hand with a multitude of skills learned in core classes, such as critical thinking, problem solving, group/teamwork and confidence. A study done by Arts Education Partnership analyzed sixty-two studies which revealed that students that study music had shown to have increased achievement and proficiency in math, reading and cognitive development. In relation to this, their verbal SAT scores increased as well. In the same study, visual arts were shown to also have a positive impact on students as well, showing that students had a stronger ability to interpret complex texts, such as those found in science courses. The study also found that students that take a combination of art-related courses demonstrated improved verbal, reading, and math skills, which also led to them having more developed skills in analyzing and problem solving (Chen 2015).

There have also been results pertaining to how participating in the arts affects your physical health. Engaging in creating art has been shown to reduce levels of stress (Merschel), and even cortisol levels, as stated in a study done by the journal *Art Therapy* (Girija).

From my own personal experiences in participating in arts education programs, Choir taught me how to collaborate, work, and socialize with others. Theatre classes taught me about understanding my own emotions, as well as those around me. When I briefly learned to play the

violin in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I learned how to be resilient and patient when it came to practicing. Millions of students around the country have had similar experiences to mine when it comes to how the arts have impacted their lives, and the benefits of arts education programs go on and on. However, the arts were not always included in curriculums throughout the US. It took a while for the arts to be included, and once they were, more and more programs began to get introduced.

### **The History of Arts Education in America**

Whether it be in school or in their community, a fine arts education is an essential part of the development of every human being, no matter the age. All students have a right to have quality experiences in the arts field, with there being an abundance of data showing what the benefits of a quality arts education has on the developing mind, especially when those benefits revolve around increases in positive mental health, lowered stress levels, and improved academic skills. Not everyone that studies art education become artists, but it is still important to instill the importance of these programs to give everyone a fair and equal exposure to the arts. But even with all this sufficient research, there are still places in the country not fully offering these quality programs in their communities, despite a line of history that fights towards it.

#### **North Vs. South Colonies**

When public schools were first established in America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was not that strong of a focus on implementing arts education in the curriculum, or any education at all for that matter. At first, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, colonial public schools were used as a means of increasing social interaction between children. Mathematics and literature were meant to be taught at home from their parents, assuming that they knew these subjects already. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century when the public-

school system took on these responsibilities from the parents and began to actually teach their students. It was then that all the New England colonies required their towns to set up schools for the white, male students in their communities. From this grew the advancement of grammar and prep schools, which also called for tuition costs. Education at this time was a privilege, designated for those who were born into a wealthy family, and was meant for those who weren't expected to work on their family's farmland for the rest of their lives.

In the more southern colonies, education was based more on wealth and class status and centered more towards religion, specifically Catholicism. The schools established were, again, mainly catered towards white male students, with a few female-centered institutions as well. It was typical for the planter class to either hire private tutors for their children, or send them to private schools, sometimes even sending them to England or Scotland to get a better education. Colonies like Georgia and South Carolina began to start their own public universities, but wealthier families would still send their children north for schooling. In more rural areas, schooling did not extend further than eighth grade for either white or black students. After 1900, some cities were able to establish high schools, which were still primarily for middle class white students, and it wasn't until around 1945 that more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of either white or black southern students accomplished more than 8<sup>th</sup> grade schooling.

### **The Academy**

The curriculum at this time during colonial schooling included arithmetic-simple math, literature- simple reading, writing, and maybe some poetry, and prayers. There was no arts education because it did not benefit the children in any way, since most of them were going to grow up to work in and around plantation life. Eventually, towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was Philadelphia that started to produce a more advanced schooling curriculum. A



member that was a part of this move towards higher education was Benjamin Franklin, who came up with the formation of the 'Academy', which was touched upon in his book titled *Proposed Hints for an Academy*. At the time, this academy was meant for male, primarily white, students with prior elementary school experience that wanted to pursue subjects that were not normally taught in public schools at the time. Franklin's proposals for the system of education that was to be followed by the academy were new to the colonies. The character of the Academy was to be utilitarian, and when speaking on this, Franklin explained that "as to their studies, it would be well if they could be taught everything that is useful and everything that is ornamental" (The Place of Penn). Franklin's introduction of the Academy would outline a new type of educational institution, one that would call for teachings of more typical subjects, such as mathematics and language arts, while also supplying more atypical and modern subjects such as athletics and drawing, which Franklin thought to be "a kind of universal knowledge" (The Place of Penn).

This Academy is one of the first times we acknowledge 'arts education' to be taken seriously in a school's curriculum. Even though this institution was only available to those of privilege, I feel it is still seen as a monumental representation, considering how well known and knowledgeable Benjamin Franklin was thought to be at the time. Franklin's belief that drawing was to be seen as a universal knowledge, one that should be included in school curriculums in order to create well rounded scholars, led to a bigger and broader understanding of the importance of arts education throughout the years to come.

### **Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870**

Most often regarded as a benchmark in the history of American arts education, with the ratification of this legislation, Massachusetts became the first state to mandate drawing education

in public schools. With the Industrial Revolution well under way, it was clear that the world was changing. With that, people were beginning to believe that there were more ways of living, establishing routines that did not revolve around industry. It was then that art was thought to be “essential to growing a powerful country, a vital economy, and improving and advancing the well-being of citizens” (MassArt). Prime examples of this were found in London and Paris, where they were seen to have thriving art scenes, including grand galleries and museums such as The Louvre and The National Gallery of Art.

That being said, this act mandated that any town in Massachusetts with more than 10,000 residents offer free industrial or mechanical drawing classes for citizens over 15 years old. Mechanical, or industrial, drawings are sketches that outline mechanical or architectural structures, typically done with precision instruments, and usually showing information about the structure like heating, ventilating, air conditioning, etc. This skill would be incredibly useful during this time of the Industrial Revolution when so many industrial trade jobs were taking place. It was believed that mechanical drawing instruction would benefit the local economies, while also speeding up the industrial efficiency time.

In 1873, in response to this act, an institution called the Massachusetts Normal School opened its door to the public, making it the first school to fully adapt to this new act put in place. This school, now known as Massachusetts College of Art and Design, still exists today, helping further quality high arts education in America.

### **Arts Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Much of what I have talked about in this paper so far pertains to the advancement of the United States recognizing drawing as a useful skill, specifically relating to the workforce. If arts

education was not able to be used efficiently in the labor field, it was not seen as useful, and therefore not important. This begins to change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when creative expressionism began to surface. The act of making art for personal development was becoming more common and valued, even though it was disappearing from curriculums.

### **Advocates for the Arts**

There have always been strong advocates who fight for the arts to be represented in school curriculums, and in societies in general. These advocates take the form of organizations, like the previously mentioned Americans for the Arts and the NEA, as well as in individual people. These representations show up all throughout history and can all be connected to each other through established research and teachings.

As previously mentioned, Benjamin Franklin and his introduction of the Academy had beneficial impacts on the American public schooling system. To dive in more specifically with someone else who has also made strides towards making arts education more recognized and established, I would like to bring up Louis-Benjamin Francœur. Francœur is the author of the book *An Introduction to Linear Drawing*, which was published in 1825. However, it was William Bentley Fowle that translated the book from French to English and made additions and adaptations to it so that it could start to be used as the first documented drawing textbook for the American schooling system. Drawing class could not be taught effectively without the knowledge of how to draw. It was pertinent to have a textbook that would provide students with diagrams and examples of how to create technical perspective drawings, and to explain why they were doing what they were doing, and how it is effective. This foundational knowledge would be the steppingstone in going forward in advancing ones drawing skill. This book was also

beneficial for teachers to have a guideline or lesson plan that explained what and how to teach their students.

Another person that fought for better arts education in the U.S. is Elliot Eisner. In addition to his extensive educational background with arts education, receiving multiple degrees in the field and working at many prestigious schools as an Art teacher, he was also involved in many key projects and initiatives. From 1982 on, he served on the advisory board for the Getty center for Education in the Arts, which is well known for their advocacy for 'discipline-based art education' (DBAE), emphasizing on four main content areas: art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetic enquiry.

Eisner was aware of the fact that most schools were providing an unbalanced approach to their curriculums. Leaving out arts education in schools left a big gap in a well-rounded education. One of Eisner's main arguments stressed that growing children thrive artistically when their environment caters towards it, and that art education has unique contributions that other subjects may not possess, such as inclusion of culture and health improvements. When it comes to school reforms, and how Eisner has contributed, there are three major ideas that Uhrmacher (250) has helped establish: (1) Advocating for a more expressive mode of thinking, rather than technographic or behavioristic. (2) Calling to attend to fundamentals, rejecting educational fads and fashion, dominant paradigms, while inviting educators and others to ask questions such as 'what is basic in education?'. (3) Arguing that schools should help children create meaning from experience, and that this requires an education devoted to the senses and the imagination. These three things are what Eisner has argued and pushed for in order for the educational system to beneficially change and cater to all subjects.

Eisner also makes the case for a concern with connoisseurship and criticism and pointed them towards educators and researchers. Eisner describes connoisseurship as “the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances is distributed and variable, including educational practice” (Eisner 1998: 63). When comparing it to criticism, Eisner goes to say:

If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure...thus... connoisseurship provides criticism with its subject matter. Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public. Connoisseurs simply need to appreciate what they encounter. Critics, however, must render these qualities vivid by the artful use of critical disclosure. (Eisner 1985: 92-93)

Eisner points this towards educators and researchers and how they need to be aware of the difference between the two. Connoisseurship is something that must be drawn upon, reflecting on personal experiences in order to look at the bigger picture. Educators cannot just be connoisseurs though; they must be critics as well. They need to be able to qualify others to see the qualities of something. As Smith puts it “Educators also need to develop the ability to work with others so that they may discover the truth in situations, experiences and phenomenon”. If educators are unable to criticize their student’s artwork, to be able to stimulate a more engaging environment, then their students will not be able to grow as students, artists, or people.

This is not a complete comprehensive account of all of the advocates in the worlds because when it comes to people advocating for higher quality arts education to be instilled in K-12 school systems, the list goes on and on. However, despite all the proven benefits quality arts education instill in students, they are still one of the most neglected subjects.

## **Introduction of STEM**

In my personal experience, STEM programs and classes always took importance over arts programs. This was partially because of the ideology that there are more 'successful' career opportunities in the STEM field compared to the arts. When the concept of Art being added to STEM, to make the transition into STEAM, was introduced around 2013, it made complete sense in my head. All five components of STEAM cohesively work together in ways that all parties involved benefit. When it came to me coming up with how art education programs could be better understood and recognized in school curriculums, STEAM seemed like one of the more plausible answers. If the arts started to become more associated with STEM, then the arts would be able to receive more recognition and funding and would not have to suffer as much.

The concept of STEM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, was recently introduced in 2001 by the U.S. National Science Foundation. The reason why STEM was created was because US students were falling behind in these four disciplines compared to students in other countries. These four disciplines were meant to harvest specific skills such as proficiency in collaboration, questioning, problem-solving, and critical thinking, and it was predicted that these skills would be integral to the workforce in 2019, where there would be a rapid growth of STEM related jobs (Hallinen).

### **STEM + Art = STEAM**

Throughout the progression of students taking these new STEM classes, research showed that the students were not succeeding as thought, and overall were not happy. When it came to these students choosing to further their education in a STEM specific field, roughly 40% of them switched their majors, or ended up failing to get any degree. In addition, 60% of STEM

graduates did not end up working in a STEM related field post-graduation (STEAM). These statistics are not great, which made education policymakers rethink their original plans. It was found that a possible solution would be to include the arts, seeing as the benefits of all of these programs lined up and complimented each other.

I mentioned previously in my paper how art education programs widely benefit students, and with the introduction of art in STEM classes, these benefits were shown to carry over. Even though STEAM has been on its way to being used by all states and school districts, STEM is still the common vernacular when referencing this area of study. Kent State University conducted a study where they asked art teachers how they felt about the introduction of art in STEM. The consensus was that they found it to be beneficial, however, at least 51% of these teachers felt that the focus was still primarily on the original STEM subjects, and not so much on the added art section (STEAM).

The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM is an organization that provides online courses, conferences, and certifications that benefit K-12 students and their teachers who are trying to teach their content in and through the arts. When bringing up the importance of STEAM and arts integration, they claim that:

STEAM is an educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The end results are students who take thoughtful risks, engage in experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and work through the creative process (Arts Integration & STEAM Research).

Alongside these benefits pertaining to students and how they grow and learn in the classroom, the integration of arts into STEM qualifies schools for more opportunities relating to funding and grants, which can be found to be extremely beneficial, especially when the arts are known for having a rough track record when it comes to them receiving the proper funding to support their programs.

### **Funding Issues**

The arts are not superior to any other type of subject in school curriculums. Each subject has its own importance to it, and a school curriculum could not be complete without them all being included. That being said, these other subjects, such as STEM and English/literature, get more focus and attention in curriculums because these are the subjects that show up in standardized tests. It is pivotal for schools and their teachers to stress the importance of these core subjects because these are the subjects that matter most when it comes to representing how effective a school's teachings are. This next section of my paper will discuss the importance standardized testing has in school curriculums, and how it affects arts education programs and their funding.

### **No Child Left Behind**

The 1954 court case of *Brown V. Board of Education* ruled it unconstitutional for schools to racially segregate their students, and as the years have passed, there have been multiple acts put in place that hold these same ideals. *The No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act was enacted by President George W. Bush in 2002, which allowed the federal government to assess school districts by the scoring of their students reading and mathematics standardized tests. This act was established to ensure that all students were receiving the same amount of attention and



accommodation in the classroom setting so that they were all able to thrive, regardless of their ethnicity or socioeconomic status. This put a new pressure on school districts and their teachers to make sure they were effectively teaching material to students in ways that could be understood and retained by all. Teachers had to be highly qualified, specifically meaning they had to have at least a bachelor's degree, as well as pass all state testing criteria, in order for them to be able to keep their jobs.

As admirable as these acts sounds, they came with some concerns. One of these bigger concerns revolved around funding. A study that was conducted by the National Association of State Boards estimated that for a seven-year period, in order for all states to develop and implement all the standards needed for this act, it would cost roughly \$7 billion dollars. This is a pretty hefty amount, considering the budget of NCLB only allowed for \$400 million to go towards helping the states implement what was required (Chen 2007). Because of this huge imbalance, schools, especially those in low-income areas, had a hard time meeting all the criteria needed, and had to dip into funding for their other programs. When it came down to schools choosing what was most important, the visual and performing arts were the ones that were getting the short end of the stick. Since 2008, more than 80% of schools nationwide experienced budget cuts, and most of these cuts affected their arts programs. In the 1999-2000 school year, before budget cuts, 20% of schools offered theatre and dance classes, and 87% of schools offered visual arts classes. After budget cuts in the 2009-10 school year, which was mainly due to the 2008 recession, only 3% of schools provided dance classes, 4% provided theatre, and 83% offered visual art classes (McDonald).

In 2015, Senate Education Leaders met together to discuss and replace NCLB due to the controversies around it. This resulted in the creation of a bipartisan bill that was set to

reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), which would bring in a new k-12 education policy that increased local control and state-level accountability, which was something that NCLB lacked. There was also an added focus on providing new opportunities for arts education. Additionally, the Senate started working on the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which would declare the arts to be included in school curriculums in order for it to be a well-rounded education. This would require the arts to be as equally represented in curriculums as often as reading, math, science, and other disciplines are (Vargas).

### **Funding Issues Prevail**

Every act put in place since *Brown v. Board of Education* has been a step in the right direction when it comes to all programs receiving the same attention and representation in public school curriculums. That being said, they still do not completely absolve the monetary inequality arts education programs receive. Funding issues are still prevalent in plenty of school districts, which means they must turn to outside resources to acquire what they need to sustain their programs.

Under ESSA, there were multiple programs enacted to help fund arts education programs. The *Assistance for Arts Education* (AAE) program, which was authorized under Title IV of ESSA, has allowed grants to be given out to more than 230 congressional districts in 33 states. Districts can apply for these grants for their art education related needs, such as “support(ing) standards-based arts education, integration of arts instruction into other subject areas, arts education projects targeted for low-income families and students with disabilities, and professional development for arts educators” (Legislative). This program has proven to be widely beneficial and has managed to secure their funding from Congress year after year. There are several other titles under ESSA that aid others in receiving funding for the arts, such as:

Title I, which focuses on providing personnel, instruction, and interventions to help close achievement gaps, can be used to address the huge, persistent disparities to access to arts education in public schools. Title II, which focuses on preparing, training, and recruiting high quality teachers, principals, and other school educators, can be utilized to obtain professional development funding for arts educators. Finally, Title IV, Part A, which contains the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, may be used to support the arts as part of a well-rounded education (Legislative).

In addition to these programs, there are also organizations that devote their mission to supporting the arts. One of these organizations, *Americans for the Arts*, is a non-profit that recognizes and supports “the extraordinary and dynamic value of the arts” (About). They work to make sure that every American has equal access to the arts, as well as the proper funding to do so. They do not specifically give out grants, but they do offer their members the proper “tools, professional development, and programming that will prepare them and their communities to access and better qualify for funding opportunities” (Funding). These tools they mention include discounted rates to their annual events that they hold, such as their Annual Convention and their National Arts Marketing Program Conference. These events offer development and networking opportunities that smaller arts organizations can find to be helpful.

An organization that does provide direct funding to smaller organizations is the *National Endowment for the Arts* (NEA). The NEA supports community art projects nationwide through grants and partnerships. In 2016, the NEA was able to recommend more than 2,400 grants to nearly 16,000 communities across the country. The NEA also makes sure to support low-income and underserved populations, with 33-36% of their grants going to organizations that reach those who are veterans, people with disabilities, or people in institutions (NEA Quick Facts).

However, even with all these organizations and programs, funding issues still prevail in public schools. These aforementioned organizations strive to help mainly small or struggling arts organizations. Public schools that are lacking in funding in their visual and performing arts department do not always necessarily qualify for grants that these organizations disperse. Students in public schools can benefit from NEA partnered events such as songwriting, poetry, and art competitions, but there is not really any other benefit to the school itself. A more directly related organization to supporting specifically art education programs is *Grantmakers in the Arts* (GIA). GIA is committed to supplying “funding and support for arts education within federal policy and defend that every student has access to the arts as part of a well-rounded education” (Arts Education). In 2012, GIA created the Arts Education Funders Coalition (AEFC), which is a group that specifically addresses the needs of arts education programs. Over the years, GIA has worked hard to support and fundraise for public schools in the US, securing “\$250 million per year in funding for the arts in the US Department of Education’s Pre-K grant program” (Arts Education). In addition to these organizations, schools also resort to finding their own ways to support their art education programs. Public schools can directly achieve funding through parent donations, PTA/PTO, and grants through these previously mentioned organizations. At Buckingham Elementary School in Maryland, a PTA-led fundraiser was able to gather the funds for the art department to install a kiln in their classroom (Sharpe). And in Oregon, at Oregon High School, two seniors held a school event that showcased the work of 16 artists and 8 musicians, where all the donations raised went towards funding their arts programs (Rave). Students and teachers across the country possess the passion to keep their arts education programs alive, even when they do not receive the proper funding and support.

## **STEAM Opportunities**

Previously in this paper, I briefly mentioned that ESSA declared that the arts are key to a well-rounded curriculum in schools, and are just as beneficial as math, reading, and science, among other subjects as well. The arts being integrated into STEAM backs up the notion of a well-rounded curriculum and helps to solidify the arts in school curriculums. Because of this, the arts became eligible for funding and grants under Title I, II, and IV of ESSA. Assistance for Arts Education was newly included in the bill, and revolved around a \$20 million grant program that aimed to promote arts education to disadvantaged students in multiple ways such as “providing professional development for arts teachers, developing arts-based educational programming, and building partnerships to ensure that all students have access to a “well-rounded education,” including the arts” (Arts Integration & STEAM Funding) .

With the arts being integrated with STEAM, there provides more of an opportunity for schools to be better qualified for funding and grants. With the effects of COVID-19 impacting schools over the past year, grants have been tremendously beneficial for schools struggling to keep their programs alive. The *American Rescue Plan* (ARP) provided nearly \$123 billion in funds to the *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief* Fund which went towards schools having a safe reopening and recovering. With research showing how STEAM and arts integration in the classroom increases “student achievement, decreasing behavior issues, and increasing student attendance” (American Rescue Plan Funding), ARP has found them to be effective options for meeting the requirements set for their funding use, hence meaning that if schools accurately incorporate STEAM programs in their curriculums, they have a higher chance at receiving funding, which shows to be beneficial, especially when a pandemic is taking place.

## **COVID-19 and Its Effects on Arts Education Programs**

The arts struggled heavily over the past year since the first case of COVID-19 was reported. Thousands of arts organizations across the country experienced cancellations, closings, unemployment, and loss of revenue. In May of 2020, Non-profit arts organizations nationwide lost an estimated amount of \$4.98 billion and around 208 million admissions, which additionally resulted in a \$6.6 billion loss in event-related spending pertaining to restaurants, lodging and retail. These losses led to a \$1.9 billion loss in government revenue, as well as the loss of support for 328,000 jobs. As for individual artists, 62% have become fully unemployed, which led to a loss of \$50.6 billion in income nationally (COVID-19's Impact on The Arts). In lieu of these financial issues, artists and arts organizations had to come up with ways to be able to sustain themselves, such as them turning to selling their products in online shops, creating online programs, and making events and meetings accessible through Zoom calls.

The effects of COVID-19 also widely impacted schools and their staff, including their arts education programs. Over the past year, students have had to adapt to remote or hybrid classes, and because of this, their teachers and class curriculums have had to adapt as well. Online learning left students lacking in in-person and hands-on projects and programs. Online classes turned more traditional as well, where teachers that implemented arts integration in the curriculum had to step back and focus on the core material. However, it was hard to students to feel engaged while taking classes in their own house, especially when students experience internet and connection issues, lack of technology, and mental health issues. Teachers found it hard to expect a lot from their students, as mentioned by Nevada K-5 art teacher Christel Polkowski. She mentions in an interview with Double Scoop that she has “a few kids that enjoy sharing their work with me, and more that have stayed quiet, and even more that haven't joined

my Google Classroom...They may not have the ability to connect with me online, and I have to accept that” (Vagner). Polkowski also mentions that it is hard to give feedback to her students and goes on to say that “Usually in my classroom I may offer suggestions for improvement. But in my Google Classroom I’ve been sticking to positive praise like, ‘I like the colors you used,’ or sometimes just, ‘I love it! It’s beautiful! ... I want them to feel safe when they put themselves out there and share their art...” (Vagner). This empathetic energy is great for struggling students and shows them that it is okay to not be perfect with everything they do, which can help with their mental health in this time and place.

Teachers have struggled immensely during this pandemic with not getting the proper recognition nor wage from their administration, which is not new to the world of teaching, but has gotten worse because of the pandemic. According to a DataArts survey from July 2020, there has been a 78% decrease in teaching artist staffing at NYC-based organizations. Additionally, 96% of the 5000 teaching artists that responded to the survey experienced a loss of income (COVID-19 Impact on Nonprofit Arts and Culture in NYC).

With all the bad the pandemic has brought to the US, there are some benefits that tag along as well. Millions of people have had to sacrifice their time to prevent the spread of the virus, meaning they have been cooped in their homes for weeks or months at a time. Because of this, they have turned to the arts and media in the form of TV shows, movies, video games, and knitting. There was no better time to learn a new skill or hobby. Because of this, people all over the world have grown a fonder appreciation for the arts because they realized how much they rely on them to fill up their free time. Schools and teachers have a better understanding of how their students understand and deal with their course loads.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has touched upon and highlighted the historical background of arts education, and how it came to be what it is known as today. In comparison to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the position that arts education programs were in are much more advanced and acknowledged now, but there is still a lot of room for improvement.

Throughout this paper, I have highlighted multiple flaws in the public school system that prevents arts education programs from fully succeeding. Arts education programs have been mistreated for so long due to a lack of funding and understanding of its proven benefits. When the arts began to be incorporated with STEM classes to make STEAM, students began to benefit more than they previously had. Arts education programs were shown to positively effect students in ways that are mental and physical, where students were shown to have improvements in stress levels, collaborating with others, standardized test scores, and, of course, creativity. Throughout the years, there have been countless organizations and individual advocates that have fought for the arts to receive equal representation in school curriculums. However, the stigma around the arts not having the same benefits as other subjects in school curriculums is still prevalent today.

### **How to Combat These Issues**

As stated, multiple times throughout this paper, the arts have had a rough time getting the recognition they deserve. I have mentioned the physical and mental benefits that the arts have on students, and how these skills stay with them for the rest of their lives. I have also mentioned the financial benefits of the arts, on a state level as well as on a nationwide level. Yet, these still are not enough.



Arts education programs should be introduced and integrated in all schools, and not just those can afford them. Art integration in classroom settings, where the teacher combines music, dance, and art with core subjects such as math, language arts, and science is an excellent way for AEP's to be more normalized. This also allows for a gateway to be opened for students to pursue AEP's outside of the classroom, such as in theatre and band. In order for this to happen, the teachers should be willing to teach this way and must be provided with the proper tools and equipment in order to do so. This calls for adequate funding and support from schools and governments as well, which is the tricky part. Research showed that if a school system recognized STEAM programs in their curriculum that they can widely benefit financially from it. It is pertinent that schools become aware of grants that they are eligible to apply to as well, because that is one of the best ways for them to acquire the funding they need for their programs without having to ask their community for their immediate support.

In my opinion, the least that school leaders can do is directly talk to their teaching artists and their art and performing art students to make sure they are always involved in the conversation. A school will never truly understand what is best for their teachers and students until they directly include them in their decision making. At the end of the day, nationwide statistics are helpful at gaining an overhead understanding of what is most beneficial for students, but every student and school district is unique and will respond to things differently. A school should not waste their time and money coming up with and implementing programs that their students will not participate in. There is still a long way to go in making sure the arts become equally represented in school systems across the country. Schools should not have to sacrifice one area of study in order to benefit another area, and the quicker that school systems and governments begin to realize this, the faster and better their students will benefit.

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