

ARTS ED NOW

For Every Student in Every School

BY ROBERT MORRISON

March marks “Arts in Our Schools Month,” the annual celebration and showcase for our students in dance, music, theatre and visual art. For New Jersey schools, there is much to celebrate this year.

Data from the most recently released school performance reports, along with other sources, reveal that New Jersey provides nearly universal access to one or more arts discipline for our students. Nearly 99.8 percent of all students have access to some level of arts education in New Jersey.

And while this is certainly worth celebrating, what is even more impressive is that student arts education participation rates have been rising across the board.

During the 2016-2017 school year, more than one million students participated in an arts class representing 80 percent of all students across the state, with increases reported across all school types: elementary, middle and high school. Most important, the number of students attending New Jersey schools with no arts programs has dropped from more than 75,000 students in 2006 to 3,000 students in 2017.

While impressive, there is still work to be done. More than 80,000 elementary and middle school students who should be participating in the arts (based on state policies) are not, and another 40,000 or so high school students who also could be participating are not. Moreover, when it comes to per-pupil arts spending and student/arts teacher ratios, both measures are more favorable in schools serving more affluent populations.

While nearly all students have access to some arts education and the vast majority of schools provide access to both music and visual art (90

percent), fewer than 10 percent of schools provide instruction in all four arts disciplines (dance, music, theatre and visual art) as required by state policy.

That said, as a state, we are on the right path.

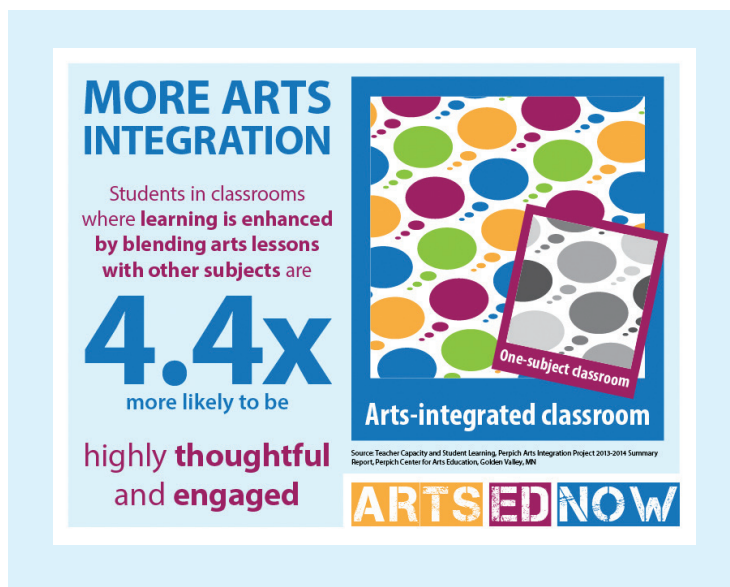
Much of the improvement in New Jersey can be directly linked to important, underlying data that drives transformation. Beginning in 2006, New Jersey reported on the status and condition of arts education in every school through a state-wide census of arts education conducted every five years, and most recently, through a review of arts education participation found in the annual School Performance Reports. This information has empowered school board members, administrators, teachers and parents with information needed to create positive change in our schools.

By providing data along with context – opportunities that are provided to students in one school when compared to another – we have developed a culture of reflective analysis, continuous feedback and ultimately increases in both participation and overall program quality.

This has led to some amazing success stories. Let me share two:

In 2007, Lisa Vartanian, supervisor of fine,

An update on the ongoing effort to increase student access to arts education in New Jersey



performing, and practical arts in the Paramus Public School District, was looking for resources to help her enhance the arts education programming in her district.

It was at this time that Arts Ed NJ published the findings of a statewide survey on arts education titled, “Within Our Power: The Progress, Plight, and Promise of Arts Education for Every Child.” The survey highlighted the status of existing programming in arts education among New Jersey Public Schools and made recommendations for how to enhance those programs.

Lisa shared with us how she used the survey findings in her district:

“As a new administrator, the survey helped me realize where our strengths and weaknesses were in the area of arts education. The survey enabled me to sit with principals and central office administration within the district and examine the arts department to see how we could improve the overall program. After the survey was complete, I was able to use the data collected to propose new programs and to make changes to some of the programs currently in place. In addition to using the data, I utilized the ‘model schools’ rubric that the Arts Ed NJ provided during one of their workshops as a guide. The rubric included the stated criteria for what made a model school and indicators of what to ‘look for’. I was determined that the next time the survey came out – Paramus was going to be ready!”

Since 2007, Lisa and her colleagues have systematically worked to enhance the program using the following resources:

- Surveys published in 2007, 2012 and 2017 on the state of arts education in New Jersey;
- Professional development sessions facilitated by the staff at Arts Ed NJ;
- The Arts Ed NJ newsletters which keep educators and district administrators up to date with current trends in arts education;
- Ongoing, easy-to-access research available through ArtsEdNJ.org and ArtsEdNow.org;
- The “Model Schools in the Arts” rubric, which helped administrators and educators take steps to meet criteria for arts education in the state;
- The Arts Ed Now “Today an Arts Student. Tomorrow...” campaign, which was used to engage with parents, students and staff, at a district-wide arts festival;
- Attending the Arts Ed Summit to hear the status of arts education in New Jersey; and
- Use of Arts Ed Now resources, such as infographics and “Stats and Resources” to help raise awareness about the importance and benefits of arts education for our students.

The results? Vartanian worked closely with educators, a supportive administration, and school board to enhance the arts education programs, including:

- A new dance program at Paramus High School;
- A new music technology program with music technology and piano lab classes;
- A new state-of-the-art Macintosh computer lab with art classes, including filmmaking, documentary and AP Photography;
- A revised theatre arts program;
- Increased interest in the arts among students, many of whom applied to colleges for degrees in the arts; and
- Recognition as a “Model School in the Arts”

My second example comes from Hedgepeth-Williams Middle School for the Arts, in the Trenton school district. This school hasn’t always been an arts-focused middle school. Rather, it had struggled with student performance, absenteeism and the overall climate and culture.

NJSBA’s “Conversations on New Jersey Education,” podcast featured an interview with Robert Morrison on Thursday Feb. 22. To download or listen to the podcast, go to www.blogtalkradio.com/njsba.

Led by an inspirational principal Adrienne R. Hill, the staff at Hedgepeth-Williams Middle School set out to change the school's climate and culture in the spring of 2016, by integrating the arts into their daily practices. With the help of a newly-formed Creative Leadership Team, the staff decided to:

- Write a board of education resolution to change the school's name to Hedgepeth-Williams Middle School of the Arts;
- Connect with community arts partners who could support the vision of a school that used arts to turn around thinking from what the school had been to what it "could be and would be;"
- Assess student and staff levels for a more creative environment. Once they determined the eagerness of the staff to embrace this new approach, the team set about creating as many arts experiences and opportunities as they could afford and find. (i.e., museums, performances, a guest-artist series, nontraditional teacher professional development, creation of an annual art exhibition, dance night);
- Identify and train teachers to enable the arts to be integrated into the classroom; and
- Identify all available arts opportunities that supported the schools' mission, such as Title I funding, Young Audiences NJ grants, BucksAir, McCarter Theatre and the MET Opera Guild partnerships

The results? The school administration noticed a big and immediate difference:

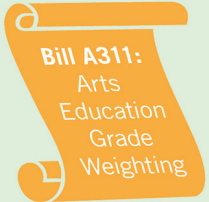
- Student (and staff) attendance – A notable reduction in chronically absent students – the school was cited in the new ESSA plan for its work;
- Student engagement increased across the board – in school, learning, activities and in arts clubs;
- There was a severe decrease in student discipline referrals;
- There was an increased engagement with parents; and
- There was a noticeable increase in smiles, hugs, and laughter for all stakeholders.

Principal Hill noted: "The process strengthened what I already knew and believed – The arts can save lives; connect individuals; reignite teachers; cross all language barriers and restore hope. I also

MYTH:
Taking an arts course will have a negative impact on Student GPA in New Jersey.

FACT:
New Jersey requires public schools to weight arts courses and other courses equally.


On January 11, 2016, the New Jersey Legislature passed



in a unanimous vote in both the Assembly and the Senate

Source: New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, March 2017, artsednj.org/visual-and-performing-arts-grade-weighting-bill-wins-committee-approval-2

Yet, 13% of New Jersey high schools do not weight arts courses equally with other core subjects



Source: 2015-16 New Jersey Arts Education Census.

ARTS ED NOW

ABOUT ARTS ED NJ

Arts Ed NJ is the unified voice for arts education in New Jersey. Formerly the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, Arts Ed NJ was founded in 2007 by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, New Jersey Department of Education and Music for All Foundation with additional support from the ArtPride New Jersey Foundation. The mission of Arts Ed NJ is to provide a unified voice for a diverse group of constituents who agree on the educational benefits and impact of the arts, specifically the contribution they make to student achievement and a civilized, sustainable society. Additional information is available at www.artsednj.org.

ABOUT ARTS ED NOW

Arts Ed Now is a statewide campaign to increase active participation in arts education in all schools in New Jersey. Studies show that students who participate in arts education do better in school and in life. Unfortunately, not all NJ students have the access or information to increase their participation in arts education. The Arts Ed Now campaign identifies ways to increase participation in arts education and garner public support to put a spotlight on the issue – and is designed to be customized at a local grassroots level for more impact. The "Campaign Central" website <https://artsednow.org> features stories, tools and ways for citizens to become better ambassadors – together. This project is supported in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional partners include many of the New Jersey's leading education organizations including the New Jersey School Boards Association. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov.

learned that teachers need to be a part of the creative process. Everyone must have and be encouraged to use their voice! And finally, it is clear to me the arts matter in our schools.”

As these two examples reveal, arts education is a critical part of our successful education system. And the public agrees. A Rutgers Eagleton Statewide Public Opinion Survey found that:

Nine in 10 residents say that receiving an education in the arts – which includes lessons in dance, music, theatre, visual arts, media arts, and other forms of creativity – is “very” or “somewhat” important in the classroom (90 percent), through before or after school programs (93 percent), and through cultural organizations in their community (89 percent).

Likewise, half or more of residents believe arts education is just as important as a whole range of other subjects, including English language arts (53 percent), science (50 percent), social studies (56 percent), computer science (49 percent), health and physical education (56 percent), and world languages (54 percent); a plurality feel this way when arts education is compared to math (43 percent) and career and life skills classes (45 percent).

Furthermore, New Jerseyans believe that arts education can help students “a lot” in becoming more creative and imaginative (87 percent), building confidence (81 percent), improving communication skills (74 percent), becoming more tolerant of other cultures (73 percent), developing discipline and perseverance (69 percent), improving overall academic performance (60 percent), or gaining workforce readiness and career skills (53 percent).

Your fellow school board members feel even stronger about arts education. In the 2017 New Jersey School Board Candidates Survey conducted by Arts Ed NJ:

- 100% of school board members were aware of the benefits of arts education;
- 99% of school board members indicated they would play a leadership role in supporting arts education in their district; and
- 92% opposed efforts to “narrow” the curriculum

Also of note is the fact that 83 percent had a personal involvement in the arts at one time and 83 percent also report having children involved in the arts.

At a time when we are educating our students for jobs that do not yet exist in industries that have

yet to be invented, the arts provide important skills to prepare them for the future.

That is why in 2016 we launched Arts Ed Now, developed in partnership with the NJ State Council on the Arts; the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation and many educational organizations, including the New Jersey School Boards Association.

Arts Ed Now is a multi-year campaign designed to increase participation in arts education in schools across New Jersey.

The campaign goals by 2020 are as follows:

- All N.J. students will have access to arts education;
- Increase the number of schools providing more than two art forms
- Increase arts participation in elementary and middle schools to 100%;
- Increase participation in high schools to 60%;
- Increase school engagement with community resources; and
- Develop a statewide network of local stakeholders.

As a school board member, what can you do? There are many ways in which you can make a difference:

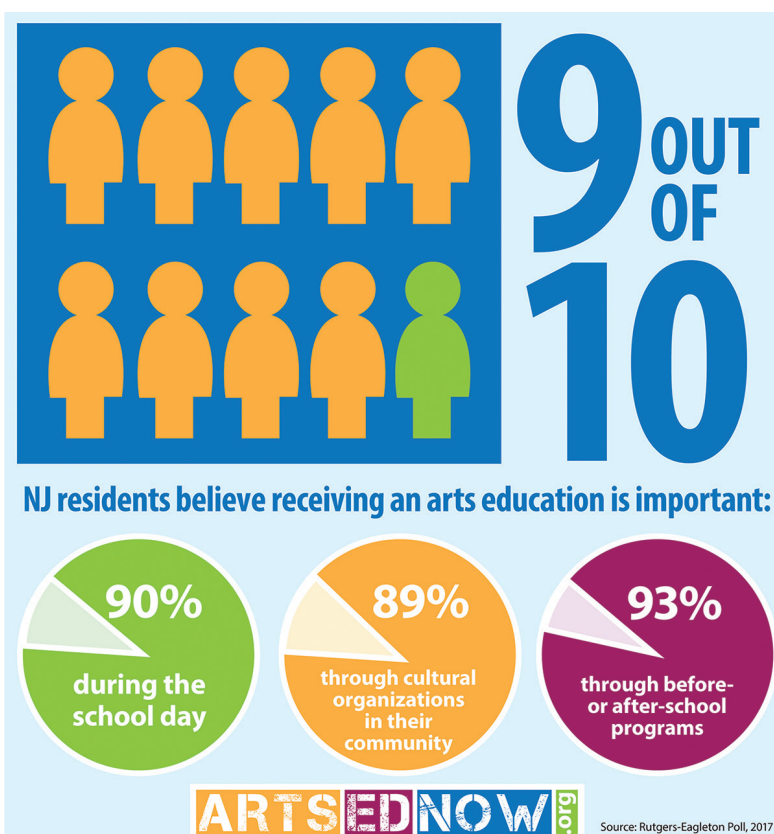
1. **Visit** artsednow.org, look up your schools and see how they stack up to the statewide goals. Explore the Campaign Tools section to assist you in your districts.
2. **Engage** with your school administration to discuss the district strategy for arts education; consider a program review or develop a strategic plan for arts education.
3. **Adopt** an arts education policy that outlines the board’s and administration’s shared vision for arts education.
4. **Make sure** arts courses receive proper weighting. Read more about the new law that went into effect in 2016, and what you can do in your schools at artsednj.org.
5. **Make sure** your local curriculum is updated and aligned with the most recent N.J. Student Learning Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts.
6. **Be visible**, and attend local concerts, productions, recitals, and exhibitions. Let your faculty see your support. Display ARTS ED NOW stickers and share materials to get the word out

(available at artsednow.org).

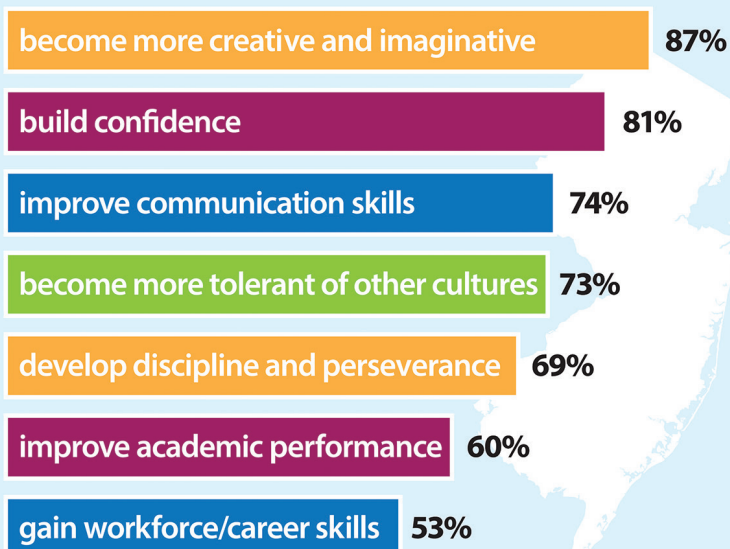
7. **Explore** professional development and other opportunities offered by NJSBA and its partner organizations to learn more about developing an arts-rich district.

By becoming knowledgeable about the issue, and engaged in the effort, you can ensure that your students will get an education that includes Arts Ed Now.

Robert Morrison is the director of Arts Ed NJ and a national leader in the field of arts education. He is a member (and past president) of the Watchung Hill Regional Board of Education, president of the Somerset County School Boards Association and a member of the New Jersey School Boards Association Board of Directors. He can be reached at bobm@artsedresearch.org.



New Jerseyans believe arts education helps students:



Source: Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, 2017

ARTSEDNOW.org