

Increasing Youth Access to Quality Arts Experiences

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Is there a child in your life that is interested in the arts, but you are uncertain how to support them on their journey? If you have had limited involvement, participation or experience in the arts it can be difficult to understand and support youth as they explore this exciting field. Perhaps they have expressed an interest in a career in the arts, but you are concerned about the financial viability or career options they may have. By increasing access to quality arts experiences, youth can learn valuable essential skills that can set them up for success in a wide variety of career paths.

THE ARTS ARE IMPORTANT TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The arts teach necessary essential skills, formerly known as “soft skills”, such as teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving. In the past, you have likely heard of STEM curriculum, which places an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. However, educational leaders have since recognized the critical role that arts serves for essential skill development, and have added an “A” to the acronym to become STEAM. In a report titled *How the ARTS Benefit Student Achievement*, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies points to data that show the benefits of incorporating arts into a student’s school day. Researchers found that students scored better on standardized tests when they were more active in the arts, compared to those who were less active in the arts. Those same students reportedly also watched less TV, felt less bored in school and participated in more hours of community service.

Each field of the arts relies upon self-discipline, self-reflection and motivation to be successful. Students who spend hours practicing music,

dance or drawing will develop the essential discipline, dedication and attention to detail that is necessary for any career path in the future.

To provide your student access to arts education that will ensure their success, make yourself aware of the arts offerings within their school system. Express to your school board, administration and elected officials that arts education is a priority to you, your child and your family, and ask what you can do to advocate for increased programming within the school. Pay attention to the core curriculum that teachers are using: ask your child if they are using art to enhance science, math or history classes. There is an abundance of curriculum available to Kentucky teachers that will incorporate arts into their everyday lesson plans. If teachers are not currently using these offerings, consider asking the teacher about upcoming subject matter and research potential arts integration lessons that can help that teacher enhance their curriculum.

THE ARTS SUPPORT COMMUNITY VITALITY

You can also support your child by researching community arts programming. Even the smallest of towns have dance centers, volunteer theatre groups or drawing and painting workshops. Plan a family outing to support a local recital, production or art showcase. In addition to teaching arts disciplines, these participatory art programs often provide inter-generational opportunities for youth to spend time with and learn about others within their own community. After school programs such as 21st century programming often incorporates arts and teaching artists to provide youth with arts opportunities they do not receive during their regular school day.

If your community does not have access to public art experiences, you can still support youth by creating Art Stations within your own home. Simply stock a toolbox, storage container or cart with a variety of art supplies such as paint, pencils, magazines and sketchbooks and encourage them to replace one hour of screen time a day with one hour of art creation. Display their creations proudly and encourage them to create with friends. If your child shows interest in performing or singing, create a Prop Box at home that is full of old clothing, hats or even pool noodles—you will be amazed at what your child's imagination can create with a few random items! Encourage them to write and act out their own stories with their friends in the backyard to engage in creative play. This type of creative and collaborative arts engagement can help empower them with confidence and quick thinking that will be necessary for future success.

THE ARTS ARE CRITICAL TO THE ECONOMY

Arts are vital to a strong society, healthy and empathetic citizenship and a robust economy. According to the Americans for the Arts blog, Ten Reasons to Support the Arts in 2018,

“The arts bring us joy, help us express our values, and build bridges between cultures. The arts are also a fundamental component of a healthy community—strengthening them socially, educationally, and economically—benefits that persist even in difficult social and economic times. Arts improve individual well-being.”

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies is an organization that tracks the economic impact

of the arts in our country. According to their 2017 State Policy Brief, the arts in our country produce \$729.6 billion, or 4.2% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This indicates that the arts sector is a major contributor to our national economic prosperity. In fact, the arts sector is “three times greater than the amount that the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sector contributes to GDP.” With 4.8 million workers in the creative sector nationally, there are a significant amount of viable career options for youth to pursue.

THE ARTS ALIGN WITH MANY CAREER PATHWAYS

Career paths in the arts can be daunting for both students and their parents to contemplate, but according to research by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, employment and job satisfaction for art major alumni are on par with those of other college graduates. The research indicates that art majors are well equipped for our current dynamic job market, in which job and career hopping have become the norm. In today's digital age, viable arts careers have expanded to become more than the fabled “starving artist” worry of yesteryear.

While youth may dream of stardom, bright lights and grand openings there are art career options in art education, art administration, technology and graphics that could keep them involved in the arts as well as support a high quality of life. Fostering a child's interest in the arts can also provide the discipline and focus they need to succeed in careers such as medicine, engineering, business management or contracting. One advantage of a diverse arts path is creating a unique career that aligns a person's passion with their lifestyle expectations. If your child has expressed an interest in an arts field, do research with your child so their expectations are informed, realistic and purposeful. ■

References:

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