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SPECIAL REPORT

EDUCATING IN THE ARTS

See also the 2016 Special Report, “The Urgency of Arts Education in Christian Education,” which highlights three articles detailing the practical benefits in Arts Education.

FACT

Courses in **music and art** are required to be *taught* at the elementary level and *offered* at the high school level of every PA religious school that desires to enroll students as part of their Compulsory Attendance obligations. See the Appendix for more details.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Modern education tends toward limiting arts education as irrelevant to the development of the average student. This tendency has been aggravated by STEM emphasis.

- When a school budget tightens, arts education is typically one of the first cuts.
- Hiring specialized arts teachers can be difficult, especially for smaller schools, and the additional cost of art supplies and instruments falls on families.
- Arts education is typically downgraded when compared with other subjects. Not being included in standardized testing gives an art or music class the illusion of less importance.
- The arts in contemporary culture have degenerated into a form of “creative self-expression” that has diminished their perceived value.
- Shifting trends in society have decreased the utilization of arts education activities such as 1) teaching music basics, musical part-singing, and hymnology while singing from traditional hymnbooks; 2) skill-building activities such as All-State Choir and All-State Band; and 3) talent-developing adjudications such as are administered in a Festival.
- A student’s “spare time” is absorbed by sports, electronic device usage, or idle recreation, leaving little time for the arts. While athletic events are exciting and easy to follow and electronic usage is addictive, most people do not “get” the nuances and technical peculiarities of art forms.
- Parents concerned with tangible effects are typically attracted to the “instant gratification” of standardized test scores or athletic achievements, deemphasizing the “delayed gratification” of internal development.
- It is easy to justify a lack of arts *education* by providing arts *activities* (e.g., a school play or Christmas concert).

PROMOTING A SOLUTION

Recent studies show that arts education, far from being “irrelevant,” can boost academic programs and produce other important benefits.

A. Music and Visual Arts Education: What the Research Says

Studies have promoted the significant value of taking music lessons. Most recently, a 2020 [study](#) published by *Journal of Educational Psychology* finds that high school students who enroll in music courses score significantly higher on math, science, and English exams than do their peers. The following findings are noteworthy:

- Noting the tendency of school leaders to cut resources for music education, one of the researchers points out that “the irony is that music education...can be the very thing that improves all-around academic achievement and an ideal way to have students learn more holistically in schools.”
- Relationships between music lessons and academic achievement are much stronger for those who study instrumental music than for those who study vocal music.
- The study defends three possible explanations for why taking music lessons makes these students perform better in school:
 1. Music training alters the brain to improve *self-regulation in tasks, improvement in how information relates with working memory, and the flexibility of changing between tasks.*
 2. The mastery of complex skills and achievement of desired outcomes from repeated practice builds confidence in how important practice is to success. This motivation extends to their view of homework and diligent work for large-scale projects.
 3. The collaborative, non-competitive nature of music activities improves social climate and social interactions. Positive school climate boosts academic achievement.

A [study](#) by the Brookings Foundation published in February 2019 detailed research involving 10,548 students enrolled in 42 schools across the Houston area. The study found that arts education greatly impacted “students’ academic, social, and emotional outcomes.” The following findings are noteworthy:

- The schools observed a reduction in disciplinary infractions.
- The schools observed an improvement in writing scores.
- The schools observed an increase in the participating students’ “compassion for others” (i.e., they were “more interested in how other people feel and more likely to want to help people who are treated badly”).
- The study laments the “remarkable lack of large-scale experimental studies that investigate the educational impacts of the arts.”

The National Dropout Prevention Center published a [paper](#) in 2017 entitled “The Arts and Dropout Prevention: The Power of Art to Engage.” The study made multiple positive observations about arts programs in schools. The following findings are noteworthy:

- Students who study the arts are more engaged in their academics. Learning to take the time to be thorough and careful in how they observe the world, they develop critical and creative thinking skills. Their increased ability to critique themselves makes them more willing to experiment. They exhibit greater motivation, including persistence and focused attentions.
- Students who study the arts are better able to manage their behavior and to maintain a positive self-concept, developing social tolerance and self-confidence. Even lower-elementary students who study the arts increased their growth mindset.
- Schools with arts programs are more engaged in their communities. They create an attractive, culturally rich environment.

B. Music and Visual Arts Education: What the Research Does NOT Say

The studies cited above address arts programs that involve technical instruction with academic expectations. These do not include anything resembling:

- An arts-and-crafts time set aside for the students.
- A recreational course offered for students who want to avoid study hall.
- An academic survey course of composers and artists.
- A one-year course offering.
- A “brochure course” offered to make the school more attractive to prospective families.
- A “creative arts” program offered to give your students a fun outlet.

SO WHAT? HOW DOES THIS IMPACT MY MINISTRY?

This Report encourages pastors and principals to review the research as arts education benefits 1) students, 2) school curriculum, and 3) school enrollment trends. Reexamine how the inclusion of robust arts education enhances the education of your students and the attributes of your school. Reprioritize to improve the balance and effectiveness of your curriculum. Strengthen what you are already doing well and improve where you discern weakness.

A. Applying Arts

We encourage you to consider how arts education objectives align with your school’s mission and purpose. Consider:

- Does arts education integrate a biblical worldview? Students should be educated in discerning the philosophical/spiritual backgrounds and emphases of arts from a biblical worldview.
- Is your arts education an integral part of whole child development that develops character and engages students, or is it a “schedule filler”? Building a program that is intentional and rigorous takes time and care to establish.
- How can arts education be used in student discipleship? The individualized nature of arts classes lends itself well to discipleship opportunities.
- How does arts education build relationships with students and their families? The arts appeal to the emotional, more personal side of people.
- How is the utilization of class time or designated after-school hours for arts education consistent with your school’s academic goals? Do not hold arts classes to a lower academic standard because they are not included in standardized testing.
- Do you communicate to your families how private music and art lessons align with your school’s mission and purpose? Although your school may be limited in its resources, you can educate your school families in the importance and value of arts education. Building relationships with “outside” professionals gives you flexibility to recommend them to families or to offer them facilities for providing after-hour lessons.

B. Honoring Achievement

Participants in worship recognize the value of applied arts. Not only does personal experience attest to this value, but even a cursory reading of Exodus will alert the reader to the attention God placed on artistry—and this was a nation of newly liberated slaves wandering in a desert!

- Role models in the church such as pastors, deacons, elders, and Sunday school teachers need to encourage youth who are involved in the arts. Thank them for their playing, singing, decorating, and similar achievements of artistry.

- Be specific in your praise. Even if you are not familiar with technical terms, identify a detail that was a blessing to you. Communicate your praise to the parents—students are not the only ones making an investment!
- Attend recitals, concerts, and plays involving your students. Make a big deal about awards and recognitions.
- Look to the future. Athletic prowess peaks and fades, leaving memories. Involvement in the arts improves academics, builds character, and ensures years of ministering to hearts and bringing glory to God.

APPENDIX

Prior to 1986, a PA religious school was mandated by law to follow the mandates passed by the State Board of Education. That includes curricular mandates. So, for example, there was a mandate that classes in Physical Education were required to include dance. KCEA battled for relief from *state control* of curriculum, not just relief from specific mandates. KCEA spearheaded what became Act 178 of 1986, which excludes state curricular mandates on PA religious schools. There is, however, a mandate on students.

Section 1327 of the School Code of 1949 is part of the Compulsory Attendance statutes. Students of compulsory attendance age are required attend one of the educational options listed in statute. The family/child can choose a religious school that conducts classes for the designated length for a school year, that teaches in English, etc., etc., and does the following as to its curriculum because the school is an academic institution:

(1) At the elementary school level, the following courses are **taught**: English, to include spelling, reading and writing; arithmetic; science; geography; history of the United States and Pennsylvania; civics; safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires; health and physiology; physical education; **music**; and **art**. *[emphasis ours]*

(2) At the secondary school level, the following courses are **offered**: English, to include language, literature, speech and composition; science, to include biology and chemistry; geography; social studies, to include civics, economics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania; a foreign language; mathematics, to include general mathematics and statistics, algebra and geometry; **art**; **music**; physical education; health and physiology; and safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires. *[emphasis ours]*

Every affiliating school has submitted an affidavit like PDE-5000A wherein the school has promised to teach/offer these subjects.

Just as we wrote and enacted Act 178, even today there is no specification as to the amount/length of instruction for any subject; and government is prohibited from content control.