



PERPICH
TEACHING IN AND
THROUGH THE ARTS

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For immediate release

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First-of-its-kind Minnesota report shows both gaps and achievement in K-12 arts education

Minnesota schools are doing much better than schools in some other states when it comes to arts education. We have arts courses in 99 percent of our schools, but less than half of the high schools and middle schools and only 28 percent of elementary schools provide the state-required variety of arts areas. Student assessments are inconsistent and at the elementary school level, the per-pupil arts expenditure is only two cents a day.

These are just a few of the findings from a statewide arts education study, “Building a Legacy,” launched during the 2010-2011 school year by Perpich Center for Arts Education, a state agency in Golden Valley serving all schools and students in Minnesota. The report provides a never-before-available picture of arts education in the state and establishes a baseline for tracking and measuring future progress. The Minnesota State Legislature funded the study through its Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Despite identifying some significant challenges, the report shows that arts education in Minnesota is alive and well.

“Overall, the Perpich Center is very pleased with the results—most schools are offering arts courses, the state has enacted strong policies in arts education, qualified teachers provide instruction, strong connections have been forged between schools and cultural organizations and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities require an arts credit for admission to its institutions,” says Sue Mackert, executive director of the Perpich Center. “However, we have much more work to do.”

The study answers the need to provide data to decision makers, schools and the public about this critical area of K-12 education. Increasing numbers of national studies show again and again a significant positive relationship between arts study and overall academic achievement, especially in schools with high populations of at-risk students. This study confirms those findings.

“The study verifies that investment in arts education pays off in student achievement,” Mackert says. “Arts education in Minnesota is a basic educational right for all Minnesota children—not just the gifted, or the talented or the economically advantaged. It has a very strong grounding in state statutes and rules. Minnesota needs to ensure that equity and access to arts education is available to all Minnesota students. This report is the state’s roadmap for that effort.”

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Two correlations between student achievement and arts education were identified in the study. First, a positive relationship exists between a school's Focus Rating (part of the Minnesota's Multiple Measurement Rating or MMR) and higher levels of arts education (as measured by the arts education index). Second, there is a positive relationship between a school's scores for the Graduation Required Assessment for Diploma (GRAD) reading assessment and higher levels of arts education. These positive correlations still hold when controlling for other "confounding" variables such as income, minority status or geography. Higher levels of arts education coincide with higher Focus Ratings (MMR) and GRAD reading scores.

"For many of our most pressing challenges for education in Minnesota, the arts are a part of the solution," Mackert says. "In an environment where our world is demanding individuals with the capacity to be creative and innovative, we know the arts are one of the ways to unlock potential and develop these skills in our students."

A plethora of data justifies the value of arts education, according to Mackert. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a national public-private organization focused on student skills and readiness, states that education must combine traditional subject matters (the three Rs) with the four Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity—the basis of arts education. In addition, "the latest studies on brain science show that the arts play an important role in brain development throughout your life," Mackert says.

The report states that the relative strength of arts education in Minnesota is no accident, pointing out that Minnesota is the only state in the nation with a dedicated state agency supporting arts education, the Perpich Center for Arts Education. The center has helped to shape the Minnesota Academic Standards in the Arts K-12, collaborated with the Board of Teaching to develop teaching licenses in the arts areas and provided professional development for teachers around the state so they are able to teach the standards, assess student learning and incorporate community resources into the schools.

The lack of a system of accountability to ensure that state policies are implemented is of concern, Mackert says. "Limited financial resources supporting arts education and a reliance on external funding and/or student fees indicate a system under stress."

Pam Paulson, senior director of policy at Perpich Center and director of the study, points out that "this report is designed as a helping hand, not a wagging finger. We need to find out WHY some schools may not be where they need to be.

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“The good news is we have great arts programs across all economic geographic regions in our state,” Paulson says. “There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained from these schools and some tremendous mentoring opportunities for schools with similar backgrounds to share and learn from one another. “

Recommendations from the study focus on maintaining and improving arts education standards, asking the legislature to require “full implementation and accountability processes to measure adherence to the strong policies supporting arts education” and implementing an annual report on the status and condition of arts education in Minnesota, to be conducted by Perpich in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education.

External research cited in the report from numerous highly reliable studies shows that inclusion of arts in K-12 curriculum benefits overall learning and academic advancement. These studies show how study in the arts contributes to college and workforce readiness, to student success in school, to student engagement in learning and to increased achievement for at-risk students in particular.

“Leaders must look beyond justifying the value of arts education and evaluate and act on the research results being released that illustrate the need for arts education,” Mackert says. “Arts education is not a luxury or an extracurricular activity. It must be regarded as an intrinsic part of any successful educational program focused on student and teacher achievement.”

The response rate in the survey on which this report is based was 44 percent from all public (non-charter) schools. Twenty percent of charter schools responded. Altogether, schools responding represent 376,924 Minnesota students. Because of the high response rate, there is only a +/- 2.95% margin of error in the results of the study’s statistical findings. Paulson directed the project and the research director was Robert Morrison of Quadrant Arts Education Research in Warren, New Jersey.

The full report is available at: www.pcae.k12.mn.us/survey/legacy.html

Perpich Center for Arts Education is a state agency serving all school districts in Minnesota. Created in 1985 by the Minnesota State Legislature, the agency seeks to advance K-12 education throughout Minnesota by teaching in and through the arts. Perpich staff and faculty experts provide outreach, professional development, research, curriculum and standards development, a statewide arts education library and a public arts high school that serves students from around the state.

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