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Making the Policy Case for Public Investment in Youth Arts

Often considered nice but not necessary, arts education—both in school and after school—seldom receives sufficient public funding. Yet, the arts are essential to a **21st century education**, teaching children **vital skills** that nurture intellectual and creative development.¹ Young people learn to think creatively, work on a team, and practice challenging tasks until completion. For hard-to-reach students (who cope with disabilities, violence, or poverty), the arts are frequently the reason they stay in school.² Research shows that arts education correlates with better grades and test scores and facilitates learning in other subjects.³

We need to make art a right for all young people, regardless of their socioeconomic status and life circumstances. In challenging economic times, funding for the arts is the first to be cut, yet nearly 95 percent of Massachusetts voters see the arts as a basic part of a child's education, as fundamental as English and mathematics.⁴ The **Massachusetts Cultural Council** (the state's arts agency) receives one-tenth of one percent of state spending, even as arts organizations from the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston to the Community Art Center in Cambridge **contribute more to the state's economy than all of Boston's professional sports teams** combined.⁵

Learn more! The rationale and recommendations for **increasing public resources for youth arts** follows.

*“Once music gets inside of
you it makes everything
a shade more beautiful.
Jokes are funnier and
flowers smell sweeter.
I couldn't survive
without it.”*

*-Meghan,
16-year-old
French horn player*

Youth arts matter

To employers.

Arts education can serve as an important **workforce development strategy**. Children limited to an education that focuses on rote and repetitive learning will be prepared only for rote and repetitive jobs, which are rapidly disappearing.⁶ Massachusetts is a leader in re-visioning education to prepare students for **21st century jobs**. The arts develop the kind of thinker and manager that businesses are asking for in the competitive global marketplace.⁷ Finding the courage to sing for an audience builds the courage to speak publicly; playing one's role in a cast of actors leads to performing one's job in a company of workers. **Arts education today develops the successful employees of tomorrow.**

And arts programs are not just preparing young people for their future careers, but giving them jobs today. **Eighty percent** of at-risk youth arts programs funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council pay their participants and nearly 40 percent of these programs provide opportunities for **entrepreneurial young people** to sell their wares.⁸



© Artists for Humanity

Arts Learning = 21st Century Job Skills

To thrive in the workplace, students must master:

- core academic subjects;
- interdisciplinary themes;
- learning and innovation skills;
- information, media, and technology skills; and
- life and career skills.⁹

The arts foster each of these lifelong benefits. In fact, arts education achieves key competencies in cognitive growth, including:

- perception of relationships;
- skills in finding multiple solutions to problems;
- attention to nuance;
- adaptability;
- decision-making skills; and
- visualization of goals and outcomes.¹⁰

-Dr. Elliot Eisner,
Emeritus Lee Jacks Professor
of Education and Art,
Stanford University

"I was surprised to hear that business leaders seek to hire students who have an interest and background in music, as well as those with formal business skills, but in reality, musically inclined people often have a way of thinking that is appealing and practical to industry."

-George A. Russell, Jr., President,
State Street Foundation

To young people.

Our children and youth are among our greatest resources, yet many young people have trouble staying on track. Arts programs in and out of school are often **the only positive outlets in these young people's lives** and an effective way to form lasting relationships with caring adults.¹¹ The strongest programs provide opportunities for youth to mentor their peers, run programs, and serve as authentic advisors in the administration of their schools or organizations.¹² These youth become examples of success, making their families and communities proud.



© Boston Children's Chorus

Research shows that all **students highly engaged in the arts do better in school and achieve higher scores on the SAT.**¹³ Underserved kids participating in creative programs improve their behavior and academic performance and are less likely to drop out of school.¹⁴ Students consistently involved in music and theater show **higher levels of success in math and reading.**¹⁵

To educators.

Research shows that schools with large populations of students living in poverty—often places of frustration and failure for students and teachers alike—can be transformed into vibrant and successful centers of learning and community life when the arts are infused into their culture and curricula.¹⁶ In a national sample of 25,000 students, those with high levels of arts learning experiences **earned higher grades and scored better on standardized tests** than those with little or no involvement in the arts, **regardless of socioeconomic status.**¹⁷ An **11-year national study** examined youth in low-income neighborhoods and found that those who participated in arts programs were much more likely to **be elected to class office, participate in a math and science fair, and/or win an award for writing an essay or poem.**¹⁸

“As teachers, we support arts education in our schools and our communities. Through arts education, students develop critical skills—such as creativity, planning, and collaboration—that are useful across disciplines. The arts engage students by giving them an expressive voice and the opportunity to grow.”

*-Anne Wass, President,
Massachusetts Teachers
Association*



© Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras

Research Shows

Scientific research suggests **arts training affects brain development**:

1. In children, there appear to be specific links between the practice of music and skills in geometrical representation.
2. Music training correlates with both reading acquisition and sequence learning.
3. Training in acting appears to lead to memory improvement.
4. Learning to dance by effective observation may transfer to other cognitive skills.¹⁸

To the community.

Like all states, Massachusetts faces **unprecedented economic challenges**. Nevertheless, workers trained in the arts drive the **success of leading Massachusetts industries**, including the software development, telecommunications, and new media industries.²⁰

Many of the cultural organizations that provide arts programs **create jobs and revenue** in struggling communities. Annually, Massachusetts cultural nonprofits provide nearly **37,000 jobs**, collect and pay **\$6.6 million in state sales taxes**, and have a **total economic impact of more than \$4.2 billion**.²¹ The arts support more than **245,000 jobs** throughout New England, or **3.5 percent** of the region's total job base—more than either the software or medical technology industries.²²

Among the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, those with high levels of cultural participation are more likely to have **low rates of juvenile delinquency and truancy**.²³ Students highly engaged in the arts are more involved in their communities. **US Department of Justice** researchers found that, when compared with control groups of young people not involved in an arts program, participants in youth arts programs showed **better attitudes** toward themselves and their roles in the world; **fewer new court referrals**; an increased ability to express anger appropriately and to **communicate effectively with peers and adults**; and an increased ability to **see a complex task through its completion**.²⁴

*“Arts are not a luxury.
Providing arts for
stressed-out students
lets out their
pent up energy
in a healthy way,
rather than
through violence.”*

*-Natasha,
parent of Boston Public
Schools student*

Spotlight!

Community Art Center

Mission

The Community Art Center is a neighborhood institution committed to nurturing children and young adults with limited access to financial resources so they achieve personal and cultural growth and have a positive impact on their world through joyful experiences in the arts.

What We Do

For 75 years, the Community Art Center has been dedicated to propelling a diverse population of under-resourced children and teens to develop themselves artistically, academically, and socially. During the most dangerous hours in a child's day, the Community Art Center provides not only safe care, but also a vibrant, creative learning environment. The Art Center offers two programs: the School Age Child Care Program for children ages 5–12 and the Teen Media Program for youth ages 13–19. Generations of families have passed through our classrooms drawing, writing, dancing, and learning photography, pottery, and video. Our dedicated staff and volunteers, some of whom grew up at the Art Center, both know firsthand the hurdles our youth must master and serve as a family network. We are boosting traditional art forms with 21st century technology through our media and design computer lab. The world that Community Art Center children inhabit demands citizens who are flexible, inventive, and globally aware; we are preparing them to be responsible citizens and to achieve personal and professional success.

Number of employees:	10
Total payroll:	\$387,401
Total spending on vendors:	\$151,945
Number of kids served:	250
Related jobs created:	The Teen Media Program works with students from Cambridge's Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program to provide summer jobs for 20 teens.

Of Note

- 2008 finalist for the Social Innovation Forum
- 2006 recipient of Coming Up Taller Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities
- 2006 recipient of \$100,000 capital improvement grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to be used for facilities improvement



© Community Art Center

"It's about everybody learning together from their hearts and people being who they are, no matter what color they are; everybody working together, teamwork and artwork making people happy."

-Artists statement by School Age Child Care Program group project participants

Significant Work Deserves Significant Support

Despite all of the benefits youth arts provide, we have failed to secure sufficient public funding. Among 11 subjects offered in high school, **superintendents surveyed nationwide** rank arts activities as one of the most likely subjects to develop creativity, yet a majority of respondents only offer the arts as electives.²⁵ Since 2002, time devoted to art and music instruction has declined by **35 percent** in a significant number of public schools across the country.²⁶

In **Massachusetts**, many school districts do not invest the resources and time necessary to provide an adequate K–12 education in the arts. Less than one third of all school districts in the state require a course in the arts for graduation. Forty-one districts, about **12 percent**, **have no arts instruction at all**. Massachusetts is **one of only four states without an arts education mandate**, and one of only ten that does not have a high school arts graduation requirement, although the Massachusetts Recommended High School Core Program of Studies includes at least one full-year fine arts course or its equivalent.²⁷

“The arts provide students with positive interactions with their community and expand their horizons. Increasing arts opportunities for young people increases their potential.”

*- Thomas Menino,
Mayor, Boston*



© Boston Arts Academy

In Boston, very few schools achieved what arts educators consider to be the benchmark of arts education—twice-weekly, year-long instruction for all students. In a 2007 survey, only **five percent of all elementary school students** and **six percent of all middle school students** in the Boston Public Schools met this goal. Eleven percent of schools showed no arts education available for their students during the school day.

Limitations to the school budget were overwhelmingly identified as the primary factor that prevented schools from offering more arts education.²⁸



© Community Art Center

What You Can Do Today

1. Sustain—or, better yet, increase—levels of funding to the **Massachusetts Cultural Council**.
2. Sustain—or, better yet, increase—levels of funding to the **Youth Violence Prevention Program, through the MA Department of Public Health; Shannon Community Safety Initiative, through the MA Executive Office of Public Safety; Community Development Block Grants, through the US Department of Housing and Community Development; and the 21st Century Learning Partnership, through the US Department of Education**. Advocate for the arts to continue to receive funding through these programs.
3. Support the establishment of the **Creative Challenge Index**, under consideration by the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education, to measure creative and critical thinking opportunities offered in schools across the Commonwealth.
4. Encourage that **municipal linkage monies**, which require developers to provide public benefit or mitigation for construction projects, be designated for youth arts programs in your community.
5. Support increased arts programming in the **After-School and Out-of-School Time Quality grant** and in the **Expanded Learning Time grant, both through the MA Department of Education**.

“Though we both have a long history in arts education, we were startled to find such systematic emphasis on thinking and perception in the art classes we studied. In contrast to the reputation of the arts as mainly about expressive craft, we found that teachers talked about decisions, choices, and understanding far more than they talked about feelings.”

- Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland, researchers at Harvard University Graduate School of Education's Project Zero

6. Visit arts programs in your district and community to **see these programs in action** and learn firsthand how critical they are for the children, youth, and families who participate.
7. Invite **young artists to share their talents** and tell their stories to fellow policy shapers.
8. **Stay informed** about current legislation and budget issues affecting the youth arts community. Ensure that your staff and constituents receive regular email alerts on youth arts advocacy opportunities by joining the following list-servs:
 - a. **Massachusetts Advocates for the Arts, Sciences and Humanities:**
www.maash.org/join/join.htm
 - b. **Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership:**
www.capwiz.com/massafterschool/mlm/signup
 - c. **Massachusetts Cultural Council:**
www.patronmail.com/pmailweb/PatronSetup?oid=945
 - d. **Americans for the Arts:**
www.capwiz.com/artsusa/mlm/signup
 - e. **Arts|Learning:**
www.artsllearning.org/programs/advocacy/maecmembership
9. Make specific requests to **district-level school boards:**
 - a. Advocate for **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** grant applications to the state to include arts education programs and nonprofit cultural organizations.
 - b. Meet the goal of at least **two hours of weekly high-quality sequential arts instruction** for each K–8 student.
 - c. Adopt the arts as a **core component of the recommended curriculum.**
 - d. Require that **every high school student receive at least one unit of arts education** in order to graduate.
 - e. Advocate for teachers to have **increased access to high-quality professional development** in the arts.
 - f. Support **arts-centered school programs** and encourage their expansion and duplication (e.g., Boston Arts Academy). Most of these schools have extraordinary success in graduating nearly all of their students and sending them to college.
10. Persuade public higher education institutions to **require proficiency in at least one art form for admission.**



© Hyde Square Task Force

“The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively. These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances.”

*– Arne Duncan,
US Secretary of Education,
in a letter to school
and education
community leaders*

ART *Works* for Kids

ART *Works* for Kids garners **sustained private and public support** of arts organizations that transform the lives of kids in **Eastern Massachusetts**. We promote the arts in classrooms, after-school programs, and the larger community to encourage young people to stay on track. We fund a coalition of approximately 30 youth arts organizations supporting underserved kids in Eastern Massachusetts. We help them to garner sustained private and public funding through advocacy, outreach, convening, and grantmaking.

ART *Works* for Kids is the local initiative of **Hunt Alternatives Fund**, which advances innovative and inclusive approaches to social change at local, national, and global levels. Since its founding in Denver in 1981, the Fund has contributed more than \$80 million to social change through a blend of grant making and operating programs.

“Despite a shaky economy and dwindling public resources, we in the Boston Public Schools are absolutely committed to expanding the exposure to the arts that our students receive.”

*-Dr. Carol Johnson,
Superintendent,
Boston Public Schools*

Contact Us

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Current **ART Works for Kids** Grantees

Actors' Shakespeare Project
Artists for Humanity
BalletRox
Books of Hope
Boston Arts Academy
Boston Children's Chorus
Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras
City of Boston, Mayor's Office of Arts, Tourism, and Special Events
City Stage Company
Community Art Center
Community Music Center of Boston
Conservatory Lab Charter School
Dorchester Community Center for the Visual Arts
Express Yourself
From the Top
Hyde Square Task Force
Making Music Matters
The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum
Origination
Raw Art Works
The Revolving Museum
The Theater Offensive
Troubadour: Literacy through Writing and Song
United South End Settlements
University of Massachusetts Lowell String Project
Urban Improv
Young Audiences of Massachusetts
ZUMIX

Boston Landmarks Orchestra
(affiliated non-grantee)

ART Works for Kids' Coalition Impact

1. 81% of organizations serve a majority of **low-income youth**; all organizations have programming directed toward low-income youth.
2. About 40% of organizations work with **targeted underserved populations**, including incarcerated youth, kids with mental illness and special needs, victims of domestic violence, and English language learners.
3. 80% of organizations are **supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council**, the state's arts agency, attesting to the quality of the programs.
4. 90% of graduating seniors from coalition programs enrolled in college in 2006.



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Resources

Americans for the Arts

www.artsusa.org

Arts|Learning

www.artsllearning.org

Arts Education Partnership

www.aep-arts.org

Hunt Alternatives Fund

www.huntalternatives.org

Massachusetts Advocates for the Arts, Sciences and Humanities

www.maash.org

Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership

www.massafterschool.org

Massachusetts Cultural Council

www.massculturalcouncil.org

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

www.nasaa-arts.org

National Endowment for the Arts

www.nea.gov

“You [Raw Art Works] have become one of the biggest and most influential impacts in my life! You have given me a second home, lifelong friends, a job that I love, and people that care about me and accept me for who I am ... I thank you for creating my future.”

*-Doneeca,
Raw Art Works graduate,
attending Bucknell University
on a full scholarship*

Endnotes

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"One of our greatest assets in this country are the talented boys and girls who devote their early lives to music."

*-President John F. Kennedy
at a Boston Youth
Symphony Orchestras
concert at the White House,
1962*