

The Arts,  
Creative Learning &  
Student Achievement

2008 Study of

# ARTS Education

in Colorado Public Schools



## The Colorado Department of Education

The Colorado Department of Education is committed to educational leadership, service and support that relentlessly focus on the learning of all students. The state agency serves the preK-12 public education, adult education, and family literacy and library communities of Colorado.

## The Colorado Council on the Arts

The Colorado Council on the Arts, a division of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, invests in communities across the state to ensure that the cultural, educational and economic benefits of the arts are enjoyed by millions of Colorado youth, citizens and visitors every day.

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A great nation  
deserves great art.



DENVER OFFICE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

ARTSFORCOLORADO



“**The benefits are clear:  
The new study shows public  
schools in Colorado that offer  
more arts education have  
higher academic achievement  
and lower dropout rates.**”

## introduction



*Alexandra Graham • Adams City High School • Adams County School District 14*

Providing a strong arts education to every child in every Colorado public school is no longer just an option. It is as integral to learning as reading, writing and math.

Sound far-fetched? It's not.

Reading, writing and math are still as important as ever, but they are no longer enough. An arts education is essential to academic achievement and should not be discounted as merely "something nice to have." The stakes are too high. For today's students to succeed in school, work and life, they will require a well-rounded education that thoughtfully weaves core subjects with the visual arts, music, theater and dance.

In a global economy, graduates with skills in imagination, creativity and innovation will be heavily sought after by employers. In addition, the creative industries – design, architecture and interactive media – are among the fastest-growing work force areas.

In Colorado, state government and education leaders understand this important shift. Colorado is one of only three states that have conducted similar comprehensive studies of arts education in public schools, underscoring our state's commitment to this issue.

The first-of-its-kind study conducted by the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Council on the Arts sheds new light on what our public schools are doing well and where we must improve. The results will benchmark progress in years to come.

# major findings

The Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Council on the Arts invited more than 1,700 public schools to participate in the statewide arts education study. One-fourth of them – serving more than 200,000 children – completed the survey.

Because each school approaches arts education differently, researchers rated schools on a dozen factors – or an “arts index.” The index reflects various ways Colorado’s public schools offer arts education. (See “Arts education defined.”) To view the complete arts index, visit [www.coloarts.org](http://www.coloarts.org).



Logan Young • Wheat Ridge High School • Jeffco Public Schools



## Arts education defined

- Researchers created an “arts index” to capture the breadth and depth of arts education in Colorado’s public schools. Schools were evaluated against more than a dozen factors, such as:
- Arts education that is taught during the school day and is graded
  - Number of arts subjects offered
  - Amount of arts education offered across all grade levels
  - Number of students enrolled in arts education
  - Use of arts specialists for arts courses
  - Arts achievement included in grade point averages at the high school level



# finding one:

## Most Colorado schools offer some arts education.

Most of the state's public schools – with elementary schools in the lead – offer some formal arts education to a majority of students, regardless of the geographic location or socioeconomic makeup of the student population. The fact that high poverty schools provide the scope of arts education suggested in the study may surprise some. However, Colorado's findings mirror those of similar studies conducted in Illinois and New Jersey.

On average, elementary students study two hours of formal arts education each week from mostly experienced, certified teachers. Similar data are not available for middle or high school students because they have more discretion in selecting their arts courses and class schedules vary, making it harder to interpret results.

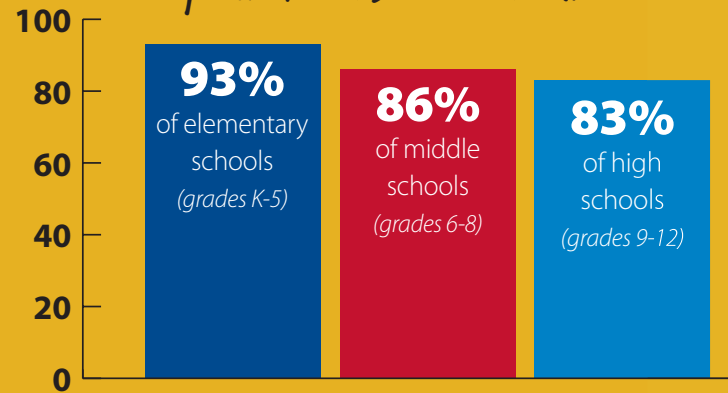
Juliana Meirado Valle  
Denver School of the Arts  
Denver Public Schools



### Benefits of arts education

- Associates with higher scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program in reading, writing and science
- Lowers dropout rates
- Helps better prepare students for future education and the workplace
- Enhances parental involvement in schools
- Strengthens creativity and imagination – in-demand work force skills

### Percentage of schools offering some formal arts education:



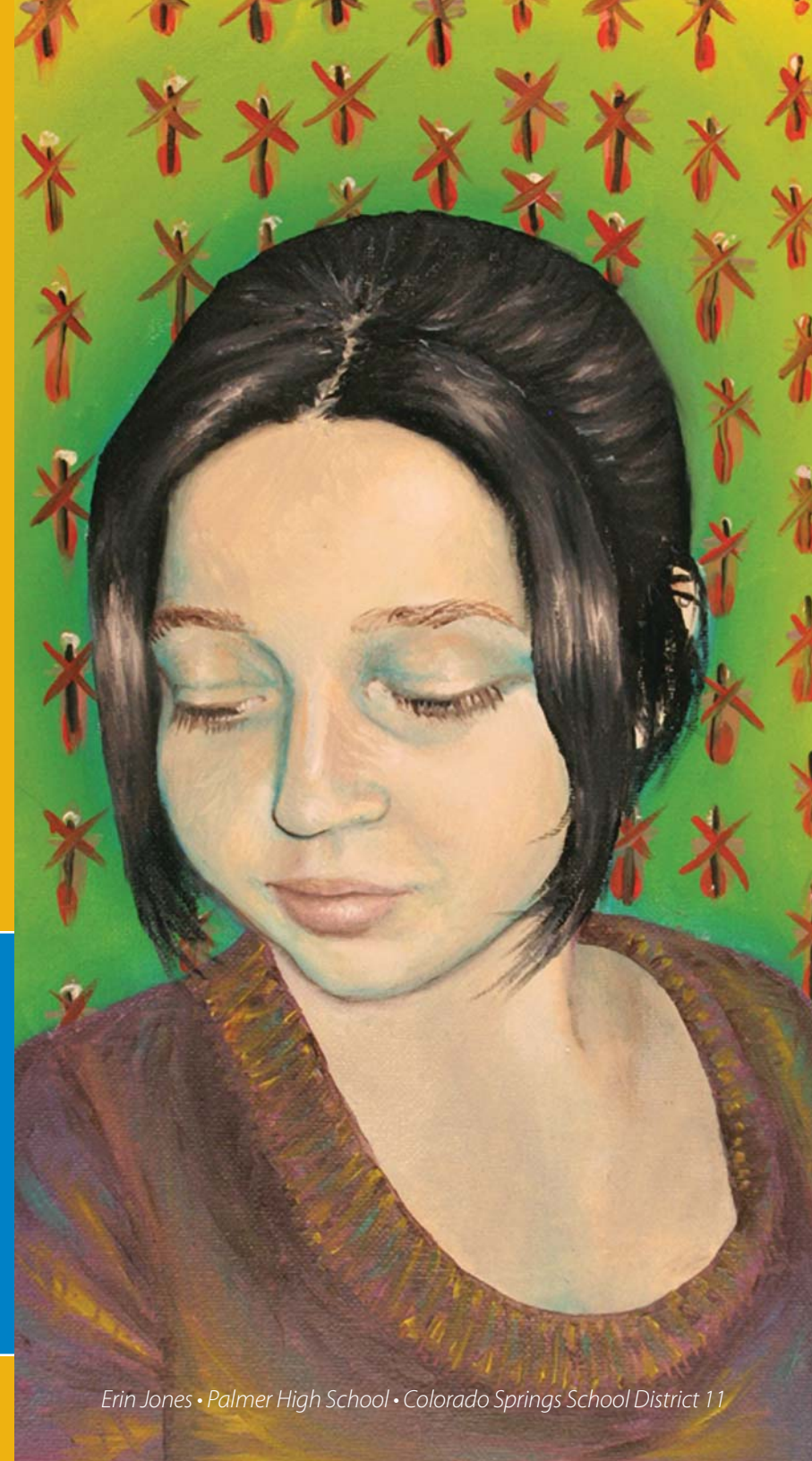
Which arts courses are students most likely to receive? The answer depends on the grade level. Visual arts and music dominate elementary and high schools, but less so in middle schools. Theater is more commonly offered in high schools, but fewer opportunities exist in elementary and middle schools. Dance, by far, was the least offered in all grade levels.

Most high schools factor students' performance in the arts into grade point averages and class rank, and just over half of all high schools in the state stipulate the arts as a graduation requirement. The study shows that schools with an arts credit graduation requirement offer more arts courses than those without one.



## Famous artists who graduated from public schools in Colorado:

- Amy Adams, Academy Award-nominated actor, Douglas County Public Schools
- India.Arie, Grammy Award-winning singer, Aurora Public Schools
- Don Cheadle, Academy Award-nominated actor, Denver Public Schools
- Lynne Taylor-Corbett, Tony Award-nominated choreographer, Littleton Public Schools
- Chris Sanders, Academy Award-winning Disney animator, Jeffco Public Schools
- Isaac Slade, singer and song writer for the Grammy Award-nominated band The Fray, Denver Public Schools







## finding two:

**Colorado schools that offer more arts education have higher academic achievement and lower dropout rates.**



The study found that more arts education is linked to student success. Students who do well in reading, writing and science attend schools that offer a rich and varied arts program – regardless of the students’ racial composition or socioeconomic status. Teachers in schools that offer students a strong arts education also tend to be more keenly aware of students’ learning styles and can help them achieve at higher levels.

The arts also help keep students in school, according to the study. Schools that scored high on the arts index had lower dropout rates. For many students, the arts are the crucial connection that motivates them to learn and gives them the confidence to tackle other subjects such as math or science.

## Rural school district strikes the right note between academics and music



*Students from Kit Carson School District*

Kit Carson is a small, rural community of 300 people located near the Kansas state border. The community's only K-12 school has 100 students who excel in academics, the arts and athletics.

Arts education is a part of the day just like reading or math. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade attend music class daily. "They are learning at an early age that there are certain expectations and ways of doing things, and they are having fun, too," says Superintendent Gerald Keefe.

Many of the district's students will go on to play in the middle and high school bands. The students are so good that the Kit Carson Wind Ensemble has received national awards.

But honing their musical talent isn't the only skill these students are learning. They are building a strong work ethic, learning about teamwork and enhancing their creativity. Keefe says those skills carry over into academics and, later, the workplace.

The commitment to the district's music program runs deep throughout the community. Voters approved giving the district an extra \$2,000 per student from local oil and gas reserves to help attract a talented music teacher to this rural area.

The staff also supports the music program. The coach attends every band concert. In a community that values athletics as much as academics and the arts, that is important. "Some students questioned whether it's cool for a football player to be in band," says Keefe. "I talked to the kids and said, 'You are great athletes and great students. Remember, you are setting an example that it's OK for guys to be in the band.'" Now it's no longer an issue.

For Keefe, engaging students in music isn't a choice – it's a necessity. "We are proud of our CSAP scores, but I don't think we'd ever hear someone say that we have to pull students out of music class because they are not passing the test. That's not an option. We can help them in other ways."

To hear the national award-winning Kit Carson Wind Ensemble, visit [www.kcsdr1.org](http://www.kcsdr1.org).



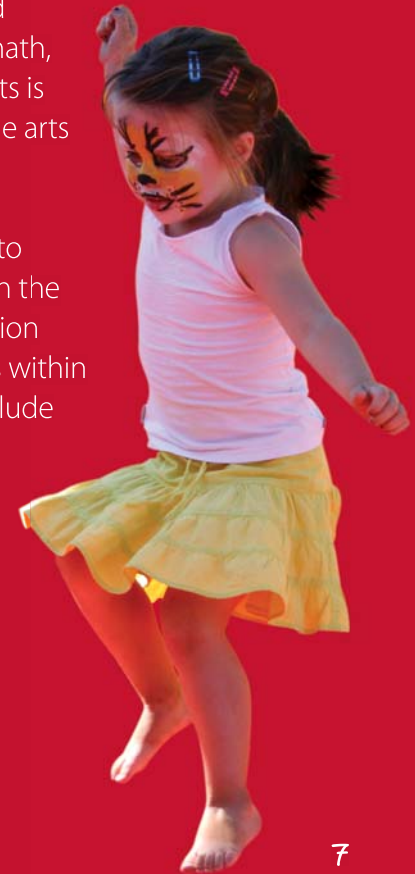
# finding three:

## School leaders say finding the time to offer the arts is their biggest challenge.

Colorado does not mandate that every student take arts education, but districts are required to offer the arts, and the state has standards about what students should know and be able to do in music and the visual and performing arts.

While most principals surveyed believe in the value of arts education, almost 75 percent said the amount of time needed for math, reading, writing and other subjects is their biggest barrier to offering the arts in their schools.

Principal leadership also appears to matter. There is a striking variety in the depth and breadth of arts education offered among individual schools within a school district. Other factors include whether the arts are a priority for parents and whether schools can find qualified arts teachers.




# finding four:

## The study shows students' access to the arts in Colorado's public schools needs to improve.

Although most public schools in Colorado offer some type of arts education, access for every child remains a challenge. About 29,000 children attend public schools that do not offer any formal arts education. Fifty-three percent of high school students are not taking any arts courses. The study also shows that the amount of courses offered in theater and dance lags behind the visual arts and music.

Principals also report a recent trend of decreased funding for arts education in the past five years. This raises questions about sustaining the quality of arts education currently in public schools.



### Barriers to increasing access to the arts in public schools

- Lack of time during the school day
- Failure to make arts education a priority
- Finding qualified arts teachers
- Limited access to arts venues such as theaters, museums or dance performances

Access to arts institutions also makes a difference. The study shows rural schools provide lower levels of arts education than suburban and urban schools. This may reflect less access to art museums, theater venues and dance performances as well as the difficulty in attracting arts teachers.



Claire O'Connor • Palmer High School  
Colorado Springs School District 11



# what's next?

The arts matter. Origami can introduce a child to the principles of geometry. Musical notes – a half note, a quarter note – help a child begin to learn fractions. Theater and dance allow students to more creatively express themselves, both in movement and in the language arts.

Work is under way to increase access to arts education in Colorado's public schools and to better position the arts as a resource for teaching math, science, reading, writing and other subjects.

A team led by Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien and Colorado Department of Education Commissioner Dwight Jones has begun to identify steps for strengthening arts education in Colorado schools, including:

- Ensuring the Colorado Model Content Standards and Assessments for all content areas incorporate creative learning practices
- Increasing professional development to help educators infuse more creative learning into core subjects
- Launching "Creative Conversations" with policymakers to discuss how schools can better meet the demand for a creative work force
- Sharing best practices of schools that have made the arts and creative learning strategies available for student success







# make a difference

Each of us can advocate for high-quality arts education and more creative learning in every Colorado school. How can you help? Begin by sharing this report with others and considering these strategies. If you are a:

## **Principal**

Learn about new methods to add creativity and imagination into teaching core curriculum. Support teachers in learning to integrate the arts into lesson plans. Seek local business support to fund arts programs in your school.

## **Teacher**

Work with principals to identify gaps in the arts curriculum and assessments. Ask Gov. Bill Ritter's P-20 Education Coordinating Council and the Colorado State School Board to make arts education a priority. Encourage parents to expose their children to the arts.

## **Parent**

Ask the principal of your child's school how much time each day is dedicated to the arts, how student progress is measured and whether basic arts classes advance into more complex arts study. Ask your child's teacher to use the arts in everyday instruction to develop creativity.

## **Policymaker**

Ensure that every child receives a high-quality arts education by creating supportive policies and practices. Require meaningful ways to measure student and school performance in the arts.





Alexandra Graham • Adams City High School • Adams County School District 14  
Chris Cain • Art teacher • Adams City High School

### Arts organization leader

Partner with schools to enrich their arts education offerings. Schools often rely on outside sources to strengthen their arts program, such as field trips to performances or visiting artists. Engage youngsters now – they are your future audiences.

For more tips, visit [www.keepartsinschools.org](http://www.keepartsinschools.org).

For more information, contact the arts education manager at the Colorado Council on the Arts at 303-892-3802, or the arts education specialist at the Colorado Department of Education at 303-866-6600.

Want to know more?  
Visit the Colorado  
Council on the Arts  
at [www.coloarts.org](http://www.coloarts.org)  
for the complete  
survey results.

# the arts & student achievement

## Other Noteworthy Colorado Studies



Luisa Poot • Foster Elementary School  
Jeffco Public Schools

- The 2008 **Profiles of Success** study conducted by the Donnell-Kay Foundation and Augenblick, Palaich & Associates profiles eight public schools that are successfully closing the achievement gap. All of the schools offered music programs and most provided creative and performing arts.  
<http://www.dkfoundation.org/pdf/profilesofsuccess-3-4-2008.pdf>
- A 2007 study by **Englewood Public Schools** shows integrating the arts into the curriculum improved student engagement and teacher morale. Classroom teachers who regularly used arts-related teaching strategies saw students' 2007 CSAP scores increase in reading and writing.  
<http://englewood.k12.co.us/peak/news.html>

- A 2007 survey of Colorado parents conducted by **Think360 Arts Complete Education** shows 87 percent of respondents say the arts are "important" or "very important" in preparing students for a variety of career choices, and 88 percent state they would be more likely to vote for a candidate whose list of priorities included more access to the arts in school.  
<http://www.think360arts.org/SurveySummary.pdf>









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