



# STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS THROUGH ARTS PARTNERSHIPS

Evaluation Summary:  
First Cohort, 2013–2015

# STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS THROUGH ARTS PARTNERSHIPS

According to a 2010 survey of access to arts education, 20% of Arizona schools offer zero arts courses in any discipline. Follow-up research revealed that for Arizona's lowest-performing schools,\* that percentage was even higher, at 34%. These findings prompted the Arizona Commission on the Arts to pilot an experimental funding initiative in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).

Strengthening Schools Through Arts Partnerships is based on a growing body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of strong arts education and/or arts integration programs, supported by community arts resources, to school improvement and capacity-building efforts.

\* as determined by the State of Arizona's schools-ranking system



**34%** OF ARIZONA'S LOWEST  
PERFORMING SCHOOLS  
OFFER NO ARTS COURSES



Strengthening Schools Through Arts Partnerships grants were awarded to four partnerships, each comprising a low-performing “D” label school and a nonprofit arts organization, in support of programs that aimed to strengthen teaching and learning in arts education and/or arts integration.

Implemented over two consecutive school years, the programs were facilitated by local arts organizations and professional teaching artists who consulted with school staff on the needs of their students and how their programs could support each site’s curriculum, school climate and culture.

The ADE Program Evaluation unit consulted with the grant recipients and advised on the development of program evaluation strategies. Throughout the process, the grant recipients met with the Arizona Commission on the Arts and ADE representatives to report on the evaluation process and results.

In September 2015, the ADE Program Evaluation unit published a cross-case evaluation of the funded programs based on their final reports, summarizing the three major areas of impact across programs as Academic Achievement, Student Self-Efficacy, and Student Engagement.

# PROGRAM COHORT: 2013-2015

Each funded program was comprised of a partnership between a school and a nonprofit arts organization or governmental entity, to leverage the benefits of connecting schools with community arts resources. Four partnerships were selected to participate

in the inaugural cohort, representing a range of objectives, structures, and approaches, while remaining focused on the implementation of customized arts education programming in support of each school's distinct improvement plan.

## *Stability and Capacity Building Through Arts Education*

**SCHOOL:** AVONDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL, AVONDALE

**ARTS PARTNER:** CITY OF GOODYEAR ARTS AND CULTURAL COMMISSION



A two-tiered arts integration program aimed at creating an engaging academic environment and encouraging multiple layers of arts experience for students as well as educators: (1) an in-school integration of art into middle school math and English language arts classes, and (2) an after school theatre club.

## *Therapeutic Arts in Schools*

**SCHOOL:** CHILDREN FIRST ACADEMY, PHOENIX

**ARTS PARTNER:** FREE ARTS FOR ABUSED CHILDREN OF ARIZONA



A program designed to impart social and coping skills that enable children to build self-esteem and feel confident in decision making. The program used professional artists to instruct students in a wide variety of art forms.

## *Raise Your Voice*

**SCHOOL:** ALHAMBRA HIGH SCHOOL, PHOENIX

**ARTS PARTNER:** THE RAG COLLECTION



A program of free after-school artistic workshops designed to connect students with artistic opportunities and help them discover their talents and express their voices. The program also connected students with the greater arts community in Phoenix through field trips, guest artist visits and student art exhibitions.

## *Opening Minds Through the Arts*

**SCHOOL:** MORGAN MAXWELL SCHOOL, TUCSON

**ARTS PARTNER:** ODAIKO SONORA



Weekly instruction in the art of ancient Japanese drumming and accompanying performances were designed to integrate arts education with core curriculum, increasing student achievement in mathematics, improving attendance rates, and developing a strong community of participating classrooms.

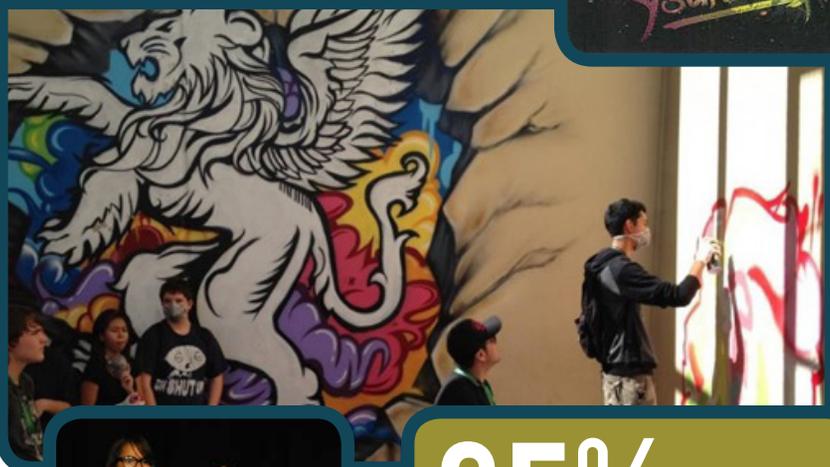
# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Overall, students who took part in the arts education and arts integrated programs performed better academically than non-participating students.

AT AVONDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL

5 OUT OF 6

CLASSES WITH ARTS INTEGRATED PROGRAMS OUTPERFORMED THE CONTROL GROUP



35% OF TEACHERS AT CHILDREN FIRST ACADEMY REPORTED INCREASED ACADEMIC SCORES

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“Math scores went up dramatically after the [arts integrated] fraction lessons. They begin to really understand, and their scores went up on Math tests after being introduced to these concepts.”

“While that sense of pride and self-discipline was evident in the taiko classroom, some of them carried that feeling through the curriculum.”

Teachers at Morgan Maxwell School

# SELF-EFFICACY

Participating students developed self-confidence and learned creative skills. They also learned to voice their opinions and connect their feelings to their art work through exhibition and performance.



“At the start of the semester, many of the students did not really have an idea of what they wanted to say.... As they began to learn more and more skills and build trust with the teaching artists, they began to say many deep things about their lives, their stories, and their futures. This was powerful to watch unfold. Their art was meaningful, not simply pretty.”

Teaching Artist at Alhambra High School

“

“My experience working with the taiko sensei helped me gain a sense of pride and self-discipline.”

Student at Morgan Maxwell School



“I am different because the first time I went in to Free Arts, I was scared and my sister, she was scared....But the third day they told us that we were going to do a performance so I got scared (and) I ran out the door. But now my favorite memories are the first time when I did the performance and the other time I did the performance.”

A Student at Children First Academy of Phoenix

# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The attendance rate reported by the grant recipients showed that participating students were deeply engaged in the arts education and arts integrated programs.



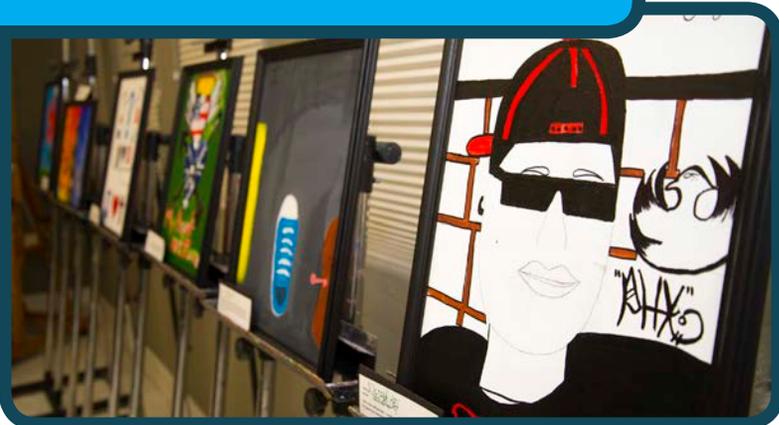
**BOTH AVONDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL AND MORGAN MAXWELL SCHOOL FOUND AN INCREASE IN ATTENDANCE RATE DURING DAYS WITH ARTS INTEGRATED CLASSES.**



**BOTH ALHAMBRA HIGH SCHOOL AND CHILDREN FIRST ACADEMY REPORTED THAT ATTENDANCE REMAINED CONSTANT FOR THE DURATION OF THE PROGRAMS INDICATING THAT STUDENT ATTRITION WAS LOWER THAN ANTICIPATED.**



**ALL TEACHER SURVEYS ADMINISTERED BY THE GRANT RECIPIENTS AND THE MAJORITY OF STUDENT SURVEYS DEMONSTRATED THAT PARTICIPATING STUDENTS ENJOYED THE ARTS EDUCATION AND ARTS INTEGRATED PROGRAMS.**



# CONCLUSION

Programs funded during the first round of the Strengthening Schools Through Arts Partnerships initiative developed innovative programs that responded directly to school improvement plans. With two years of funding to learn and experiment, these programs produced impressive results, particularly in the areas of academic achievement, student self-efficacy, and student engagement.

Findings summarized in this report are guiding the Arizona Commission on the Arts as it seeks to expand on and confirm these initial results, and a second cohort of partnerships has been funded. Like their predecessors, these programs will contribute to a growing body of research and case-studies documenting the efficacy of partnerships between schools and nonprofit arts organizations.



*"I guess today was a good day, but I felt great after the performance. I felt like I was somebody."*

A Student at Children First Academy of Phoenix

This report summarizes the findings of a cross-case evaluation prepared by the Arizona Department of Education Evaluation Unit. A copy of the full report can be found at [www.azarts.gov/arts-learning/sstap](http://www.azarts.gov/arts-learning/sstap).

Photos courtesy of Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona and Children First Academy; City of Goodyear Arts & Culture Commission and Avondale Middle School; Alhambra High School and The Rag Collection; and Tucson Unified School District (TUSD photos by Jes Ruvalcaba).



## COMMISSION ON THE **ARTS**

One of 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies across the United States, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is a 49-year-old agency of the State of Arizona and a leading force in the creative and professional development of Arizona's arts sector. Through robust programs, research initiatives and strategic grant-making, the Arts Commission catalyzes arts-based partnerships that strengthen Arizona communities through the arts.

*We imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.*

For more information or to request this publication in an alternative format, contact the Arts Commission at (602) 771-6501 or [info@azarts.gov](mailto:info@azarts.gov).

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