



# STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS THROUGH ARTS PARTNERSHIPS

Evaluation Summary: 2016 & 2017



# 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 (SSTAP) 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.

A cross-case evaluation of SSTAP programs implemented during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years reported a positive impact on academic achievement, student engagement, and student self-efficacy regardless of school type, grade level or arts discipline.

This publication highlights findings of a cross-case evaluation across SSTAP programs implemented during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years.

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

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



## INAUGURAL COHORT: 2013-2015

The inaugural SSTAP cohort comprised four partnerships between low-performing “D” label schools and nonprofit arts organizations. Implemented over two consecutive school years, these 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.

Findings from a cross-case evaluation of the four programs offered confirmation that integrating arts programs with school improvement plans or capacity building efforts, regardless of school type, grade level, or arts discipline, can have a positive impact on three key areas:

### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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

### 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.

### 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.

# PROGRAM COHORT: 2015-2017

Following the successes of the inaugural cohort, two schools were awarded funding in SSTAP's second funding cycle, spanning the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. One partnership focused on 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms while the other focused on Structured

English Immersion (SEI) classrooms. Led by experienced teaching artists, both programs provided extensive training and professional development for classroom teachers.

## EMBODY LEARNING

SCHOOL: GALLEGO INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL, TUCSON  
ARTS PARTNER: ARTS INTEGRATION SOLUTIONS

Gallego Intermediate School partnered with Arts Integration Solutions to offer intensive training to a core group of classroom teachers. Working with specialists the teachers learned and implemented an active engagement technique called *Embodiment Learning*.

Drawing from the pioneering work of Viola Spolin and Nellie McCaslin, *Embodiment Learning* utilizes drama-based techniques to engage students' bodies and creative imaginations in active explorations of classroom curriculum.



## DRAMA FRAMES

SCHOOL: ISAAC SCHOOL DISTRICT, PHOENIX  
ARTS PARTNER: CHILDSPLAY

Isaac School District partnered with Childsplay to provide professional development to teachers in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms at Moya Elementary and Alta E. Butler Elementary Schools.

The drama-integrated strategies used in *Drama Frames* build upon best practices for language acquisition identified through recent research, including storytelling and retelling, interactive approaches embodying both content and language, and opportunities to engage with language in motivating and meaningful contexts.



## ENHANCED TEACHER EFFICACY

Shifting common teaching practices to incorporate physical movement was a strong component in each program. Once they had achieved a level of comfort with the approach, teachers reported that they thrived on the student engagement and critical thinking that resulted.

## CHANGES IN TEACHING PRACTICES

In addition to providing personalized professional development and training, teaching artists co-taught with teachers and observed solo classroom sessions, providing constructive feedback throughout. Teachers noted changes to their own teaching practice and the resulting positive impact in their classrooms.



“

*It helps classroom management because the students are engaged. It's important to have my students engaged in what they are doing at all times. When you walk into my class and we're doing Embody Learning it's evident; you can see that.*

*Overall I noticed an incredible increase in vocabulary retention and test scores.... In our final lesson students showed truly how far they had come.*

“

*I've definitely noticed a change in my kids. My kids are much more relaxed and much more willing to go with me on the ride.*

“

*[By] my third lesson... I was like, 'Oh they can be engaged and I can be having fun! And they can be having fun and we're not getting too crazy.... This might actually be a good thing to do all the time.'*

# INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Teachers reported that students were participating and contributing more to classroom lessons. Further, students made the techniques their own, incorporating them independently and requested that the techniques be carried into other class activities.



*Students who don't usually have creative ideas all of a sudden became creative. I got to see students that usually aren't as outspoken...using higher vocabulary and giving really good ideas.*



*I've seen confidence growing, which has been great. I've seen more students participating...[who] have not generally participated. And I've seen their willingness to participate at a greater level than during other instructional time.*

# CONCLUSION

The programs reviewed from the SSTAP Cohort 2015-2017 focused on changing teaching practices. This resulted in enhancing the classroom experience both for the teacher and the student. It is evident that student engagement was increased and as a result, teachers were affected as well. Teaching practices were altered to incorporate physical movement into their curriculum. This addition to the classroom strategies helped all students remember words and concepts. It was particularly effective for kinesthetic learners and ESL students.

Success was reported from both programs through interviews, focus groups, student letters, and district benchmark assessments. The quotes featured throughout this publication are actual quotes from participating teachers, shared during program evaluation interviews and focus group sessions.

Photos courtesy of Arts Integration Solutions; Childsplay, Inc.; Helios Foundation; 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 photo by Jes Ruvalcaba).



ARIZONA   
COMMISSION  
ON THE ARTS

One of 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies across the United States, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is a 51-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 grantmaking, 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) or visit [www.azarts.gov](http://www.azarts.gov)

Published May 2018