

School Talk: Arts Education

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The financial roller coaster of state and local funding for public schools force school boards, administrators and teachers to have very real discussions about what programs our schools can afford. The decisions are never easy and often leave advocates of certain programs wondering if their areas are valued. While there is never enough funding for all programmatic desires, finding the right balance that ensures every student benefits for a wide array of choices is key.

Arts education has even hit the radar screen of the last two U.S. Presidents. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that lists the arts as one of the ten "core academic subjects" of public education, thus qualifying arts instruction for diverse federal grants and other support. In May, President Barak Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities released a stellar report, [*Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future Through Creative Schools*](#), which details the powerful role that arts education strategies can play in closing the achievement gap, improving student engagement, and building creativity and nurturing innovative thinking skills.

The arts are very much alive in the Columbus School District. From our award-winning high school marching band and choirs to the very entertaining stage productions to very creative visual pieces, kids from every grade are able to express themselves in various ways.

In addition to the arts offerings at school, our local community has stepped up to support greater arts access for kids. For example, in partnership with the Columbus School District, the Redbud Players Community Theatre has provided an opportunity for kids of all ages to participate in the performing arts. Since the group's inception in 1999, more than 600 children have recited lines, sang songs and danced their way into the hearts of their parents and neighbors. Some of these kids later went on to do theatre in college and other community programs. Additionally, hundreds of dancers from Partners Dance Studio in town have graced the stage at the high school over the years as well.

When we look at the results of financial triage in schools, arts education has typically taken the hit for reasons ranging from low student interest to cost to lack of space. Many rural districts like ours are confronted with those factors for many programs, not just art education. While I am proud of the arts education exposure for our students in Columbus, I continually hope the future brings additional opportunities.