

Editorial: Arts education

With exceptional cultural institutions in Houston, everyone should benefit.

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Photo By Dave Rossman/Freelance

The Museum of Fine Arts Gala Saturday Oct 18, 2014.(Dave Rossman photo)

Think funding for the arts in public schools isn't money well-spent? Think again.

Students involved in the arts are less likely to be truant or get in trouble, and they do better in standardized tests, as a recent report by the Community Arts Team notes. The Community Arts Team, established by **Young Audiences Inc. of Houston**, Houston Independent School District and the city of Houston, surveyed 209 HISD K-8 grade schools. According to the **Center for Houston's Future**, there are 532 cultural institutions in our region, yet 21 of the schools surveyed reported having no community art partners. Roughly one-third of these schools had no after-school arts activities and reported having no full-time fine arts teachers.

Most teachers and principals surveyed agreed that arts are good for kids, and more than half of the principals thought that somehow in the hectic day there ought to be time to incorporate arts education. With so much consensus and Houston's bounty of cultural institutions, why doesn't every school in HISD have a cultural partnership with a nonprofit or at least plan annual field trips to our many cultural institutions?

One barrier to arts access as reported by the principals is funding. Arts education is neglected in favor of more "practical" subjects, such

as math and science. Arts courses are often the first to go when budgets get tight.

Some schools already boast strong partnerships with our cultural institutions, including the **Museum of Fine Arts Houston**, **Multicultural Education and Counseling** through the **Arts and The Ensemble Theatre**. Getting arts into all **HISD schools** will require even more philanthropic support from our generous community. It will require HISD to act on its Arts Access Initiative, of which the survey was a part, and support principals who want to replicate the best practices in arts-based instruction.

The Community Arts Team articulated a vision that through principal leadership and community partnerships, each HISD school could become a place where the arts are vibrant and valued regardless of the neighborhood or income level. We agree. Houston is justifiably proud of its economic growth. Today, that growth depends more than ever on a skilled and creative workforce. In a city of such exceptional cultural institutions, public school art deserts are not only unnecessary but wrong.

Let's help prepare our workforce by bringing art to all our schools.

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