

The Arts as an Essential Component of Education in the 21st Century

Arts education in public schools is more essential in the 21st century than at any time in the history of public education. Curricular programs such as elementary, middle level, and high school general and elective music courses, co-curricular experiences such as band, choir, and orchestra, and extra-curricular opportunities such as marching band, show choirs, and school musicals work in tandem to provide a comprehensive program of studies for students of all ages, talents, and interests.

Performing music programs are an outgrowth of a holistic general music program, where all students learn music by singing, moving, playing, listening, discussing, and creating music in the general music setting several times per week. By embedding music education as an experience for all learners, and providing inclusive performing opportunities at all levels as extensions of the core experience, arts education helps students develop the essential skills and competencies to be meaningful contributors in a global society.

Arts education is not a frill; it is an essential component of a rigorous, relevant education in the 21st century. We live in a world where work is being digitized, outsourced, and automated like never before. As long as computers can do it faster, someone overseas can do it cheaper, or machines can do it more efficiently, opportunities for work, including white-collar work, will continue to decline in this country. Through rigorous study in the arts, learners evolve as *Solvers*, *Connectors*, and *Contributors*, which will help make them “untouchable” in the modern workforce.

Successful employment in the 21st century requires new competencies and skill sets. Seth Godin, author of *Linchpin*, writes, “*The competitive advantage the marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy, capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities as she makes useful decisions without angst. Flexible in the face of change, resilient in the face of confusion.*”

A disciplined study of the arts is essential for helping students live lives of significance and meaning by teaching them to become solvers, connectors, and contributors:

By teaching students to think abstractly and to understand complex patterns and relationships, the arts help students become *solvers*.

The arts help students develop empathy by exploring and experiencing the emotions of the human condition, the depth and breadth of which are not easily represented merely in words. Simply put, the arts are a disciplined study of what it means to be human. Through this exploration and experience, the arts help students become empathic *connectors*.

Through the arts students learn to create beauty, something we need much more of in the world. By working with others to create something of significance and meaning, the arts help students become *contributors*.

Godin goes on to suggest: “*What we want, what we need, what we must have are indispensable human beings. We need original thinkers, provocateurs, and people who care.*” By educating the heads, hearts, and hands of our young people, a disciplined study of the arts is helping to prepare a generation of *solvers*, *connectors*, and *contributors*. Moreover, students experiencing rigorous, relevant education in the arts gives them their best to make *more* than just a living, the arts are a gateway to helping students create lives of significance and meaning.

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