

The Arts in Ontario's Public Schools



PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION

“I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for in the patterns of music and all the arts are the keys of learning.”

Plato

MAY 2004

People for Education, 2004

P.O. Box 64, Station P,
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2S6

phone: 416-534-0100
fax: 416-536-0100
e-mail: p4e@peopleforeducation.com
website: www.peopleforeducation.com

People for Education is a group of parents working together to support public education in Catholic, Public and French schools in Ontario.

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Executive Summary

It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.

Henry James

Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.

Albert Einstein

Ontario's education system has no specific funding targeted to arts programs. And nearly a decade of cuts to funding for both education and culture have proven devastating for arts programs in Ontario schools.

The arts enrich our lives. Experiencing the arts through music, poetry, paintings, books or plays opens our imaginations, enhances our sense of community and provide us with a common language.

It is through the arts that we sustain not only our culture, but our individual sense of identity. The arts enhance our capacity for empathy and allow us a feeling of "connectedness" in what is often an isolating and driven world.

The benefits of the arts to education have been noted for centuries. From Plato to Goethe to John Ralston Saul, educators and thinkers over the years have outlined the influence of the arts on students' ability to learn, on their capacity for articulate expression and on their facility to solve complex problems.

For many students, schools provide their first, and for some, their only, experience of the arts.

But not all students in Ontario have equal access to the arts. For many of them, their access now depends on where they live and on their parents' ability to pay for private lessons or fundraise for arts in their schools.

In 2003/04:

- ◆ The number of elementary schools with music teachers has declined 32% since 1997/98;
- ◆ The number of arts courses available in secondary schools has declined substantially since the implementation of secondary school reform in 1999.
- ◆ Students in rural schools have less access to arts programming.
- ◆ Schools where parent fundraise for arts enrichment are more likely to be in urban areas, are 10% larger than the provincial median and

A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul.

*Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe
1749-1832*

report fundraising totals that are 25% higher than the provincial average.

- ◆ Fewer theatre companies are touring to schools, and book publishers are selling fewer Canadian books to school libraries.
- ◆ In England and in the United States, the practice of setting targets for literacy and numeracy test-scores has resulted in a “two-tier curriculum” - with the arts, social sciences and physical education relegated to the bottom tier.

Arts education in Ontario

Arts in elementary schools

The arts are an integral part of any complete education....Not only does every student have the right to be introduced to the arts as an area of cultural knowledge, learners also need ways of making abstract ideas concrete. Like science, art is a hands-on way to apply mathematical and logical reasoning skills, explore ideas, and have the satisfaction of making something with what one has learned

For the Love of Learning, Royal Commission on Learning
1994

The number of elementary schools with specialist music teachers has declined by 32% since 1997/98.¹

At the same time, the median amount fundraised per school has increased every year, with more than one third of schools reporting they fundraise for arts enrichment.

Arts curriculum

Though the Ontario curriculum calls for extensive instruction in music, visual art, drama and dance in elementary schools, the Ontario funding formula does not provide funding for specialist teachers to teach these courses.

The curriculum outlines a mandatory level of knowledge and skill that every student must attain. Introduced in 1998, the curriculum is “significantly more rigorous and demanding than previous curricula.”²

In music, Grade 8 students are expected to:

- read write, and perform from musical notation accurately and fluently;
- sing and play instruments with expression and proper technique
- demonstrate an understanding of the basic elements of music specified for this grade through listening to, performing, and creating music;
- use correctly the musical terminology associated with the specific expectations for this grade;
- communicate their understanding and knowledge of music in appropriate ways (e.g., compare the characteristics of music of different historical periods; represent their response to music through painting); identify and perform music of a variety of cultures and historical periods.

In visual arts, grade 8 students are expected to:

- Define the principles of design and use them to produce and respond to works of art;
- Produce two and three-dimensional works of art that communicate a variety of ideas using a variety of art forms;
- Use correct vocabulary and art terminology;
- Explain how an artist has used the expressive qualities of the elements

and principles of design to affect the viewer and support their analyses with evidence from the work.

In Drama and dance, grade 8 students are expected to:

- Evaluate the overall effect of various aspects of drama and dance;
- Interpret and communicate ideas and feelings drawn from fictional accounts, documentaries and other material from a wide variety of sources and cultures, selecting and combining complex drama and dance techniques;
- Create drama pieces, selecting and using a variety of techniques;
- Critique, orally and in writing, their own and others' work in drama and dance, using criteria developed independently and in a group.³

The level of personal musicianship required to implement the curriculum effectively (and further to evaluate it properly) is beyond the reasonable cope of the average teacher's experience.

Classroom teacher,
Eastern Ontario
*"The State of the Art of
Music Education in Ontario
Elementary Schools"*

Funding for specialist teachers

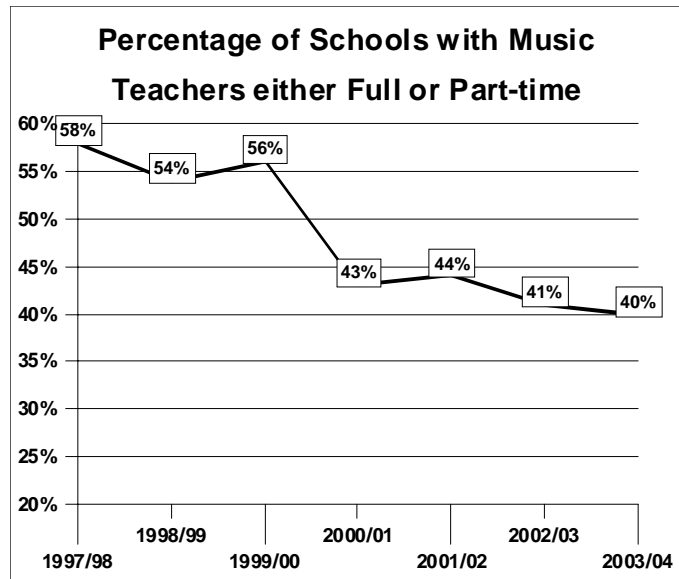
There is no funding specifically designated in the funding formula for arts programs or for specialist teachers in the arts.

In a recent survey of Ontario music teachers and classroom teachers of music, almost 60%

reported they had inadequate funds for their elementary music program. Over one quarter of the teachers reported they had no funding whatsoever for music in their school.⁴

Where schools do have specialist arts teachers, they are, for the most part, paid for with money boards receive for classroom teachers' preparation time.

In schools and boards with sufficient numbers of students and teachers,

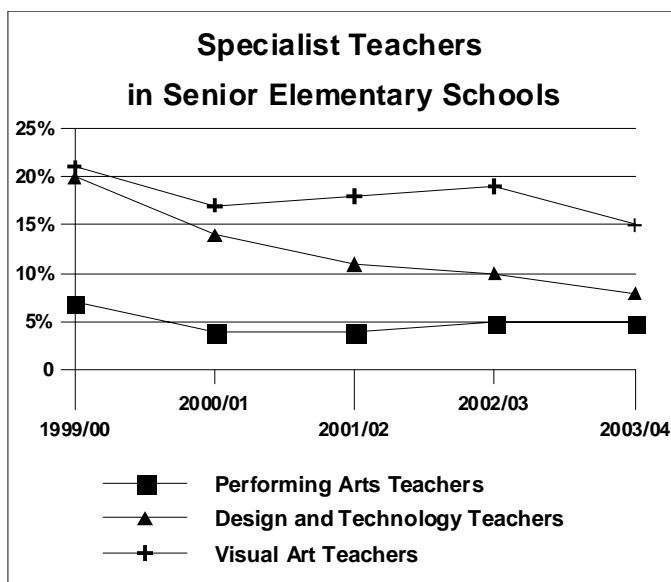


Provincial education policy provides strict criteria for music curriculum, but no funding for music teachers

the funding generated by preparation time may be used to pay for specialist teachers. But, because provincial funding for teachers' salaries is as much as 10% lower than the amount teachers are actually paid, many school boards and schools must use this funding to pay for regular classroom teachers or smaller class sizes. Small schools are at a particular disadvantage because they have fewer classroom teachers. Small schools are much less likely to have specialist arts teachers.

In 2003/04:

- 40% of elementary schools report they have a music teacher, a 31% decline since 1997/98;
- 15% of schools with grades 7 and 8 report visual arts teachers, a decline of 25% since 1998/99; and
- 5% of schools with grades 7 and 8 report performing arts teachers, a slight decrease since 1998/99.⁵



In the last five years the number of schools with specialist arts teachers has declined substantially.

...the arts are particularly important for experiencing the joy of creating, developing attention to detail, and learning ways of expressing thoughts, knowledge, and feelings beyond words.

*Learning Through the Arts,
The Royal Conservatory of
Music*

Regional variations

Access to specialist teachers varies across the province. School boards with smaller student populations are at a disadvantage because all funding is generated by numbers of students, and funding for arts specialists is generated by numbers of classroom teachers.

In Northern Ontario, for example, only 20% of schools report having a music teacher, compared to 63% of schools in the Greater Toronto Area.

Only one quarter of small schools have music teachers, compared to two-

[The arts] are unique as a way of taking in information and as a vehicle for communication and self-expression. The point is that what is best understood or expressed in music, in movement, or in a drawing cannot be paraphrased in words. Students denied access to the arts are denied literacies and are impoverished as learners.

For the Love of Learning, The Royal Commission on Learning, 1994

thirds of larger schools. Virtually all music teachers in small schools are part-time.⁶

Fundraising for the arts

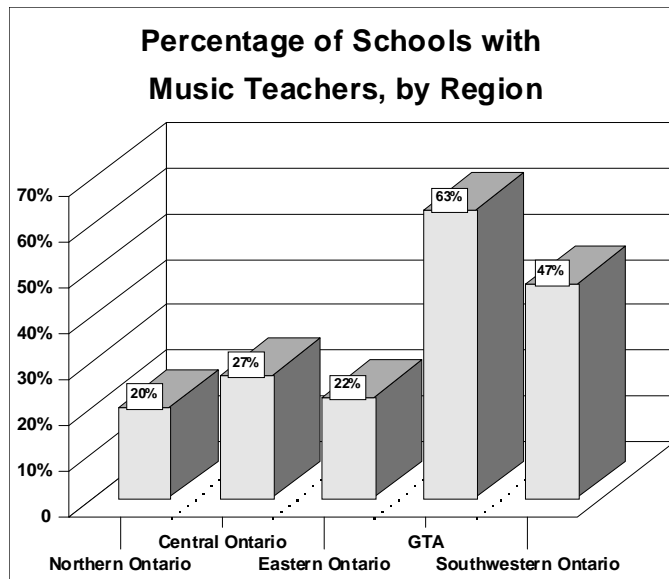
Parents fundraise for arts-related programs more than one third of elementary schools. Parents raise money for a wide range of arts enrichment including part-time art instructors, performances by touring theatre companies, musical instruments and authors' visits.

Most of the schools that report fundraising for the arts are larger schools in cities. They are schools where parents are capable of raising substantial amounts of money and are able to commit to many hours of volunteer work. Thus the arts enrichment that parents provide is generally limited to students in affluent areas.

Schools that report fundraising for the arts have the following characteristics:

- They are, on average, 10% larger in enrolment than the provincial average.
- They report fundraising totals that are 25% higher than the provincial median.
- The majority (80%) are in cities.
- The average number of volunteer hours per month parents contribute is 12% higher than the provincial average.⁷

For the most part, these high fundraising schools are found in



Equal per pupil funding does not provide equal access to arts specialists in Ontario elementary schools

in

communities with a relatively high socio-economic status. This means students whose parents have sufficient income to pay for private music lessons, tickets to arts performances and books at home, often attend schools where parents can fundraise for enrichment programs. Conversely, students whose parents do not have the income to provide private lessons or tickets to arts events, attend schools where parent fundraising cannot provide these extras either.

The arts in secondary schools

Recent reforms to secondary schools have had a negative effect on arts programs. Fewer students are able to take arts courses, and fewer courses are offered. Schools report an increase in fundraising for music programs and there has been an increase in fees for arts courses.

Arts curriculum

Arts courses in secondary schools were developed to continue the arts curriculum in elementary school.

In music, secondary school courses focus on the development of skills and repertoire needed for public performances. Students study advanced music theory, music history and a range of musical forms.

Dance and dramatic arts, which are combined in elementary school, are taught separately in high school. Students in dance are expected to acquire dance skills and be able to demonstrate knowledge of various types of dance. They are also expected to have examined the historical, cultural and social significance of dance.

Drama students in secondary school study theatrical conventions and techniques, explore a range of dramatic forms, and examine historical approaches to acting, directing and play writing.

In visual arts, students can theoretically choose from a range of courses in visual and media arts; art history, analysis and production of a variety of art forms, and art from around the world.⁸

The Arts are really being hit with the new curriculum. That is a whole story unto itself. It is actually quite tragic.

Principal,
secondary school
*Double Cohort Study,
Phase 3 Report,*
Queen's University

There is no question that the restructured program is particularly hard on The Arts enrolments.

*Double Cohort Study,
Phase 3 Report,
Dr. Alan King,
Queen's University*

Secondary school reform limits arts courses

The range of arts courses in secondary schools is available in theory only.

In a recent informal survey of Ontario directors of education, every director reported that the number of arts sections in their high schools is declining. They said students' access to arts courses has been severely limited.⁹

When asked if secondary school reform has had an effect on students' ability to take courses in the arts, one director responded, "Absolutely. Few opportunities are available. Programs are being cut, and small rural schools are struggling to provide programs."

The compression of the secondary school curriculum from five years to four has meant that students who would formerly have graduated with 36 or 37 credits are now graduating with 30. The directors said that this reduces or eliminates many of the elective courses students previously chose.

A government-commissioned report from Queen's University confirms the directors' impressions. Dr. Alan King, author of the report, says that students in the academic stream taking university/college courses have little room in their timetables for optional courses. Because the enrolment in arts courses is down, fewer of them are offered.¹⁰

Because of the decrease in enrolment in arts courses, schools are forced to combine two, and sometimes three, grades into one arts class in order to keep the section viable. According to one director of education, the double and triple classes have led to a drop in student interest. He reports there has been a reduction in his board in the number of bands entering festivals and a reduction in the number of specialized music groups such as jazz choirs and jazz bands.

Arts in rural areas

In small, rural schools it is especially difficult to offer arts courses. There are a limited number of students and there is little extra funding to provide arts teachers for small classes. It is more difficult for small schools to timetable optional courses. Some boards solve this problem by offering selected courses in a limited number of schools, but in large rural boards this increases transportation costs or restricts participation enrolment to those who are able to get to the specialized schools on their own.

Fees and fundraising for the arts in secondary schools

The new program is particularly hard on enrolments in the arts in the fourth year, when students have virtually no space for interest courses in their timetables.

*Double Cohort Study,
Phase 3 Report,
Dr. Alan King,
Queen's University*

As in elementary schools, high schools report a wide range of fundraising totals, from a low of \$0 to a high of \$248,000.

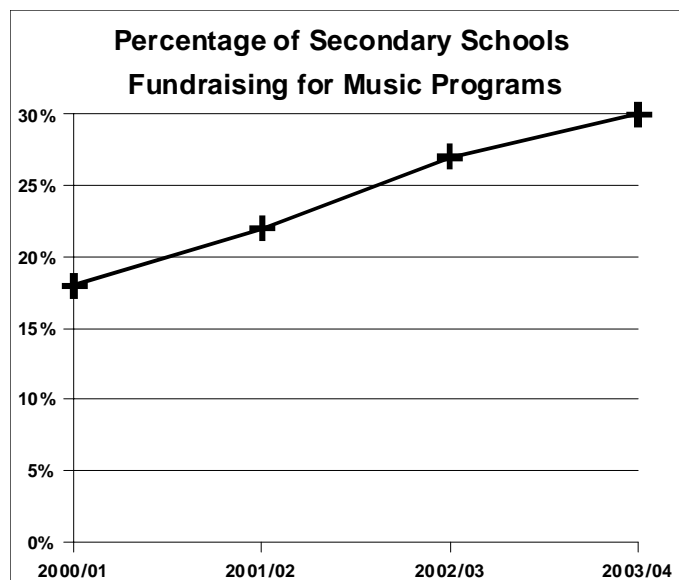
The majority of secondary schools raise money for charities and students' activities. The fundraising for student activities includes paying for buses to take students to arts events and paying to bring in visiting artists.

Nearly one-third of schools report they raise money for musical instruments. Schools also augment some of their arts programs with fees.

In 2003/04:

- 30% of schools report fundraising for musical instruments, an increase of 66% since 2000/01;
- 63% of schools report charging fees for art programs, an increase of 5% since 2000/01; and
- 42% of schools report charging fees for music programs, an increase of 11% since 2000/01.¹¹

School libraries represent a substantial market for Canadian books for children and young adults.



School libraries and the arts

School libraries represent an opportunity for Canadians to learn about one another. By cutting school libraries and teacher-librarians, we are detracting not only from the richness of our children's experiences but also from their budding sense of their own culture.

The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries,
Ken Haycock

Canadian publishers, especially those publishing books for children and young adults, have seen significant declines in sales. The publishers say that the decline in sales mirrors the decline in school libraries and the loss of teacher-librarians.¹²

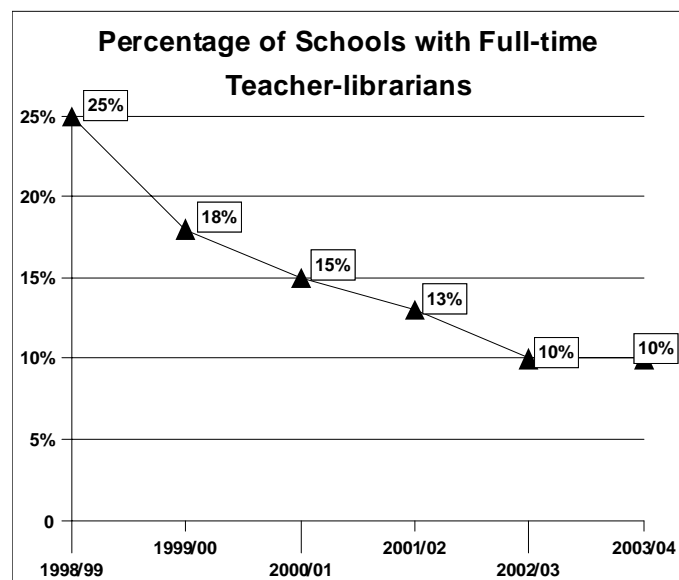
Results from People for Education's tracking project show that the number of elementary schools with a teacher-librarian (full- or part-time) has declined by 30% since 1997/98. Over the same time, the schools with full-time teacher-librarians has declined by 60%.¹³

Patricia Aldana, the publisher of Groundwood books, said that her company has lost between a third and a half of its sales between 1995 and 2000.

Publishers say they have also seen a drastic drop in visits by authors to schools. This drop is the consequence of reduced discretionary funding for arts events in schools. Authors' visits were formerly managed by teacher-

librarians whose numbers have fallen. Children lose the opportunity to meet published authors and the consequent incentive to read and possibly to write. Authors lose the honoraria provided by schools for a part of their income.

Because of the drop in Canadian sales and in sales to Canadian school libraries, publishers and authors are turning to the United States for a large part of their sales (up to 60% of sales for some). This change of focus has cultural repercussions: to be marketable in the U.S., books must lose their Canadian-ness – their Canadian locale, themes or content. Books that Canadian children can identify with in terms of national or local context are much less likely to be written.



School libraries and teacher-librarians may introduce students to their first Canadian novels. They expose students to non-fiction resource books and materials, works on music, theatre and dance.

Research has shown that the benefits of having well-equipped school libraries staffed by teacher-librarians include the creation of “capable and avid readers, learners who are information literate, teachers who are partnering with the teacher librarians to create high-quality learning experiences.”¹⁴

A recent report on Canadian school libraries notes, “The lack of Canadian content on the internet is eroding the Canadian perspective in schools....Children need Canadian books for the value of ideas, experiences, common ground. Readers can identify with Canadian stories – students love reading about Saskatchewan locations. Canadian books validate the student's world.”¹⁵

Research shows that the arts in schools have a positive effect on students’

The benefits of the arts in education

Any justification for the arts should be made in terms of the important and unique contributions that arise from arts education. For example, the arts are particularly important for experiencing the joy of creating, developing attention to detail, and learning ways of expressing thoughts, knowledge, and feelings beyond words.

Learning Through the Arts,
Royal Conservatory
of Music

learning. Education in the arts develops students’ imaginations, increases their motivation to learn and allows them to achieve at higher levels. One American project, *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* analyzed data on more than 25,000 students to determine the relationship of engagement in the arts, to student performance and attitudes. The study found that “students can attain higher levels of achievement through their engagement with the arts. Moreover, one of the critical research findings is that the learning in and through the arts can help ‘level the playing field’ for youngsters from disadvantaged circumstances.”¹⁶

A 1997 study by the Ontario Research Council synthesised three decades of research, documenting the substantial benefits of the arts in education. Among their findings:

- The arts help children develop vital higher level skills, such as creativity, problem-solving, the ability to communicate in different ways, self-discipline, tolerance and critical thinking.
- Higher level skills – developed in part through the arts – are essential to success in the workplace, such as adaptability, imagination, and communication skills.
- Arts education helps students to learn other subjects, because the arts draw on different kinds of intelligences, or ways of thinking.¹⁷

The arts open the door to self-reflection and self-expression. They provide the literal means for one of the most important tasks our youth face: to pose and wrestle with questions about the very direction of their lives.

*YouthARTS Handbook:
Arts Programs for
Youth at Risk,
Americans for the Arts*

The Royal Commission on Learning and the Royal Conservatory of Music's Learning Through the Arts Project

In 1994, the Ontario government's Royal Commission on Learning reported on its findings. In regard to the arts, it stated:

... the arts are part of the core curriculum and not inherently less valuable as part of a well-rounded education than any other subject; they are not 'frills' and should not be treated as such. Not only does every student have the right to be introduced to the arts as an area of cultural knowledge, learners also need ways of making abstract ideas concrete....

...art is the major route to learning for many students, their most developed 'intelligence' and their best way of solidifying foundation skills. Drama, for example, has been shown to motivate students who otherwise avoid writing to write - and write well. Music is mathematical in structure, and some evidence suggests that it may be similarly related to understanding and describing spatial relationships. Saving money by targeting arts programs probably does a disservice to all students, and can impose a particular hardship on many of them. Any school system that fails to open up the spirit of the arts to its students is unworthy of public support.¹⁸

A report from the Royal Conservatory of Music's *Learning through the Arts* project found that students taking arts courses scored significantly higher on mathematical tests of computation and estimation than students in the control groups. Their findings also suggested that involvement in the arts contributed to engagement in learning and increased motivation.

The Royal Conservatory study documented the impact of arts education on 6,675 children across Canada over a period of three years, and is the most recent and significant Canadian research on the subject. It followed children from different socio-economic backgrounds between grades one and six. Other benefits to students included the development of arts skills, exploring curriculum topics through the arts, and laying the foundation for a lifelong love of the arts.¹⁹

The arts and students at-risk

For many of the students identified as at risk in secondary schools, the arts provide their only source of engagement in school life. In some

Creativity has replaced raw materials or natural harbours as the crucial wellspring of economic growth.

Competing on Creativity,
Ontario Ministry of
Enterprise, Opportunity and
Innovation
and the Institute for
Competitiveness and
Prosperity

cases students at risk of dropping out stay in school because of arts programs.

An ongoing study involving youth in three American cities has found that at-risk youth involved in arts programs showed:

- Increased ability to communicate effectively
- Improved ability to work on tasks from start to finish
- Improved attitudes toward school
- Decreased frequency of delinquent behaviour and court referrals.²⁰

Presently in Ontario, over one quarter of the students in secondary school are at risk of dropping out.²¹

Employment opportunities in the arts

Arts programs in schools also prepare students for employment in arts-related jobs. Statistics Canada data from the 1996 census shows the arts and culture sector directly generated 291,000 jobs in Ontario. The direct and indirect impact of the sector on the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$19.1 billion, which represented 6.6% of Ontario's GDP. On a per-capita basis, the arts and culture sector contributed over \$1,700 in economic return for every resident of Ontario.²²

Premier Dalton McGuinty has declared his government's commitment to meeting achievement targets in literacy and numeracy in Ontario schools. He said schools will have a clear focus on reading, writing and math, including a dedicated literacy hour and math time in each school

Arts education in other jurisdictions

day. Each school will have a lead teacher specially trained in literacy and numeracy, and Ontario will inaugurate a Literacy Secretariat.²³

These reforms are modelled on recent reforms in England, where literacy test scores improved 10% in the last five years.²⁴ But increasingly, concerns are being raised about losses to arts and cultural programming in schools as a result of narrowing the focus of curricula.

England

In February 2004, England's education watchdog, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), warned that the government's focus on math and English in primary school is creating a "two-tier curriculum." In Ofsted's annual report, the Chief Inspector of Schools said: "There is still some way to go in ensuring all pupils in our primary schools enjoy a rich and fulfilling curriculum as well as being taught the basics of English and mathematics effectively. We cannot afford, and our children do not deserve, a two-tier curriculum." A National Union of Teachers spokesperson commented: "Subjects such as history, geography and the arts are suffering because of the government's obsession with tests, targets and tables."²⁵

In a survey examining the state of music education in developed countries, an Australian academic described England's schools: "In order for teachers to find time each day to implement this compulsory literacy hour, and for other economic reasons, Music in the National Curriculum with its testable stages has been discontinued, the arts are no longer compulsory, and many music centers and arts education support positions have been abolished....many generalist teachers feel they have little time, expertise or support for implementing an effective music program."²⁶

United States

Like England, there are many indications that American schools are losing arts programs and arts teachers. An arts education specialist notes that new mandates from the *No Child Left Behind Act* places more emphasis on math, science and reading and offer incentives to schools performing well in those areas.²⁷ This approach is underlined by the Bush administration's 2004 Budget, which proposes to eliminate all funding for the Department of Education's arts education program.²⁸

After interviewing 1,000 school principals in New York, Maryland, New Mexico and Indiana, the Council for Basic Education released a

study in March which found that 25% reported a decline in time spent teaching the arts during *the past school year*. A third of the principals expected a greater reduction in coming years.²⁹

Author Richard Louv comments on the debilitating cuts that arts education has experienced over the past two decades and the outlook for the future:

As many as one-third of the nation's public school music programs have been dropped...in Milwaukee, budget cuts mean that 'many students in the city's public schools reach their teen years without ever having touched a musical instrument or paintbrush,' according to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*..³⁰

Funding cuts to both education and culture have had an indirect impact on students' access to outside artists. Theatre companies report a drop in school bookings for touring shows. School boards have limited budgets for arts enrichment, and because arts consultants have been cut by many boards, there is no longer the expertise to broker tours of theatre for young audiences. Arts consultants at the board level also worked to

Access to professional artists

ensure that students at all schools within a board – not just those in schools where parents had the capacity to fundraise – could have access to professional theatre.³¹

According to Patterson Fardell, former Arts Education Officer at the Ontario Arts Council and presently Director of Education, Marketing and Outreach at Roseneath Theatre, “The costs associated with bringing a children's theatre company into a school must now be passed on to the students and their parents. At a time when parent councils are being asked to raise money for everything from playground equipment and computers to text books and basic school supplies, the competition for fundraising dollars is fiercer than ever and the arts often take a back seat to other budget priorities at a school”.³²

Touring to isolated communities and communities in the north has also been limited by funding cuts to education and the Ontario Arts Council. And in rural Ontario, inadequate transportation budgets make it difficult for school boards to bus students to larger centres where they can attend professional theatre or music performances.

Arts education is an essential component of any balanced curriculum. It provides students with an enriched and diverse education. Properly funded, and staffed with appropriately trained teachers, arts education

Conclusion

can provide students with equitable access to the arts regardless of socio-

economic background. It gives many children their only experience of music, art or drama education.

Educating children in the arts produces culturally literate adults. It trains young people for jobs in the arts. It develops supportive audiences for theatre, opera, ballet, visual arts and all forms of music. And a vibrant and rich arts community is the reflection of a developed and thriving society.

If arts education in Ontario is to survive and thrive, it will be necessary to develop a funding model that provides for arts programs in schools. In an era where the gap between rich and poor is growing at an unprecedented rate, it is more important than ever that we at least level the playing field as it applies to our culture, and ensure that all students have access to the arts

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