



Strengthening Education & the Workforce Through the Arts

By Randy Cohen, vice president of research, Americans for the Arts

When the 2013 Nobel Laureate in Medicine, Stanford University's Thomas Südhof, was asked by the prestigious medical journal, [Lancet](#), to name his most influential teacher, one can only imagine the look on the interviewer's face when the professor responded, "My bassoon teacher." He later went on to describe how it was his music education that gave him the habits of mind that made him a great scientist—discipline and drive for excellence, creativity, communication, and a desire to innovate.

As Lieutenant Governors work to strengthen their education systems and the competitiveness of their workforce, the research makes clear that ensuring every student in their state receives a quality arts education achieves both.

Every Student Benefits from Arts Education

There is a myth that the purpose of arts education is to train young people for a career in the arts. While that may be the destiny for some, all students benefit when the arts are part of a well-rounded education. Students engaged in the arts [perform better academically](#)—better grades, higher standardized test scores, lower drop-out rates, and greater readiness for higher education. In fact, students with four years of arts and music classes in high school average nearly 100 points higher on their SAT scores than students with just one-half year or less.

The academic benefits of arts education also reach across all levels of socio-economic status (SES). Low-SES students who are highly engaged in the arts have significantly lower drop-out rates (4% vs. 22%) and are twice as likely to earn their college degree (37% vs. 17%) than peers with low arts involvement. The gains can even be tracked into adulthood with arts-involved students being more likely to obtain career-oriented employment (50% vs. 40%)—jobs with higher pay, greater responsibility, and more promotion opportunity.

Building a 21st Century Workforce

As if a well-rounded education and improved academic performance were not reason enough to ensure every student receives a quality arts education, it is fast becoming a business imperative as well. For businesses to prosper in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, they require the brightest and most innovative employees. Once again, arts education contributes.

In [Ready to Innovate](#) by The Conference Board—an international nonprofit business research organization—business leaders rank “creativity” among the top five applied skills they seek in their workforce. 72% say creativity is of “high importance” when hiring; 85% of those respondents report they are struggling to find qualified candidates. When asked to identify indicators of creativity, “study of the arts while in school” was among their top responses. The report concludes, “The arts—music, creative writing, drawing, dance—provide skills sought by employers of the third millennium.”

A similar finding was observed in [IBM’s 2010 Global Leadership Study](#), an international survey of 1,500 CEOs, which identified “creativity” as the most crucial factor for future success in business, even outweighing integrity and global thinking.

STEM to STEAM

Given the importance of creativity as a tool to drive innovation and develop a top tier workforce, it is little wonder that business and political leaders alike are calling for the integration of the arts into STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). That is, adding the “A for arts” and turning STEM into STEAM. The American public has repeatedly demonstrated its understanding of the value that the arts bring to education: [91%](#) believes the arts are part of a well-rounded education and [94%](#) believes K-12 students should receive an education in the arts.

Quite simply, STEM makes *great* engineers; STEAM makes *innovative* engineers.

Creativity Leads to Success in the Workplace

Nobel Laureate Südhof is not alone in linking the importance of his arts education and creativity to his scientific success. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe the [arts make them a more creative person](#) and 60% say that the more creative and innovative they are at their job, the more successful they are in the workplace. As if further evidence was needed, [research](#) on creativity shows that Nobel Laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged in the arts than other scientists.

Lieutenant Governors can learn more about arts education research and policy from their state arts agency as well as research from [Americans for the Arts](#).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jay Dick, Americans for the Arts' Senior Director of State and Local Government Affairs at jay@artsusa.org.