

# THE ARTS IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

*"I do not want ART for a few any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few."*

*William Morris*

Creativity is considered to be one of the key skills necessary to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and one of the best ways to foster it is through arts education.<sup>1</sup>

There is strong evidence showing arts education fosters student engagement and achievement.<sup>2</sup> Arts programs in school also help children learn to express themselves, to work with others, to take risks, and to learn about cultural traditions—their own and others.<sup>3</sup>

When publicly-funded schools are adequately resourced, they are the best place to ensure *every* child has regular access to the arts, both through curriculum and enrichment.

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**Each year it becomes harder to carve out sections for the Arts... society seems to have lost the importance of a balanced Liberal Arts education.**

*Secondary School, Halton DSB*

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## RICH CURRICULUM, VARIABLE DELIVERY

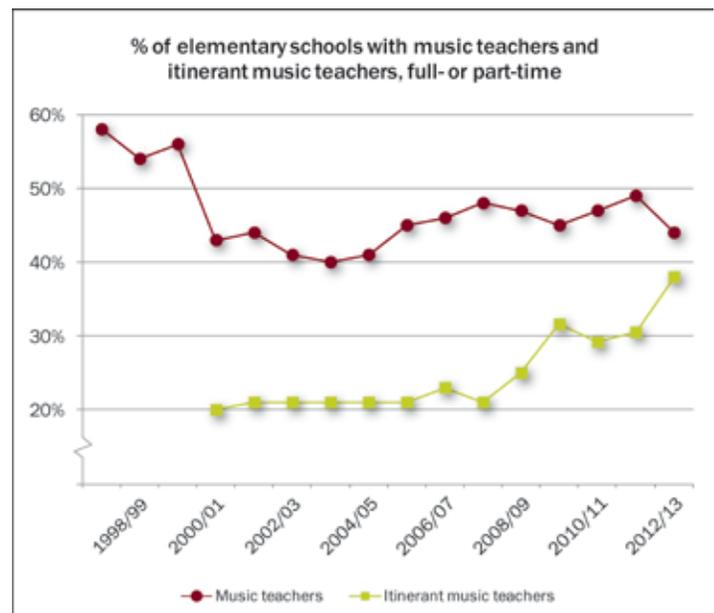
Ontario has detailed and compulsory curriculum for visual arts, drama, dance and music in elementary school, but not all teachers are equally comfortable teaching every aspect of the curriculum. For example, the music curriculum requires that teachers teach students musical notation and how to compose music. Only a minority of schools has a specialist music teacher, and most of them are part-time.

In 2013, in elementary schools:

- 44% have a specialist music teacher, compared to 49% last year; the lowest level since 2005, and far from peak levels of 58% in the late 1990s.
- 40% of music teachers are part-time.
- 32% of schools have neither an itinerant, nor a specialist music teacher.
- 62% of schools in the GTA have music teachers, compared to 26% of elementary schools in northern Ontario, and 32% in eastern Ontario.

## QUICK FACTS FOR 2012/13

- 44% of schools have a music teacher, compared to 49% last year.
- 40% of music teachers are part-time.
- Schools with a specialist music teacher are significantly more likely to offer the chance to learn an instrument in school hours, be part of a choir, band or orchestra, perform in public, and see live performances.
- Schools with higher average family incomes are more likely to offer students the chance to be part of a choir, band or orchestra.



## SPECIALISTS = GREATER ARTS ENRICHMENT

New questions on this year's survey show that in schools with a specialist music teacher, students are significantly more likely to have the chance to learn an instrument in school hours, be part of a choir, band or orchestra, and to perform in public. Schools with specialists are also more likely to report that their students see live performances.

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE THE ARTS	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY
<b>Connected to curriculum</b>		
Students can participate in a band, orchestra or choir	65%	84%
Students can learn an instrument during school hours	64%	90%
Students can perform or display their art	73%	92%
<b>Arts enrichment</b>		
Students will see at least one live artistic performance	93%	95%
Students will see three or more live artistic performances	22%	40%
Students will have the opportunity to work with an artist	65%	–
Students will have three or more opportunities to work with an artist	10%	–

### FEWER MUSIC TEACHERS, MORE ITINERANTS

Many elementary schools without specialist teachers report they have an itinerant music teacher. These teachers—who go from school to school—can be certified teachers (though not necessarily music specialists), or musicians with or without certification. They often teach in specific areas such as band, or teach students to play specific instruments. There has been a steady increase in the use of itinerant music teachers across the province, from 20% in 2000-01 to 39% this year, likely as a result of increased prep time.

### EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS-ENRICHED LEARNING

A loss of funding for arts enrichment, and narrowly defined goals for education that often relegate the arts to being “extras,” have had an impact on students’ access to the arts.

This year’s findings show that elementary and secondary schools with higher fundraising are more likely to report that students will see live performances. At the same time, schools with higher average family incomes are much more likely to offer opportunities to participate in a band, choir, or orchestra.

Several principals identified a drop in arts opportunities in their school when the provincial government eliminated the Program Enhancement Grant, which was intended to support a “well-rounded education” including arts programs in schools.<sup>4</sup> This year, principals also noted that contract disputes had a negative impact on their schools’ arts programs.

Nearly all schools report that at least some students see at least one live artistic performance in the school year, and most offer the opportunity to learn an instrument, participate in a band, orchestra or choir, or perform or display their art.

But in one third of elementary schools, students *don’t* have the opportunity to work with an artist, be in a musical group, or learn an instrument. These activities can be—and often are—integrated into the curriculum, but when arts are treated simply as enrichment, they are particularly vulnerable to cuts in funding from the province or the school board.

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**We bring in a dance teacher—formerly paid for out of the Program Enhancement Grant. This year we are paying for it out of student fundraising because staff and students wanted to continue with the program. Losing that funding hurt. All JK–8 students were involved in dance sessions. Bringing in a play or other talents comes from student fundraising as well.**

*Lambton Kent DSB*

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### FEES AND FUNDRAISING FOR THE ARTS

The lack of recognition of strong arts education as a core educational goal can also lead to a reliance on parent fundraising and fees to supplement arts’ budgets.

This can, in turn, increase the inequity among schools: students with parents who can afford the lessons, concerts and cultural enrichment attend schools where parents can fundraise more and where students can pay fees; students with less access to outside enrichment may not be able to afford fees and often attend schools with less fundraising.

In their comments, many principals emphasize that although arts opportunities exist in their schools, not all students have the opportunity to take part.

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**A student can learn an instrument during school hours if the parent pays for the individual student.**

*Elementary school, Limestone DSB*

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For the first time this year a number of principals report that some students attend fee-paying instrumental music lessons at school during the school day while the rest of the students in their class did whatever programming would normally be available.

Other principals report there is “not enough money raised through fundraising to afford artistic performances.”<sup>5</sup>

- 26% of secondary schools charge fees for visual arts courses, and 15% charge fees for music courses.
- In past surveys, one third of school councils have reported that they fundraise for arts enrichment in their school.<sup>6</sup>

Some principals did comment that arts enrichment in their school is supported by funding in the province’s Urban Priority High School Grant<sup>7</sup> or funding from outside charitable organizations.

## SIZE MATTERS

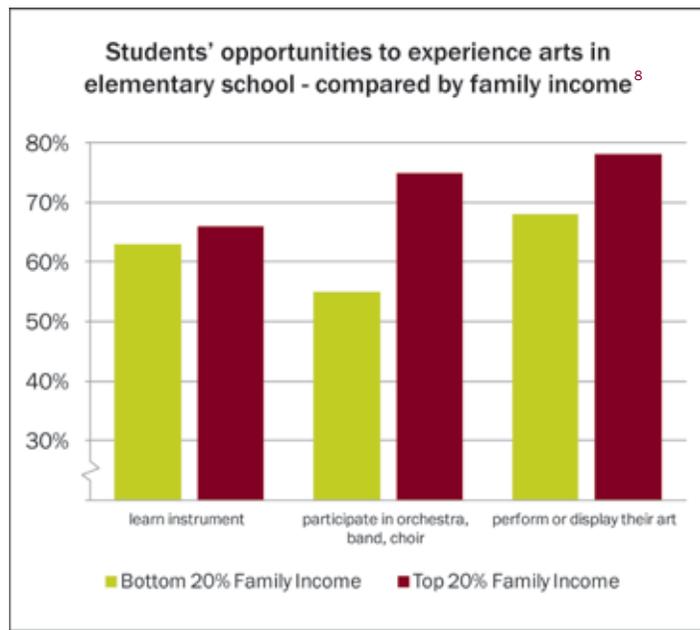
In elementary schools, funding for specialist teachers comes from teacher preparation time. Every teacher must have time during the school day to prepare lessons, contact parents and work with other teachers. During that time, another teacher covers the class. Thus, funding for preparation time is actually funding for other teachers, and more students equals more teachers. As a result, larger schools are far more likely to have full-time music teachers. The average number of students in schools with a full-time music teacher is 486, well above the average school size in the province.

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**Our school almost lost the music program because of a reduced number of students and teachers. Our music teacher was bumped from the school. We managed to keep the program because we had a teacher who is a musician and was willing to teach the one section of music we had left. We had to combine all grades in the one class.**

*Secondary school, Toronto DSB*

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## ARTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Students are required to take at least one arts credit in high school<sup>9</sup> and this year for the first time People for Education surveyed secondary schools on the availability of advanced arts courses.

The vast majority of schools offer some visual art, music and drama courses in grades 11 and 12, with visual art and music the most common. Dance and the interdisciplinary ‘exploring and creating in the arts’ credits are offered in less than a quarter of schools. The courses are offered, but it appears that many students may not be able to take advantage of them. A number of principals report that students struggle to fit in arts courses.

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**Music is offered during course selection time; however this year the number of students requesting music courses was low, resulting in the cancellation of courses.**

*Secondary School, Near North DSB*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is strong evidence that arts education provides a key foundation for developing students' creativity, engagement and academic achievement. Arts education both supports individual learning and development and builds students' capacity to communicate and work in teams.

Therefore, People for Education recommends that the province, working with school boards and school communities, develop a broader, measurable set of goals for education that includes goals for fostering students' creativity, and is supported by:

- policy and funding to ensure that all students—regardless of where they live or their family income—have access to arts instruction during school hours, and arts enrichment either during or after school, and
- policy and funding to ensure that every elementary student has the opportunity to learn an instrument, and/or perform in a choir, band or orchestra.



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

For more information, contact us:

phone: 416-534-0100 email: [info@peopleforeducation.ca](mailto:info@peopleforeducation.ca)  
web: <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca>

## NOTES

- 1 Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., & Rumble, M. (2010). *Defining 21st century skills: White paper 1* (pp. 71). Melbourne, AU: ATC21S (Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills); Pellegrino, J. W., & Hilton, M. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Education for life and work: Developing transferrable knowledge and skills for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; Martin Prosperity Institute. (2009). *Ontario in the creative age* (pp. 36). Toronto: Martin Prosperity Institute.
- 2 See e.g. Catterall, J. S., Dumais, S. A., & Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012). *The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings from four longitudinal studies* (pp. 28). Washington: National Endowment for the Arts.
- 3 National Advisory Committee on Creative and Culture Education (U.K.). (1999). *All of our futures: Creativity, culture and education* (pp. 243). London: Secretary of State for Education.
- 4 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/07.03/bg0319.html>
- 5 Elementary school, Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB
- 6 People for Education School Council Survey, 2012
- 7 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/uphs2010.pdf>
- 8 This year, the EQAO granted People for Education access to school-level demographic data derived from Statistics Canada census data (2006), analyzed by postal code. We used it to compare relationships between schools' demographics and their programs. For the purpose of this graph, we compared schools with average family incomes in the top 20%, to schools with average family incomes in the bottom 20%, in relationship to students' access to arts opportunities. For this chart N=783
- 9 Ontario Schools: Kindergarten to grade 12, policy and programme requirements. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/ONSchools.pdf>, p.54. Students are also required to take another credit chosen from a group of courses of which arts is one: French as a second language, the arts, business studies, health and physical education, cooperative education.