

The Arts

2017

This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.

Education in the arts is a crucial component in the development of students' cognitive, social, and emotional well-being.¹ Creative opportunities in the arts "provide students experience with situations in which there is no known answer, where there are multiple solutions, where the tension of ambiguity is appreciated as fertile ground, and where imagination is honoured over rote knowledge."²

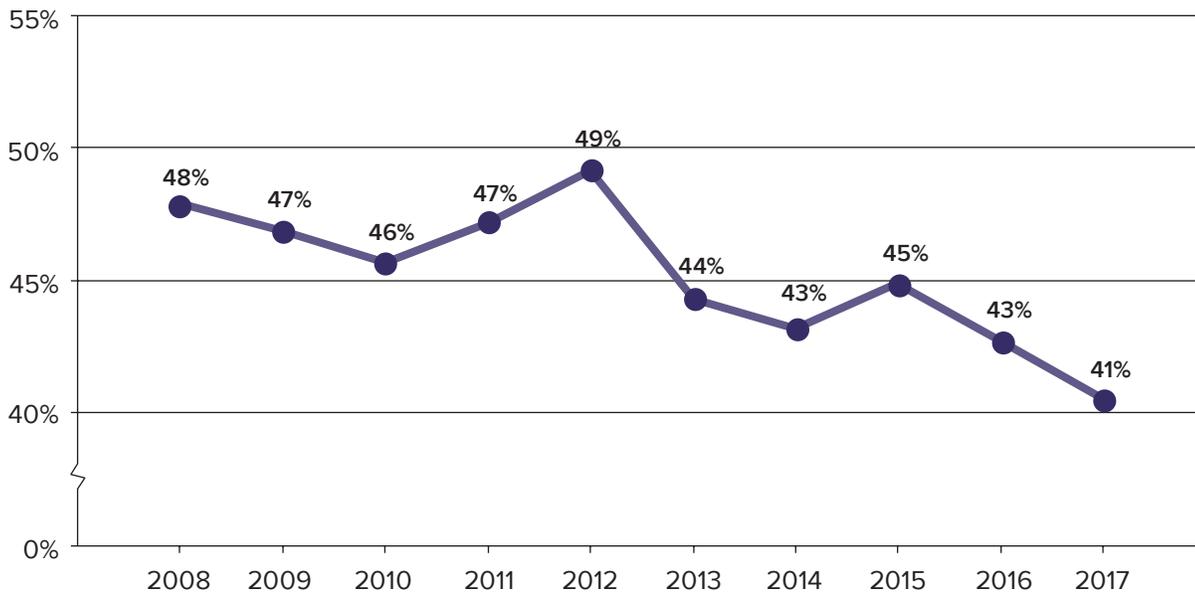
In a commitment to prepare students to solve the complex problems of a globally connected world, the Ministry of Education has identified creativity as a key competency through which curriculum, pedagogy and assessment should be focused. As stated in the Ministry of Education's *21st Century Competencies: Discussion Document*, there are substantial and important connections between creativity, high academic achievement, economic and social entrepreneurialism, leadership, and problem solving.³

2016/17 Quick facts

- 41% of elementary schools have a specialist music teacher, full- or part-time, a decline from 48% in 2007/08.
- Elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area are 2.5 times more likely to have a music teacher than elementary schools in eastern and northern Ontario.
- 40% of elementary schools have neither a specialist music teacher, nor an itinerant music instructor.
- Only 8% of elementary schools with grades 7 and 8 have specialist drama teachers.

Figure 1

Percentage of elementary schools with a specialist music teacher, full- or part-time, 2008 to 2017



Challenging curriculum, fewer specialists

Elementary teacher candidates in Ontario are only required to take one course in the arts. However, Ontario's Arts curriculum is extremely detailed, and requires in-depth knowledge, making it a challenge for teachers without specialized arts training.

There are four strands in the arts curriculum: dance, drama, music, and visual arts. These give students the opportunity to develop creative competencies through different forms of expression.

In 2016/17:

- 41% of elementary schools have a specialist music teacher, either full- or part-time, a decline from 48% in 2006/07 (see Figure 1).
- The average size of an elementary school with at least one full-time music teacher is 532—well over the provincial average school size of 341 students.
- 40% of elementary schools in Ontario have neither itinerant music teachers/instructors nor music specialists, compared to 31% in 2007/08.
- 15% of schools with grades 7 and 8 have a visual arts teacher, a number which has been fairly consistent over the past decade.
- 8% of schools with grades 7 and 8 have a specialist drama teacher.

“Our challenge is resources—our budget is tiny, and we have limited access to support networks.”

Elementary school,
Upper Canada DSB

“We’ve had to reduce the time allotted to Arts education in our timetable to allow for 300 minutes of Math each week and 200 minutes of French.”

Elementary school,
Toronto DSB

Principals report challenges

Many principals cited difficulties finding qualified music teachers in rural areas. Others pointed to challenges in hiring specialist teachers due to new regulations⁴ that may make it more difficult to hire teachers based on their specialty. A lack of space, instruments, and arts supplies were also identified as roadblocks.

In addition, an underlying perception that other curriculum areas take priority over the arts, can create scheduling challenges in schools.

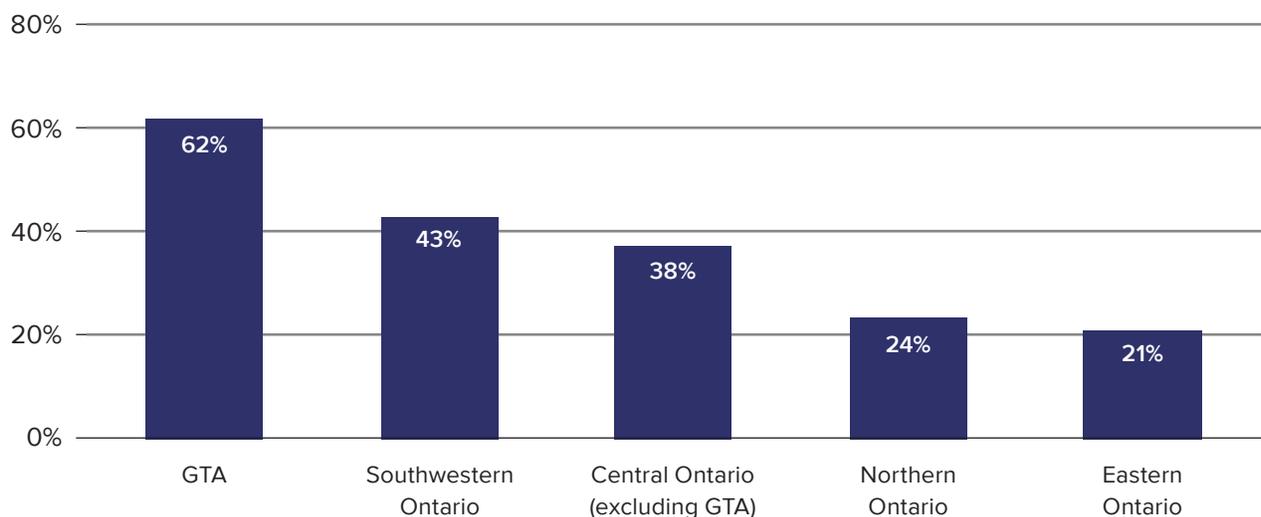
In order to fill the gaps, schools look to outside community organizations or artists for help with regular programming, workshops and presentations. Funding for this may come from cuts in other parts of the budget or through fundraising, which may lead to inequities. A 2013 People for Education report found that elementary and secondary schools with higher fundraising—which are more likely to be in areas with higher than average family incomes—were more likely to report that students have the opportunity to see live performances. Schools with higher average family incomes were also more likely to offer opportunities to participate in a band, choir, or orchestra, perform in a play, or display their art.⁵

Regional discrepancies

Because funding for specialist teachers in elementary schools is generated by the number of students, areas with larger schools are more likely to have specialists. As a result, elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area are 2.5 times as likely to have a music teacher, as compared to elementary schools in eastern and northern Ontario (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Percentage of elementary schools with a music teacher, full- or part-time, by region



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.

People for Education recommends that the province institute:

- 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.

Notes

1. Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum: The Arts (Grades 1-8)* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009), 6.
2. Rena Upitis, "Creativity: The State of the Domain," *Measuring What Matters* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, November 8, 2014), 3.
3. Michael Fullan and Maria Langworthy, *A Rich Seam: How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning* (London, UK: Pearson, 2014); Ontario Ministry of Education, *21st Century Competencies: Foundation Document for Discussion* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2015); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *PISA 2012 Results: Creative Problem Solving: Students' Skills in Tackling Real-Life Problems (Volume V)* (Paris, FR: OECD Publishing, 2014).
4. "O. Reg. 274/12: Hiring Practices," *Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016).
5. People for Education, *Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2013* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, 2016), 17.