

Arts education

It is hard to understate the benefit derived from an education in the arts. Extensive research on the impact of arts education shows that it supports students' development in areas ranging from improved spatial reasoning (Hetland & Winner, 2001) to a deepened motivation for learning (Deasy, 2002). Most significantly, arts education has the potential to enrich students' creativity and social development (Hunter, 2005). These two qualities are included in the Ministry of Education's *21st Century Competencies* (Government of Ontario, 2015), and make up two of five key learning domains identified in People for Education's *Measuring What Matters* initiative (Shanker, 2014; Upitis, 2014; People for Education, 2018a).

Despite the widely recognized importance of arts education, equitable access to arts programs and resources is an ongoing challenge in Ontario. While some schools offer many extracurricular arts activities, students in small and rural schools, in schools with higher levels of poverty, and in schools with lower levels of parental education, are less likely to have access to learning opportunities in the arts.

Arts funding and school budgets

Until recently, there has been no provincial funding dedicated to the arts, it has been up to school boards to determine how to fund arts education. In some cases, boards allocate money for specific arts initiatives or instructional priorities. For example, some boards provide instrumental music for all students in grades 7 and 8, and will therefore provide some funding to schools for instruments. Other boards provide an instructional budget based on the amount of full-time equivalent (FTE) music specialists there are at each school.

In addition to board funding, schools can fundraise for things like arts excursions, visiting artists, or musical instruments. Together, the funds raised by the school and allocated by the board make up each school's arts budget for the year.

In 2018, we asked elementary and secondary schools about their arts budget. Among elementary schools, these budgets range from under \$500 to as high as \$20,000 (see Figure 6.1). At the secondary level, arts budgets can reach as high as \$100,000 (see Figure 6.2).

In 2018:

- 46% of elementary schools report having a specialist music teacher, either full- or part-time, up from 41% last year.
- 98% of secondary schools offer a senior (grades 11/12) Visual Arts class, 92% offer a senior Music class, 86% offer a senior Drama class, and 32% offer a senior Dance class.
- Elementary schools with higher proportion of parents who have graduated from university are twice as likely to have a specialist music teacher as schools with lower proportions of university-educated parents.
- School budgets for the arts range from less than \$500 to \$100,000.

Figure 6.1

Percentage of elementary schools whose art budget is...

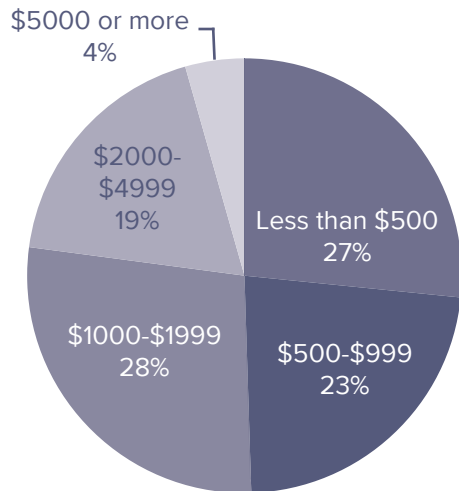
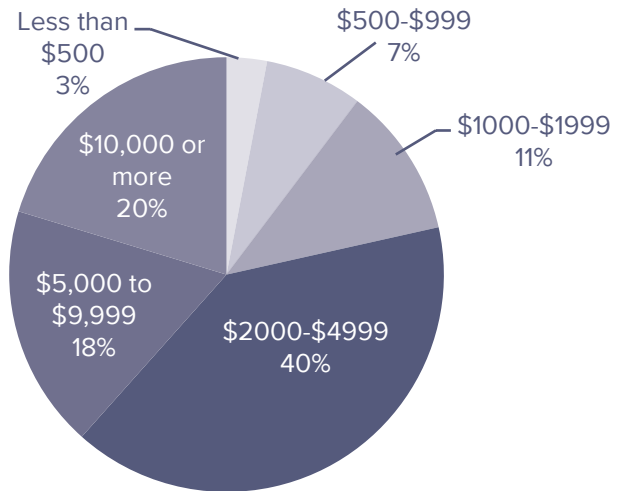


Figure 6.2

Percentage of secondary schools whose art budget is...



Arts budgets: Size matters

[Challenges with arts education:] lack of budget to buy musical instruments.¹²

Elementary school,
Conseil scolaire de district
catholique de l'Est ontarien

Both the survey data and principals' comments illustrate the impact of school budgets on access to resources and learning opportunities in the arts. One principal commented that "many instruments sit broken until budgetary bottom lines are determined closer to the end of the year. Even then, not all instruments can be repaired because there is not enough money."¹⁰ Another noted that it is "very difficult to keep up with maintenance and replacement costs"¹¹ associated with their instruments.

To understand the impact of arts budgets on students' opportunities to participate in arts enrichment, we examined the difference between elementary schools with the highest (over \$5000) and lowest (under \$500) budgets. Figure 6.3 shows that the size of a school's arts budget has a significant impact on learning opportunities for elementary students.

In elementary schools, the arts budget also appears to be connected with the availability of arts programming space. Elementary schools with an arts budget of \$5000 or greater have, on average, three times as many types of specialty arts rooms as those with arts budgets under \$500.

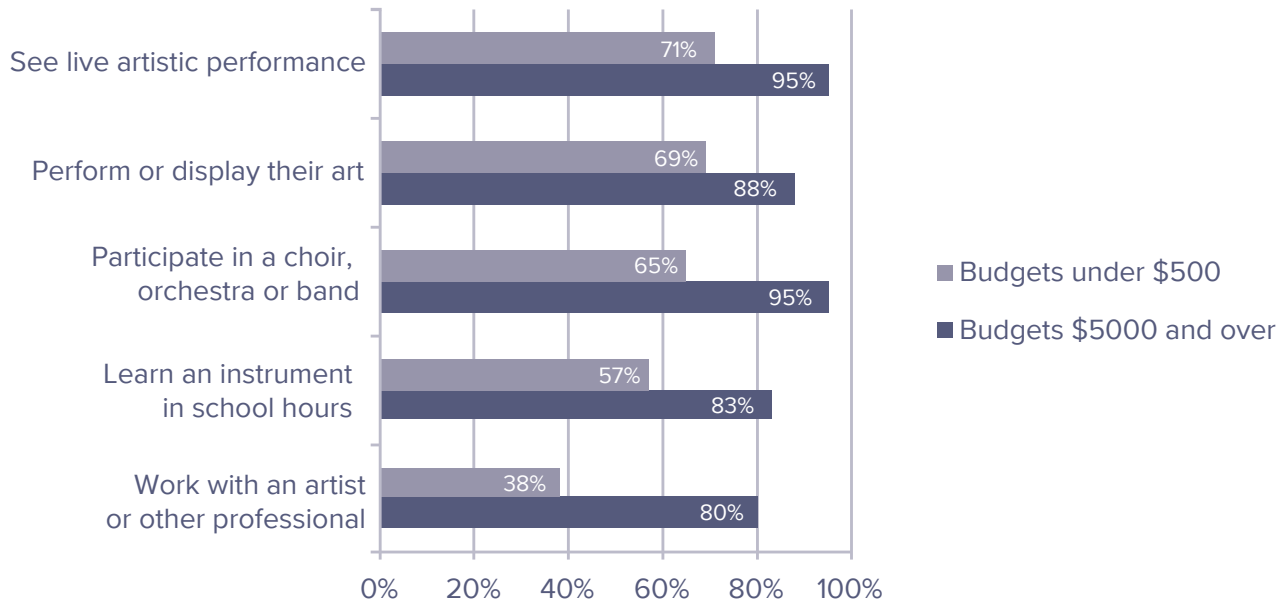
10. This comment is from a secondary school in Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB

11. This comment is from an elementary school in Lakehead DSB

12. Translated from French. Original comment: "Manque de budget pour acheter des instruments de musique."

Figure 6.3

Impact of arts budgets on students' access to arts enrichment



Secondary schools with budgets of \$2000 or higher are more likely to provide arts-related opportunities than those with budgets under \$2000. Secondary schools with budgets of \$2000 or higher are:

- 11% more likely to be able to display their art
- 15% more likely to see live artistic performances
- 33% more likely to learn an instrument in school hours
- 47% more likely to participate in a choir, orchestra, or band
- 63% more likely to work with an artist or professional from outside the school

The impact of fundraising

There is a clear link between the amount schools fundraise and the size of their arts budgets. At the secondary level, schools that report fundraising for the arts are 22% more likely to report an arts budget of \$5000 or more. At the elementary level, this effect is even more pronounced. Elementary schools who report fundraising for the arts are twice as likely to report a budget of \$5000 or more.

When the top and bottom 10% of fundraising elementary schools are compared, the gap widens further, regardless of whether they reported raising money for the arts. The top fundraising elementary schools are almost three times more likely to have an arts budget of \$5000 or more.

“Much of our arts is funded through our school council, who have prioritized the arts at this school.”

Elementary school,
Toronto DSB

The impact of demographic factors

This year, we used information from Statistics Canada and Ontario’s Ministry of Education to examine the relationship between students’ family background and a range of resources and programs in schools. We compared the top and bottom 25% of our elementary school sample in two areas: the proportion of families under the Low-Income Measure, and the proportion of students with at least one parent who has graduated from university. For the sake of comparison, we refer to these as *high* and *low* poverty schools, and *high* and *low* parental education schools.

Low poverty schools are more likely to raise more money per school, more money per student, and more money specifically for the arts, as compared to *high poverty schools*. Schools with *high parental education* were 10 times more likely to have an arts budget of \$5000 or more, as compared to schools with *low parental education*.

“Individual educators are required to integrate the arts in their classroom instruction, and often they do not have specialized training; therefore, these areas may not receive the attention necessary.”

Elementary school,
Sudbury Catholic DSB

Specialist teachers

Ontario’s arts curriculum covers everything from drama to visual arts, music and dance. It is very detailed, and can pose a challenge for classroom teachers—particularly in elementary schools—if they do not have additional training.

On this year’s survey, many principals commented that their schools struggle with a “lack of specialists” to teach the arts—a concern that is supported by the survey data. In 2018, only 46% of elementary schools report having a music teacher, either full- or part-time. While this is an improvement over the 41% of schools reporting music teachers last year, it is still well below the 58% of schools reporting music teachers 20 years ago. Only 16% of elementary schools with grades 7 and 8 report having a specialist visual arts teacher, and just 8% of elementary schools with grades 7 and 8 have access to a specialist drama teacher.

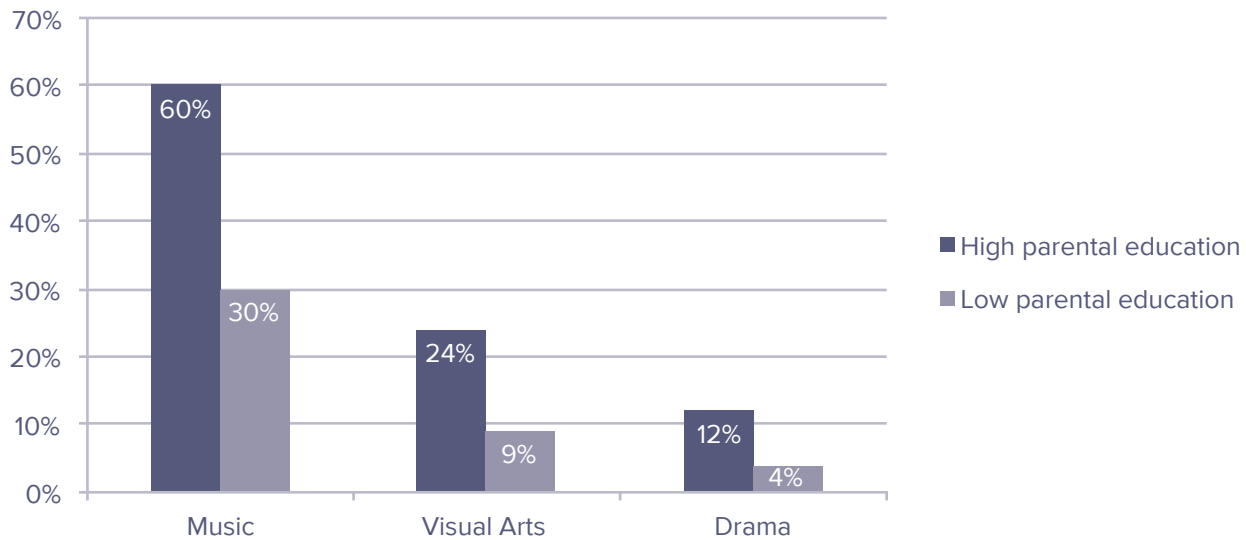
Access to specialist teachers—the impact of school size

School boards must provide teachers with preparation time, and in elementary schools, that preparation time is usually covered by specialist teachers. Schools with more students have more teachers, which generates more preparation time. As a result, larger schools can hire more specialist teachers to cover that prep time. In this year’s survey, elementary schools with a full-time music teacher average 59% more students than those without a specialist.

This year’s survey results illustrate the impact of funding for preparation time on access to specialist teachers. As funding for preparation time has increased from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (Ontario, 2016b; Ontario, 2017a), we are seeing an increase in the overall percentage of elementary schools reporting a music teacher, from 41% in 2017 to 46% in 2018.

Figure 6.4

Parental education and access to arts in school



Access to specialist teachers—the impact of parental education

This year's survey reveals that elementary schools with *high parental education* are twice as likely to have a music teacher (60% of *high parental education* schools vs. 30% of *low parental education* schools), and three times as likely to have a full-time music teacher, as those with *low parental education*. These differences hold even when the data is controlled for region (rural vs. urban) and school size.

This pattern extends beyond music. *High parental education* schools with grades 7 and 8 are two and a half times more likely to have a visual arts teacher than schools with *low parental education*, and three times more likely to have a drama teacher (see Figure 6.4).

“The space will be lost next year as the school board offers the space to provide daycare at the school.”¹⁴

Elementary school,
Conseil des écoles catholique
du Centre-Est

Is there room in schools for the arts?

Learning music, drama, dance, and visual arts requires space—space for instruments and supplies, space for working with different visual arts media, and space to move around. In their comments, survey respondents frequently cite a lack of specialized space as a barrier to providing arts programming. Many principals report that there is no available space because their school is “at capacity,” with one principal commenting that they “barely have storage space, let alone additional space for any learning outside of the normal classroom environment.”¹³

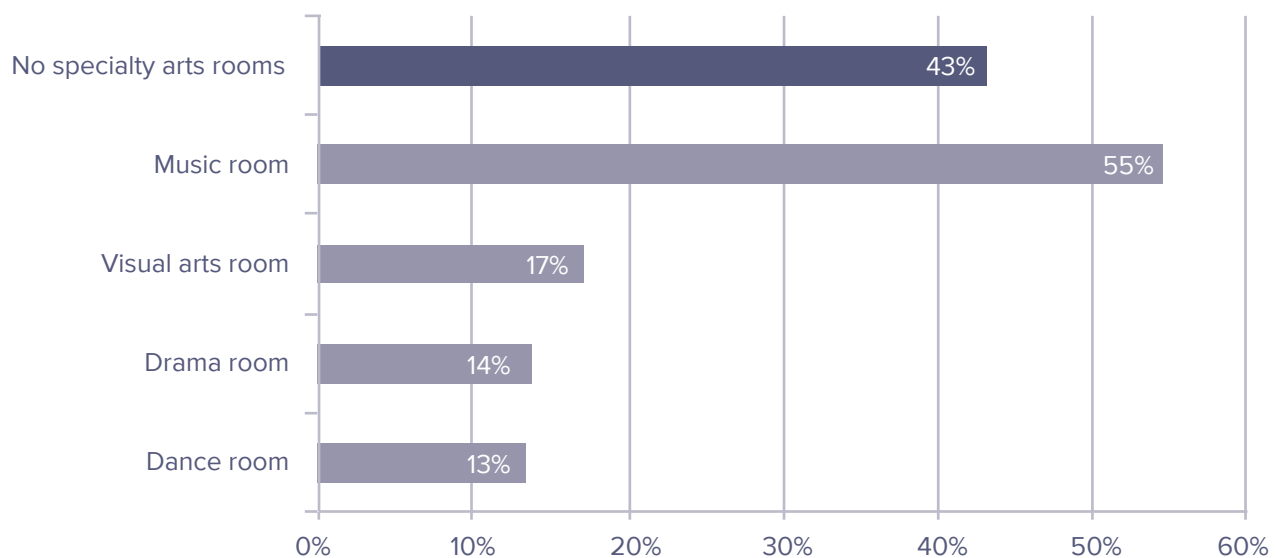
In this year’s survey, 43% of elementary schools report that they have no specialized rooms for the arts (see Figure 6.5). In 2018:

- 55% of schools have dedicated space for music
- 17% of schools have dedicated space for visual arts
- 14% of schools have dedicated space for drama
- 13% of schools have dedicated space for dance

Virtually all secondary schools (98%) have at least one room for arts instruction, and 83% report three or more specialized arts rooms. Visual arts rooms are the most common, with 96% of secondary schools reporting one. Larger schools are more likely to have more types of specialized rooms.

Figure 6.5

Percentage of elementary schools with specialized art rooms



13. This comment is from an elementary school in Brant Haldiman Norfolk Catholic DSB

14. Translated from French. Original comment: “Le local sera perdu l’an prochain car le conseil scolaire offre le local pour offrir une garderie à l’école.”

The urban-rural divide

Schools in rural areas face more challenges than their urban counterparts in providing arts education. According to the survey data, urban elementary schools are three times more likely than rural schools to have budgets of \$5000 or more.

Rural schools are also less likely to have specialist drama, visual arts, and music teachers (see Figure 6.6).¹⁵ The qualifications held by these educators reveal further disparities:

- 77% of rural elementary schools have music teachers with advanced qualifications, compared to 85% in urban elementary schools.
- 17% of rural elementary schools have drama teachers with advanced qualifications, compared to 52% in urban elementary schools.

This is reflected in the comments on the surveys, with one principal identifying the “recruitment of qualified teachers to come to [their] small rural community”¹⁶ as a challenge.

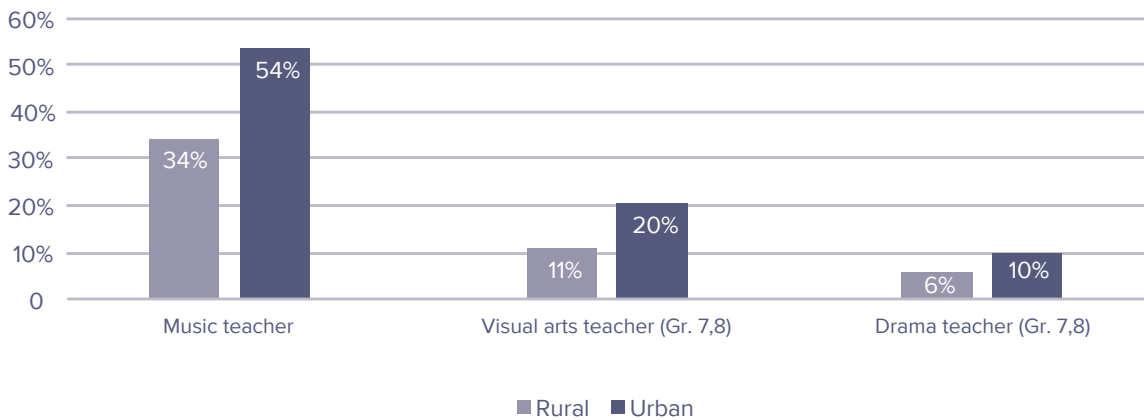
While 37% of elementary schools in urban areas report that they *do not have any* specialized arts rooms, this rises to 53% of elementary schools in rural areas. This pattern holds true even after accounting for the impact of school size, although the gap is not quite as pronounced in similarly-sized schools.

“Our school is a small country school with only 8 classrooms. Our teaching staff allotment doesn’t afford us the opportunity to have specialist teachers.”

Elementary school,
Lambton Kent DSB

Figure 6.6

Percentage of elementary schools with specialist arts teachers, by region



15. Visual arts and drama teachers are calculated among elementary schools that include grades 7 and 8 students only.

16. This comment is from a secondary school in Keewatin-Patricia DSB

Equity and the arts

The cost of arts activities and programs outside of the school day make them inaccessible to many families. This year, data from student questionnaires completed as part of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments, show that overall, 43% of grade three and 39% of grade six students participate in art, music, or drama activities at least once a week when they are not at school.

However, there is a relationship between schools' arts budgets and the amount they fundraise, and students' participation in the arts. In schools with lower arts budgets (which are also more likely to have a higher proportion of students with lower family incomes), students are much more likely to say they "never" participate in art, music, or drama activities outside of the school day. This, along with regional disparities in access to specialist teachers and specialized learning spaces, points to worrying inequities in students' access to arts education.

Recommendations

Arts education builds foundational skills and competencies that have an impact on students' long-term success. Students' critical thinking, persistence, social-emotional, collaboration, and communication skills are all developed in arts education. But students' access to strong arts education is affected by where they live, their parents' income and education, and their school's capacity to fundraise.

People for Education recommends that the province:

- Work with educators and stakeholders to evaluate the costs of arts education, both during and outside the school day.
- Recognize and fund resources and programs that support learning in the arts.
- Ensure that core competencies gained through arts education are embedded in the arts curriculum.