

Arts Integration Programs Show Promise; More Evidence Needed to Make Stronger Conclusions

A Brief Summary of “Review of Evidence: Arts Integration Research Through the Lens of the Every Student Succeeds Act”



What is the aim of this review?

Arts programs often are the first to be limited or eliminated during times of budgetary shortfalls. But cuts to art programming also eliminate one avenue through which students learn other types of academic knowledge and skills.

This evidence review sought to explore whether programs or practices that purposely attempt to connect the arts with academic concepts—known as “arts integration”—produce academic benefits for students. The review examined findings from studies testing arts integration programs on student growth in math, reading, and science, as well as students’ social emotional learning and attitudes toward school. The review also examined whether the

effects of arts integration differed by student characteristics or school settings.



What studies are included?

This review included studies that examine the effects of arts integration programs in grades PreK–12 on students’ English-speaking skills, reading proficiency, general achievement, math achievement, attitudes, and social-emotional outcomes.

In total, this review uncovered 44 studies of arts integration, but only 27 of the studies were considered “well-designed” according to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) standards. These 27 studies were included in a quantitative synthesis of findings (i.e., a meta-analysis).



What are the main findings of this review?

This meta-analysis found that arts integration programs are effective in improving students’ achievement in reading, English language arts, science, social studies, general achievement, and critical thinking, but not their achievement in math. Arts integration programs also were associated with improvements in socio-emotional outcomes, including students’ attitudes and social-emotional learning.

“Based on the average effect across all the 27 studies reviewed, one can expect an average child to gain four percentile points in achievement as a result of an arts integration intervention.”

Arts integration programs were more effective in improving student outcomes when implemented in more diverse and urban or mixed settings. In fact, such programs generally led to negative outcomes for students when implemented in suburban settings and when the majority of the sample was White.

However, more research is needed to better understand for whom and under what conditions arts integration programs work.

Specifically, additional studies are needed to examine the effects of arts integration on high school students and students with disabilities. These studies should use strong designs, such as a randomized controlled trial. Future studies also should examine whether effects are similar for programs that focus on visual or performing arts.



What do the findings in the review mean?

Arts integration can lead to improvements in student academic and socio-emotional learning outcomes, particularly for youth in urban and diverse settings. However, more evidence is needed to reach strong conclusions about the effectiveness of arts integration (and similar) programs across a variety of contexts.

WHAT IS MOSAIC?

The Methods of Synthesis and Integration Center (MOSAIC) is a center that supports methods innovation for projects that synthesize evidence across multiple studies to inform stakeholders and create evidence-based solutions in education, health, international development, social welfare, and the workforce.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief is based on Ludwig, M. J., Boyle, A., & Lindsay, J. (2017). *Review of evidence: Arts integration research through the lens of the Every Student Succeeds Act*. American Institutes for Research.



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