

# ARTS EDUCATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Program Evaluation Report  
March 2018

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## About the Evaluation

The evaluation of the APS Arts Education program began in 2015-16, during which a planning committee met regularly to develop the questions that would guide data collection. Committee members included staff from Planning and Evaluation, the Arts Education Office, other central office and school staff, as well as parents. Data collection occurred in 2016-17 and fall 2017.

The evaluation centered on two overarching questions: 1) How effectively was the Arts Education program implemented and 2) What were the outcomes?

Highlights from this study of the vibrant and diverse APS Arts Education program include:

- Teachers and administrators—at all levels—are overwhelmingly positive about the extent to which the arts are valued at their school and are a part of their school’s culture, and are positive about the level of support they receive for their arts instruction/program.
- Instructional practices in arts classrooms demonstrate high quality, particularly in emotional support, classroom organization, and student engagement.
- Our arts teachers have a strong understanding of effective differentiation techniques they employ for students who need extra support as well as those who need extra challenge.
- APS arts courses are well aligned with postsecondary arts program requirements, and could grow if future courses are offered in multimedia, animation, graphic design, and technical theater.
- APS students have a high rate of recognition in a national visual arts competition and display high levels of quality across categories in choral and instrumental concerts. Current students and graduates who were interested in a career in the arts are positive about the support they have received from APS in that pursuit.
- APS has made progress in increasing the representation of student groups in secondary arts courses, including students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, and economically disadvantaged students. This report identifies areas, such as advanced arts courses, where representation of some student groups could be increased.

## About the Arts Education Program

The mission of the Arts Education Office is to lead a culture of continual learning toward the implementation of best practices and curriculum design, aligned to APS and state standards. This will provide opportunities for students to receive a high level of arts education and to develop the necessary problem solving and critical thinking skills that will transfer to all aspects of their lives as global citizens.

Arts Education is comprised of the following disciplines: visual art (Pre-K-12), general music (Pre-K-5), instrumental music (4-12), chorus (4-12), and theater (6-12). Instruction in the APS Arts Education program is based on curricula that follow the National Standards for Arts Education and the Virginia Standards for Learning related to the specific disciplines.

The program is offered for all Arlington Public Schools students, including those who have special needs, such as gifted students, students with disabilities, and English learners.

## Connection with Systemic APS Processes and Initiatives

In addition to the specific recommendations described below, APS should carefully consider this report's findings and recommendations in light of the following overarching processes, initiatives, and resources. Fundamental and systematic coordination is needed so that we can share, learn from, and build upon both our challenges and successes in a concerted manner.

- *Strategic Planning, 2017-18*. This major endeavor presents an excellent opportunity to ensure APS charts a path to better prepare students for careers.
- *The Whole Child framework*. APS will consider this framework in the next Strategic Plan, which calls for students to be actively engaged in learning and supported within the school and broader community.
- *Virginia Graduation Requirements*. The new state diploma requirements call for Virginia graduates to have acquired knowledge, skills, behaviors, and capabilities that qualify as attributes of a career-ready student, and for students to develop the following competencies: critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and citizenship (community and civic responsibility). As the standards become effective with first-time ninth graders in fall 2018, now is the time to correlate this study's findings with the Profile of a Graduate.
- *A2E (Aspire2Excellence)*. Counselors, teachers, and students should consistently and effectively use this academic planning tool—from the early elementary grades through high school—to enhance students' awareness of the meaning and value of career exploration and the availability of arts courses.
- *Personalized learning*. Personalized learning empowers students and supports learning through flexibility and choice while ensuring instruction and outcomes are connected to each student's unique talents, skills, and interests. The approach is pertinent to career exploration and readiness.



## Findings

### Quality of Instruction

**Finding 1: Observations and survey responses indicate a prevalence of high quality instructional practices in arts classrooms, including strong differentiation practices.**

- Observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) indicated high levels of **emotional support, classroom organization, and student engagement**.
- Average **instructional support** scores were similar to national and APS district-wide trends, falling within the middle range of the 7-point scale.
- CLASS dimensions aligned with **differentiation** practices were also generally strong across observations, ranging from the middle range to the high range on the 7-point scale.
- Arts teachers reported a variety of **differentiation** practices they employ to support students who need extra support as well as those who need extra challenge. Responses showed a strong understanding of effective ways to differentiate for both groups of students and reflected differentiation techniques recommended by the Arts Education Office such as small groups, student and teacher modeling, manipulatives, and student choice.



**Finding 2: Most APS elementary students receive arts instruction in accordance with guidelines for time of instruction.**

- Teacher responses indicate that most elementary schools' arts schedules are in alignment with guidelines for time of instruction. Generally, teachers were most likely to report that their students received arts instruction either 45, 60, or, in some cases, even 90 minutes per week. Many schools are providing more than 30 minutes of arts instruction at the Pre-K level, which presents a potential opportunity for adjustment at schools where additional instruction is needed at upper grades.

**Finding 3: The amount of transition time that elementary arts teachers have between classes varies, and many elementary arts teachers are spending time supporting non-arts instruction.**

- Half of all elementary teachers reported that they do not have any **allocated transition time** between classes. These teachers reported that the lack of transition time has the effect of **reducing instructional and/or artmaking time, and preventing them from setting up the classroom appropriately**.
- More than half of visual arts teachers have time in their schedule allocated to **supporting intervention blocks** through the Arlington Tiered System of Support (ATSS). These blocks typically focus on English language arts or math, and may also include behavioral and social emotional support. Among those who have support blocks in their schedule, the number of minutes allocated varies and ranges from 30 minutes to 360 minutes per week.

**Finding 4: APS arts courses align well with requirements of postsecondary arts programs. Expected growth in certain arts careers offers APS the opportunity to consider additional courses.**

- A scan conducted by Hanover Research shows that students participating in APS arts courses will likely be well prepared to meet application and prerequisite requirements of postsecondary arts programs.
- The scan also suggests that APS should consider new courses to support students in high-demand career pathways such as multimedia, animators, graphic designers, and technical theater.

## Arts Access and Participation

**Finding 5: Teachers and administrators agree that the arts are valued at their school and are a part of their school’s culture.**

- Survey responses show that teachers and administrators—at all levels—are overwhelmingly positive about the extent to which the arts are valued at their school and are a part of their school’s culture.



**Finding 6: APS has made progress in increasing the representation of student groups in secondary arts courses, though representation has remained fairly static in advanced arts courses.**

Over the past four years:

- Representation of **middle school boys** in choral music has increased, while their representation in theater and visual arts has remained unchanged or decreased. In all cases, there are more girls than boys in these courses.
- Representation of **high school boys** in instrumental music, theater, and visual arts classes has increased, while their representation in choral music has remained unchanged and does not keep pace with girls.
- In most arts disciplines, the representation of **limited English proficient (LEP)** students has increased, and in many disciplines, LEP students are enrolled at nearly the same rates as non-LEP students. The exceptions are instrumental music at the middle and high school levels, and choral music at the high school level.
- The representation of **economically disadvantaged** students has increased across levels and disciplines, with only a few exceptions. This overall positive trend has two exceptions at the middle school level: representation of economically disadvantaged students in **exploratory wheel** and **instrumental music** classes has decreased slightly.
- Generally, **students with disabilities** are well represented in arts classes, and in many cases the proportion of students with disabilities taking arts classes has increased over the past four years.
- At both the middle and high school levels, students in most racial/ethnic groups are well represented in arts classes, across disciplines. **Hispanic** students stand out as most likely to be underrepresented, though there has been progress in increasing their representation at the middle school level. There has been little to no change in the representation of Hispanic students in all high school disciplines, as well as in middle school **exploratory wheel** or **instrumental music**.

Participation in **advanced arts courses** has remained fairly steady over the past four years, with the following student groups participating at lower rates than their peers:

- **Boys** in advanced choral music, advanced theater, and advanced visual art
- **LEP** students, **economically disadvantaged** students, **Hispanic** students, and to a lesser extent, **students with disabilities** in all arts disciplines

**Finding 7: Most secondary students who are interested in taking an arts course are able to, and when interested students are not able to enroll in an arts class, this is most commonly due to schedule constraints.**

- An analysis of middle school **course requests** shows that most students who request to take an arts course ultimately end up enrolling in the requested course the following school year.
- Feedback from students who were not enrolled in an arts class indicates that most of them were not interested in taking arts, while around a third **wanted to take an arts class and were not able to**. Among these students, their reasons for not being able to take an arts course mostly centered around schedule constraints due to **required courses, remediation courses**, or less commonly, because there was **not an arts course available** at the time they had a free spot in their schedule.

**Finding 8: The gifted referral and identification process for visual art and music varies across schools and levels.**

- While most referrals for gifted identification in visual art or music occur at the elementary level, the incidence of referrals and identifications varies widely across elementary schools. In the past five years, in any given year, between 3-9 elementary schools referred no students for visual art, and between 3-10 schools referred no students for music.
- Elementary **boys, LEP** students, **economically disadvantaged** students, and **Hispanic** students are consistently referred and identified at rates lower than their peers.
- Arts teachers who reported that they do not refer any students for gifted identification were most likely to indicate that their reason for this was that they **don't understand the process**, or that **there is no point since students don't receive separate instruction if they are identified**.
- Almost half of elementary resource teachers for the gifted (RTGs) reported that they are **not comfortable identifying giftedness** in the areas of visual art and music.
- Open-ended survey responses suggest a **disconnect between arts teachers and RTGs regarding roles and responsibilities** in the referral and identification process.

## Use of Resources

**Finding 9: Teachers and administrators are positive about the level of support they receive for their arts instruction or their school's arts program.**

- Almost all arts teachers indicated that they are supported by their school's administration and by the Arts Supervisor.
- Satisfaction with specific types of support from the Arts Education Office is generally high and varies across levels and disciplines. With some exceptions, **elementary teachers** were more

likely to indicate that they were satisfied with a given type of support and high school teachers were least likely. **Theater teachers** were the least likely to express satisfaction with support for **public relations (PR)** and **curriculum**.

- Teachers requested additional support in the areas of **responsiveness and clarity, professional development, instruments, and advocacy**.
- Principals and assistant principals were also positive about the support that they receive from the Arts Education Office.

**Finding 10: Adjustments to technology may help arts teachers use digital tools or devices in their arts instruction to the fullest extent.**

- Depending on the level or discipline, between two-thirds to three-quarters of arts teachers reported that APS technology infrastructure allows them to use technology tools/devices for their arts instruction *always or most of the time*.
- Among teachers who reported being able to use technology less frequently, technology needs included **access to apps/software, incompatibility of technology equipment with instructional needs, the app approval process, and the impact of technology changes/cumbersome processes**.

**Finding 11: APS will benefit from the development of a regular replacement and maintenance schedule for theater equipment.**

- Theater maintenance and repair needs are currently prioritized and addressed after each annual inspection, and safety needs are addressed immediately. This process works well for safety, repair, and maintenance; it does not include **equipment lifespan and replacement** needs. 2016-17 inspections of all secondary schools with theaters and three elementary schools with theaters indicate variation across schools in terms of the expected lifespan of theater equipment. The APS Arts Office will continue to use the grading scale developed for this evaluation to create a **replacement and maintenance schedule** in order to keep APS theaters and equipment running smoothly.

## Student Outcomes

This evaluation includes information about student outcomes in the categories of artistic process, artistic products, and success of graduates interested in careers in the arts.

## Process Outcomes

**Finding 12: Students are engaging in habits of mind while creating visual art products.**



- A survey tool used by visual arts teachers in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school visual arts classes indicates that most students consistently engage in eight dispositions that describe artist thinking skills.

- A few habits of mind stand out with slightly higher rates of students indicating they engage in these habits of mind only *sometimes*, or that they did not engage in these habits at all: **Understand the Art World, Observe, Express: Awareness of Audience, and My Idea and Vision/Envision.**



### Product Outcomes

**Finding 13: APS choral and instrumental concerts display high levels of quality across categories in internal APS performances as well as in regional competitions.**



- Almost all observed **instrumental concerts** were rated *superior* or *excellent* across categories, though this was slightly lower for elementary **Musicianship/Dynamics/Expression/Balance** (88%), **Rhythm** (90%), and **Intonation/Technique** (87%).
- All observed **choral concerts** were rated as either *superior* or *excellent* across all categories and levels.
- Over the past three years, all APS middle and high schools have participated in Virginia District XII band, choral, and orchestra assessments. In most cases, APS ensembles have received a rating of *superior* or *excellent*.



**Finding 14: APS students have a high rate of participation and recognition at a national visual art competition.**



- With one exception, APS has sent over 200 submissions per year to the national Scholastics competition over the past five years. During that time, APS students have received several awards each year, with the highest number (30) in 2016-17.

**Finding 15: Participation and pass rates for advanced arts exams have fluctuated over the past five years.**

- The number of students participating in **Advanced Placement (AP)** arts exams has fluctuated. Generally, **Studio Art 2D** has had the highest number of participants (55 in 2016-17), and **Studio Art Draw** and **Art History** have had the lowest number of participants with 12 and 11 participants in 2016-17.
- The percentage of students earning a 3 or higher on AP exams for all subjects has fluctuated.
- The number of students at Washington-Lee High School who have participated in **International Baccalaureate (IB)** arts exams has fluctuated, and with the exception of **Film** in 2015-16 (37 students), has ranged from 0-10 students per test.
- The percentage of students earning a 4 or higher on IB arts exams has fluctuated.

### Preparation of Students/Graduates for Careers in the Arts

**Finding 16: Current students and graduates who were interested in a career in the arts are positive about the support they have received from APS in that pursuit.**

- Both current and former students felt **well supported as students** in the arts in APS.



- Although they feel supported, current students report that some adults (mostly family) worry that their artistic pursuit **will not yield a reasonably prosperous career**. These students also report that they feel pressure both at school and at home to choose **STEM or non-arts AP classes** over arts classes.
- Participants viewed the arts as providing many **academic, career, and life skill advantages such as self-discipline and self-directedness**. This is an opinion deeply held across current and former students. They generally attributed these advantages to the art itself rather than connecting it to their experience as APS students.
- Many graduates reported that they were well supported in meeting **requirements when applying to postsecondary arts programs** (e.g., auditions, portfolio submissions). Some said that they needed to find their own way or turn to outside resources.
- APS graduates said that they were **well prepared to major and work in the arts** after high school.



## Recommendations and Staff Action Plan

**Recommendation #1: Explore opportunities for APS to increase awareness of and participation in arts courses. Work with schools and departments to encourage arts opportunities for all students and find creative solutions to scheduling conflicts.**

- Target communication about arts courses to school staff, counselors, students, and parents so that all stakeholders are aware of the opportunities and benefits.
- Work with the Student Services Office and school counselors to ensure that the academic plan process is fully implemented and incorporates discussion of students' career interests, opportunities in the arts, and flexible scheduling.
- Explore ways to increase access to arts options for all students.

### STAFF RESPONSE:

Staff has developed the following plan to increase participation in arts courses by all student groups.

| Action Plan for Recommendation #1   |                               |  |   |
|---|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Recommendation  | Goal                          | Measures of Success  | Action Steps  |
| Explore opportunities for APS to increase awareness of and participation in arts courses. Work with schools and departments to encourage arts opportunities for all students and find creative solutions to scheduling conflicts. | Develop a communications plan | All stakeholders understand full spectrum of arts opportunities for students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with counselors and content supervisors to look at the impact of strengthening courses in math and reading on students' ability to take an arts elective</li> <li>• Expand outreach opportunities for parents and students to find out more about arts courses in planning their A2E pathway</li> <li>• Communicate to all stakeholders options for fee reductions and waivers</li> </ul> |

| Action Plan for Recommendation #1 |   |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Recommendation                    | Goal  | Measures of Success   | Action Steps   |
|                                   | Make adjustments to arts course offerings to align with Virginia graduation requirements, including Profile of a Graduate | Increased enrollment in arts courses among all student groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey students to determine courses in the arts that would meet their interests and cultural background</li> <li>• Review current courses to determine those that may no longer be relevant to students' interests</li> <li>• Based on student survey findings, add new arts courses to program of studies</li> <li>• Identify methods to increase participation among all students and develop a plan for a consistent countywide approach</li> </ul> |
|                                   | Work with Student Services to develop vertical articulation from elementary through high school for arts career pathways  | Guidance lessons include exposure to careers in the arts      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with counselors to enhance their understanding of arts careers in alignment with students' interests in their individualized personal academic plan</li> </ul>   |

**Recommendation #2: Develop and implement a countywide theater equipment replacement schedule.**

- Continue to work with the external theater inspection company and APS safety inspector to assess and maintain APS theater facilities.

- Develop a countywide replacement schedule for theater equipment using a graded A–F system and include a maintenance cycle in the APS budget.

**STAFF RESPONSE:**

Staff will continue to work with the external theater inspection company and the APS safety inspector to maintain APS theaters through annual theater inspections and full rigging audits.

| <b>Action Plan for Recommendation #2</b>                                   |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>Goal</b>   | <b>Measures of Success</b>   | <b>Action Steps</b>   |
| Develop and implement a countywide theater equipment replacement schedule. | Develop a countywide replacement cycle for theater equipment using a graded A –F system and include a replacement schedule in APS budget. | All theater equipment, including but not limited to light boards, sound boards, curtains, and spots will be listed as A-B in grading system. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a replacement plan and submit annually for budget consideration.</li> <li>• Continue to work with Facilities and Operations on replacement schedule.</li> </ul>  |
|  | Provide professional learning on proper use and maintenance of theater equipment.   | Staff and outside facility users will demonstrate proper use of equipment.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide ongoing professional learning to staff on proper care and maintenance of equipment.</li> <li>• Create training module on proper use of equipment for outside groups who use our facilities.</li> </ul> |

**Recommendation #3: Explore possible course offerings based on current workforce trends.**

As we prepare to develop our next strategic plan and align work with the Virginia graduation requirements, including the Profile of a Graduate, APS should look for opportunities to evaluate and potentially expand the variety of arts offerings at each of the high schools. The new state diploma requirements call for Virginia graduates to have acquired knowledge, skills, behaviors, and capabilities that qualify as attributes of a career-ready student.

A review of workforce trends indicated potential for new courses in the following areas:

- Media Arts/Animation

- Design
- Dance
- Video game design
- Technical theater

**STAFF RESPONSE:**

Staff will continue to review the program of studies offerings, update them according to future employment trends and student interests, and enhance students’ awareness of the meaning and value of career exploration and the availability of arts courses.

| Action Plan for Recommendation #3                                    |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Recommendation   | Goal   | Measures of Success   | Action Steps  |
| Explore possible course offerings based on current workforce trends. | Plan new arts course offerings to align with current workforce trends. | Course offerings prepare students for future employment trends. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with schools to review program of studies and make recommendations</li> <li>• Survey students on courses they would like to take in the arts</li> <li>• Work with the Kennedy Center to look at workforce trends in the arts</li> <li>• Work with postsecondary schools to further align APS course offerings with college and university arts programs</li> <li>• Through the APS program of studies approval process, update course offerings based on workforce trends and student survey results</li> </ul> |
|  | Provide opportunities for students to understand new course offerings. | Student enrollment in new courses.                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with counselors to match students’ interests with course offerings in order to support their personalized learning and A2E plan</li> <li>• Present information about new courses at elective fairs</li> </ul>   |



**Recommendation #4: Explore effective ways to consistently identify students as gifted in the arts across all schools.**

**STAFF RESPONSE:** Staff has developed the following plan to increase consistency in the gifted referral and identification process for visual art and music.

| <b>Action Plan for Recommendation #4</b>   |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>Goal</b>  | <b>Measures of Success</b>   | <b>Action Steps</b>  |
| Explore effective ways to consistently identify students as gifted in the arts across all schools. | Increase referrals and identification of students as gifted in the arts at all levels. | <p>Identification practices in visual art and music are systemic</p> <p>Increase in gifted referrals and identifications in the arts</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to understand the identification process.</li> <li>• Continue to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to understand how to support gifted learners in arts classrooms.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for collaboration between arts teachers and RTGs.</li> <li>• Work with Supervisor of Gifted Services to increase communication and collaboration between arts teachers and RTGs to implement all processes systemically.</li> <li>• Work with principals to develop an understanding of the importance of identifying students gifted in the arts and the impact it can have on students' career explorations and A2E plan.</li> </ul> |