

## MEASURING SUCCESS

### What does success look like in arts education?

An elementary art teacher may tell you that success is in getting a classroom of 1st-grade students to follow directions without getting glue in their hair. A band instructor feels successful when 45 beginning band students begin and end a piece in tempo and in tune, without a stray squawk or drum roll.

For teachers of the arts, every day brings success, minor and major victories in the ongoing learning process of making art.

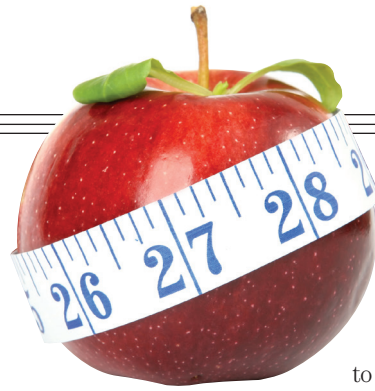
In the larger educational context, success is measured (and often justified) through a policy lens and more recently through a social equity lens. Most arts education proponents consider it a victory to have policies in place that codify learning in the arts. Every state has adopted content standards in dance, music, theater, visual arts, and media arts, articulating what every student should know and be able to do at each grade level in each discipline. Forty-four states also have policies requiring arts instruction at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Tennessee has recently adopted revised learning standards in the arts, developed by teacher teams, to be rolled out in schools in the 2018-19 school year. Standards are built around four artistic processes (domains): Perform, Create, Respond, and Connect. For example, in the Respond domain in music, 6th-grade students should be able to: *Analyze how context and musical elements inform student response to music through visual and aural examples.*

Standards in the arts are sequential, with each element building on prior learning. They are meant to be rigorous, with specific learning objectives and assessment measures in an area of education that was previously believed to be “too subjective” to measure. So, each standard has a built-in measure of success.

Which brings us to the social equity aspect of success measurement.

Supportive state policies in the arts have not always translated



to equitable access to arts instruction. Simply put, wealthier school districts are more likely to have robust arts programs than high-poverty districts. The new federal education policy, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), seeks to address access and equity by requiring states to uphold critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students and by defining what constitutes a well-rounded student, which includes music and the arts.



Photograph by Ardee Chua

Arts education advocates are also addressing equity and access issues through a participation lens. The essential questions: Is arts instruction available at the school? Do all students have access to instruction? How many students participate in those classes? The Music Makes Us program began measuring participation in 2013 with a published study establishing a benchmark for participation and measuring the impact of music education in Metro Nashville schools. Over the subsequent five years, participation rates in music increased by 1,300 students, to well over 60 percent of the student population overall. In fact, growth in music classes has been greater than the growth of district enrollment.

Measuring success in arts education can be multifaceted. Bottom line: We know we have a successful effort if we can say that all students have access to and participate in the joyful learning experience of creating, performing, and presenting art.

Visit [www.musicmakesus.org](http://www.musicmakesus.org) to learn about Music Makes Us and to read the published study.



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