



TUCSON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fine and Performing Arts

FINE AND PERFORMING ARTS DEPARTMENT OPENING MINDS THROUGH THE ARTS

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To Members of the Arizona Department of Education:

As Tucson Unified School District's Director of Fine and Performing Arts and the co-creator of the Opening Mind through the Arts (OMA) integration model, I understand you are seeking input on ways in which the Arizona School and Local Education Agency Accountability System can be modified or improved. This letter directly addresses the importance of accessibility and the specific impact on learning when children receive high quality, scaffolded, and consistent researched-based arts education.

TUSD's sixteen years of research has documented profound evidence to support the arts as part of a well-rounded educational experience for every child. Those schools that support this belief should be granted a higher rating in the School Report Card system than those who do not.

The OMA program was originally designed, researched, and refined through funding by USDOE's Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination grant, the USDOE's Arts Education Professional Development grant, and Harvard's Project Zero's Qualities of Quality study. Additional data collection has been accumulated through TUSD independent researchers. Anecdotally, TUSD principals demand the OMA program be fully implemented in their schools as families expect this refined arts education model, understanding the remarkable benefits for not only their children but for all of Arizona's students. OMA has recruited many students for these elementary schools.

In five years of research, WestEd, Inc. documented "robust results" recognizing that OMA made significant progress helping students who were at academic risk to succeed: teacher effectiveness was enhanced, arts instruction was strengthened and gains were made in student academic achievement regardless of ethnicity or socio economic status. Below are some key points from our research and data collection.

Key Research Points include

- "OMA mitigates the impact of poverty, the lack of English proficiency, and high mobility rates on student learning and achievement."
- OMA showed a pattern of robust and positive effects regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status. 3rd grade students scored significantly higher than their counterparts in comparison schools.
- Improved attendance on OMA days; students are motivated to be in school
- Student learning is very different in OMA schools than in comparison schools. OMA classrooms were observed to engage in more varied student learning activities and use the arts as important learning resources.
- Students learning results demonstrated improved skills in
 - Listening (OMA students 86%, Comparison students 26%)
 - Engaging in discussion (OMA students 23%, Comparison students 9%)
 - Engaging in problem solving (OMA students 31%, Comparison students 22%)
 - Using arts as learning resources (OMA students 40%, Comparison students 22%)
 - Engaging in reading or writing (OMA students 63%, Comparison students 43%)

Classroom Teachers comments highlight the following:

- OMA integrated lessons showed ELA and math concepts in a way different from traditional instruction, allowing struggling students to finally understand the concepts.
- Using the arts to show understanding of ELA and math concepts took these tested subjects to a different level. This provided a way for the teacher to assess true student understanding.
- Students developed listening skills and the ability to focus, which transferred to other classroom lessons.
- Teachers benefited from watching OMA teacher's classroom management styles, adopting some of these strategies to support their own instruction
- The classroom teachers' active, hands-on participation in the lessons helped motivate the students and helped the teachers gain a deeper understanding of their students.

Students' comments (gr. 3 students) demonstrate their understanding:

- OMA helped me understand I can trust my classmates. I learned how they really are.
- I learned that people would appreciate me if I appreciate them.
- OMA builds teamwork, self-discipline, and pride by participating in the lessons and respecting others, I have a lot of energy.
- Sometimes the classroom feels like a holding cell. This is when OMA can't come soon enough. When we sing, dance, and play instruments it is a break from class and helps me to focus my energy better.
- OMA keeps me calm when I play a song with my class. I feel like I have great talent. Talent doesn't come from strength and not from beauty, it comes from the heart.
- My art projects turn into masterpieces.
- OMA makes us realize we have so much to do and so little time!
- OMA helps me calm down before I take a test. I sing the songs in my head.
- OMA taught me to have better discipline. When the teacher gives directions, I follow them.
- My OMA teacher motivates me to be better. I am determined to complete each task.
- It was the perfect year of my life with OMA.

I look forward to describing more completely TUSD's experiences with arts education in some kind of an open forum that the Arizona State Board of Education may offer.

Please contact me if I may provide additional statements to support this request.

Gratefully,

Joan Ashcraft, DMA