ArtsPartners was a collaboration between Dallas Independent School District, the City of Dallas, Big Thought, and over 50 arts and cultural organizations. Through funding, professional development, and technology, ArtsPartners provided access to Dallas’ cultural institutions to students, and tools to teachers. The goal of ArtsPartners was to provide all Dallas ISD elementary students with equal access to high quality arts programs offered by the city’s professional arts and cultural institutions. Every Dallas ISD elementary classroom teacher was offered the opportunity to integrate those programs into the curriculum to benefit student academic achievement and learning in the arts.

**At-a-Glance**

**Previous Research**

There have been three studies of ArtsPartners program effects on Dallas ISD students. The first study examined Dallas ISD students from the 1998-99 pilot program. The study compared the pilot students to a control group, and found that ArtsPartners pilot students performed better on standardized tests (Bearden, 2001). This analysis established a baseline for thirteen of the original ArtsPartners schools.

The second study of ArtsPartners program effects was the Big Thought and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform four year longitudinal study ending in school year 2004-05, and reported by Wolf, Bransom, and Denson in 2006-07. That study found that students participating in an intensive ArtsPartners experience showed significant improvement in academic achievement as compared to control groups.

The third study was the present study, which takes another look at the students from the Wolf, Bransom & Denson study to see how they compare in 2009-10 with respect to their 2006-07 comparison results.

**Student Demographics**

Students from the original study were evaluated over several time points to determine if the level of exposure to arts and cultural experiences, as defined by years of participation by group, influenced student performance. To compile the desired population, evaluators first selected students who participated in the ArtsPartners study for at least two years in the following groups: focus, focus grade, and control grade, and excluded all other students. Control grade students attended funded schools, but their teachers did not receive any treatment support. Focus grade students attended funded schools and their teachers received treatment guidance with implementation of the ArtsPartners program. Focus students are those students that remained together as a class as they progressed through the grades. They attended funded schools and their teachers received treatment guidance with program implementation.

A total of 1,082 students were selected. Although many students withdrew and were subsequently excluded, the demographic resemblance to the district population remained the same within the final group of students, with about 60.7 percent Hispanic students, 30.1 percent African American students, 7.4 percent White students, and less than two percent of students of other ethnicities. The number of male students remained slightly higher than female students with 54.6 percent and 45.4 percent, respectively.

From each group evaluators selected students who were on-grade level by cohort, leaving a total of 510 students in the 2009-10 study. Among the grade one cohort, students in the control grade group lost the most students by the 2009-10 school year with 52.1 percent. In the grade four cohort, students in the focus grade and control grade lost the most, 58.3 percent and 58.2 percent respectively, by the 2009-10 school year.

**School Enrollment**

Focus students with three years of participation were more likely to remain in their feeder pattern through high school (63.6%) compared to control grade students (46.4%). Focus grade students at each participation level were more likely to enroll in a Magnet school than other students, followed by control grade students with three and five years of participation. Control grade students at each participation level were more likely to enroll in an Other school than other students; however the difference between groups declines from 3-Year and 5-Year participation.

**TAKS**

TAKS Writing was administered to students in grades four and seven only. Students from both cohorts were examined at grade seven by participation level. Control grade groups at each participation level had
higher mean TAKS Writing scores than focus and focus grade groups in each cohort. However, these differences were not statistically significant for either cohort at the significance level $p \leq .05$ (grade 1 $p = .446$, grade 4 $p = .338$).

**Fine Arts Courses**

Focus group students showed a slightly higher enrollment in Dance and Visual Arts across years of participation in ninth grade compared to focus grade and control grade groups. However, in grade 12, focus groups with three years of participation did not have any years of enrollment in Dance. This difference may represent the courses offered and levels available over the given time points. Among focus groups in the grade four cohort, Music was the only discipline across years of participation that had two or more years of enrollment, while Theater and Visual Arts had at least one year of enrollment. In comparison, control grade groups had a higher percent of enrollment in Visual Arts across years of participation.

**Advanced Placement (AP) Courses**

Course enrollment information was matched to the 510 students in this study and divided by the number of students in the cohort. About 65 percent of focus students with two years of participation enrolled in at least one AP course compared to focus grade and control grade students, who were less likely to enroll in an AP course. The percent of focus students enrolled in at least one AP course declined with years of participation, compared to control grade students who were more likely to enroll in at least one AP course as years of participation increased. Among students from the grade four cohort, all students were more likely to enroll in at least one AP course with an increase in years of participation. However, participation groups were cumulative, and students with three years participation were also included in the two year group, and students with five years participation are included in both the three and five year groups.

**Summary and Recommendations**

ArtsPartners provided funding and support to Dallas ISD elementary schools for teachers to incorporate field trips, on-campus performances and presentations, or residencies from more than 50 arts and cultural providers within the City of Dallas into their curriculum.

In this study, students from a four-year longitudinal study of the ArtsPartners program in eight elementary schools were evaluated over several time points to determine if the level of exposure to arts and cultural experiences, as defined by years of participation by group, influenced student performance. To compile the desired population, students were selected who participated in the ArtsPartners study for at least two years in the following groups: focus, focus grade, and control grade. From each group evaluators selected students who were on grade level by cohort, yielding a total of 510 students. Several comparisons were drawn between the level of exposure to ArtsPartners, as defined by years of participation by group, and several dependent variables.

High school enrollment was evaluated to determine if students who participated in the focus or focus grade groups were more likely to enroll in a Magnet school than control grade students. Focus students from the grade one cohort were more likely to remain in their feeder pattern when they entered high school at the ninth grade compared to control grade students.

Even though students from the grade one cohort had the opportunity to participate in ArtsPartners for up to five years, the effects did not have a statistically significant influence on TAKS Writing two years after participation was concluded.

Students from the grade one cohort appear to enroll in Fine Arts courses at a higher rate among students with three years participation compared to students with two years participation in focus and focus grade groups. Focus students from the grade four cohort were more likely to enroll for two or more years of Music than other groups. Further research is recommended to determine if elementary school arts discipline choices influences fine arts course enrollment later.

Years of participation by groups appeared to show some influence on AP course enrollment in high school, but affected students in each cohort differently. Other factors like parent and teacher influence must be considered when evaluating AP course enrollment in high school.

Recommendations included continuing to offer teachers ArtsPartners professional development and the opportunity to collaborate with arts and cultural institutions within Dallas County. Consider including parents in field trips, on-campus performances and presentations. To increase creative learning outside of school, conduct a needs assessment to target specific subject areas of interest by grade level. Finally, consider expansion of ArtsPartners programming at the middle and high school level.

For more information, see EA10-165-2, available at [www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/](http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/).