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Combating Chronic Absenteeism with After-School Art Programs

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate Program of the Department of Art and Design at the University at Kearney

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

Major: Art Education

Under the Supervision of Dr. Ross H. Schlemmer

By

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December 10, 2022

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Abstract

Chronic absenteeism is a problem common within our education system, even more so in districts impacted by poverty. Consistent student attendance has and will continue to be an issue within our schools because it is difficult to pinpoint all the causes and issues that affect a student's attendance. Despite this, art education, and after school art programs have been shown to improve student buy-in and help alleviate the inconsistent gaps in overall student attendance, behavior, test scores, life-skills, and improve participation within the classroom. This paper furthers the investigation by taking into consideration what the Boston and Chicago public after-school art programs have and have not done successfully, while using the research to evaluate and construct the implementation of an after-school art program for a rural south-central Kansas school district.

Keywords: Art, attendance, education, after-school programs

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
Chapter 2: Methods	6
Data Collection Tools	6
Protection of Participants	6
Chapter 3: Literature Review	8
Chapter 4: Discussion	10
The Problem	10
Boston Public Schools	11
Chicago Arts Partnership in Education	12
Struggles for Smaller Districts	13
Art Education: Facts & Figures	14
Evaluation of Interviews	15
Chapter 5: Conclusion	18
References	21
Appendices A: Facts & Figures	23
Appendices B: Teacher Interview Questions	30

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Combating Chronic Absenteeism with After School Art Programs

Chapter 1

Introduction

Consistent student attendance has and will continue to be an issue within our schools because it is difficult to pinpoint all the causes and issues that affect a student's attendance (Hubbird, 2019). As an educator, I am aware that student attendance and success are related and depend on one another. In the past our district has tried to honor students with good attendance and behavior with external motivation and rewards. However, such efforts have been inconsistent, and our district was unable to significantly encourage our chronically absent students. *Chronic absence* is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason—excused, unexcused absences and suspensions” (Attendance Works, 2018). Seeing firsthand the negative impact of chronic absences amongst my own students, I am interested in investigating potential solutions to combat this national issue within the education system. In addition to attendance, the students in my district struggle with appropriate behavior, reading comprehension and fluency, basic math, and have limited supervision outside of school. The information and research collected during this study will benefit the community and district I work for; a third of the students are chronically absent.

The purpose of this case study will highlight and discuss how the arts improve and encourage students academically and behaviorally. Research conducted by Boston and Chicago public schools will help provide data analysis for this case study. Collected research will be compared and analyzed for application into a small rural public school. The following research discusses the benefits of art education, while investigating potential connections between the impact and improvement of student behavior and attendance. The research conducted contributes

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

to the improvement and funding of the arts, by incorporating and encouraging art education and after-school art programs. A thorough examination of a study conducted by Boston and Chicago public schools, will show how school programs promote student, parent, and community engagement with the school district. This study asks:

- 1.) What made the Boston and Chicago school art programs successful?
- 2.) How does art education and after-school programs promote positive behavior and attendance?
- 3.) Why does participation in arts make for better students?

Through investigating these questions, evaluating research, and reflecting on information provided by interviewed participants, this case study seeks to offer relevant and real-life solutions specific to the issues of student attendance and behavior in rural south-central Kansas. Through the discussion and analysis of material and statistics; this study will show the importance and impact of an effective art education inside and outside of school. I am hopeful my school district is willing to consider the implementation of an after-school art program.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Chapter 2

Methods

Collected research was conducted by Boston and Chicago public schools and other research focuses on the benefits and impact of an art education. Several communities are committed to the engagement of arts, by providing, monitoring, and determining the impact of after-school programs supported by federal and state funding. Such programs vary in size, emphasis, and leadership. After-school programs have been developed to provide children with a safe and enriching environment, where they are able to expand their academic abilities, receive tutoring, be active in sports, and of course engage in the enrichment of arts (CAPE, 2008). The following two programs, a part of Boston, and Chicago public schools, were selected due to the length of each study and the notable effects on students' attendance and behavior. The research seeks to address issues related to chronic absenteeism and how art education, specifically art after-school programs, can help improve student behavior and attendance. However, it is difficult to duplicate what other case studies have done, while desiring to have a similar effect. That is why this case study investigates the positive impact an arts education and after-school art programs have on student behavior and attendance, while taking into consideration the applicability towards rural and economically disadvantaged public schools in Kansas, as well as other art educational benefits.

Data Collection Tools

To gain insight and understanding from multiple perspectives, data will be collected using two data collection tools. Through this method of research, the data provides a more inclusive study, narrowing the risk of personal art educator bias and opinions. The two types of collection tools used during this case study are:

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

- A **document analysis** of arts programing within Boston and Chicago public schools.
- A **document analysis** of facts & figures provided by the program Americans for the Arts.
- **Interviews** of current educators within the district, discussing success and failures of previous after-school programs, as well as the benefits of art education.

Protection of Participants

This study relies on the direct feedback of current educators who agreed to participate in interviews. Selected participants are individuals who have implemented or participated in an after-school program in the past. Participants will remain anonymous outside of their position and roles within the district. Alongside the information sourced from interviews, this study uses information collected from previously conducted after-school art programs and scholarly discourse regarding the impacts of art education on student attendance and behavior. In addition, I will be using stats and data provided by the program Americans for the Arts to further my findings and offer support while promoting the benefits of an arts education. Information collected will focus on art educations impact on student attendance, behavior, test scores, life-skills, and improve participation within the classroom. This paper furthers the investigation by taking into consideration what the previously conducted research has achieved or has not achieved, while examining programs with similarities and differences to rural schools and schools with economically disadvantaged students.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Ninety-three percent of Americans believe that an art education is critical to a well-rounded education (Chen, 2022). Art education is a valuable tool at relieving the gaps in student issues, such as attendance, behavior, and academic success. Students who engage in the arts perform better in other subject areas, such as mathematics and science (Chen, para.6, 2022). However, within the last few years the number of students receiving an arts education has shrunk with the expansion of data driven measures (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). The pressure to meet state standards and objectives has forced schools to focus their resources on standardized testing, reducing or even eliminating art programs (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).

Advocates for the arts understand that the arts are as important as any of the other academics; an art education provides benefits for students of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds. Because of this, the arts can be a lifeline for students, particularly minority and economically challenged students (Chen, para. 14, 2022). The New Mexico School for the Arts or NMSA believes that the positive impact of an art education is just the tip of the iceberg when looking at the whole child. Learning art is more than just creating more successful students, it creates more successful human beings. NMSA is built on a dual curriculum, meaning that the arts are just as important as other academics. The goal is to prepare students for a career in the arts, but also providing them with the skills and the knowledge to be successful in college (Swapp, para. 1, 2016).

The arts prepare students for a growth mindset, by making students resilient, develop grit, and work on mastering whatever task is on hand. Students learn this through the arts by embracing failure through trial and error and improve independent learning. Through the

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

immersion of arts, students are encouraged to work in an academia that is multifaceted encompassing other subject matters like mathematics and science for example. NMSA believes for a student to truly grow and progress, there must be a point where *intrinsic* and extrinsic motivation balance. Intrinsic motivation can be seen in the initial stages of learning an art form or medium because learning at this stage is fun and engaging. However, this type of motivation is just the beginning of a student's development. Intrinsic motivation begins to slow or even stop if there is no *extrinsic* motivation (Swapp, para. 2, 2016). Extrinsic motivation occurs when the students desire to push forward or do their best is influenced by external factors, such as tests and other assessments (Swapp, para. 2-3, 2016).

An education in the arts provides students the opportunity to express themselves, gain confidence, and improve communication skills. This is achieved through the art of making music, painting, or sculpting for example. "The arts are a mode of expression that transforms thoughts and emotions into a unique form of communication" (Swapp, para.7, 2016). The arts provide students an ability to communicate and find their voice. The arts alone are valuable, but when linked to other subjects, they are the perfect link for understanding. Empirical evidence supports the claims and benefits of art education, showing that an education in the arts can produce significant and positive impact on students and their academic and social lives (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). The art programs completed by Boston and Chicago public schools will be analyzed for their impact on student academic performance, student attendance, behavior, and overall long-term effects of learning.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Chapter 4

Discussion

Data presented in this discussion comes from the Boston and Chicago public schools, discussing how each implemented and evaluated after-school art programming worked for their individual needs. The material presented will show the negative impact chronic absenteeism has on education, while showing how other schools used the arts to improve student behavior and attendance. It will be shown from the research collected from existing art programs, that an art education K-12 is important to the well-being of young learners. This is represented not just from the short-term success, but long-term success gained from the skills and knowledge developed and enhanced through the initial stages and growth of academic achievement and behavior. This is accomplished through the arts by providing students a lifelong ability to read, write, and communicate effectively. Developing and enhancing these skills prepares students for the real world and the challenges presented. The discussion begins by considering the problem and concerns over student attendance. Once it is shown why and how art education programs and after-school programs have been successful for others, facts and figures will be provided to visually represent the impact the arts have on students and their education.

The Problem and Why it Matters

Students who chronically miss school are academically at risk and are known to have difficulties reading by third grade and struggle achieving academic success as early as middle school (Attendance Works, para. 1, 2018), negatively impacting high school graduation rates as shown in Figure 4.1 (U.S Department of Education, 2019). Absences are often tied to lack of transportation, health problems, oral and mental health issues (Attendance Works, para. 2, 2018). Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent; students

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

who are poor face the most harm since their communities usually lack the resources to make up for lost learning within school (Attendance Works, para. 2, 2018). A lack of resources within economically challenged communities puts students at a higher risk, it is easier to see why students struggle to attend school consistently or make excuses to miss school. The issue at hand is not truancy or skipping school, in fact, most students who are chronically absent are missing days that are excused, see figure 2.1 below (Attendance Works, 2018). Chronic absences are often overlooked in larger school districts since the schools are counting the number of students attending each day, instead of paying attention to how many students are missing days and falling behind (Attendance Works, 2018).

Boston Public Schools

A 11-year study completed in May 2021 in the effort to increase art programming in the Boston Public schools or BPS showed improvement with student attendance, and student and parent engagement within the schools and the role of arts. Students who were already involved in the arts, saw their attendance increase by one-third of the day over the course of an academic year. Overall, students who were linked to having chronic absenteeism saw a gain of about 1.1% a day for the academic year (Bowen & Kisida, 2021; Jonas, 2021). Assistant professor in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University, Daniel Bowen, says “a third of a day doesn’t sound like a lot. But when we dive into education interventions that are designed to have any sort of impact on attendance, this is pretty comparable to some of the interventions touted as having impact on attendance (Jonas, para. 7, 2021). Bowen alongside Brian Kisida, an assistant professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, conducted the study by collecting data from the Boston art programming in the 2008-09 academic year through the 2018-19 academic year.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Over the span of Bowen and Kisida's (2021) 11-year study they provided a quasi-experimental, longitudinal investigation of arts education impact for Boston K-12 students. Upon the completion of this study, Bowen and Kisida saw that an effective art education, one that is consistent, increased daily attendance, and decreased the likelihood of student suspension. These findings were consistent within the student subgroups as well, with students with IEP's having a more profound affect, resulting in an additional two thirds of a day per school year. The most notable impact in absence was within chronically absent students, seeing a 0.06 percent increase, meaning that these students were attending an additional (1.1%) day within the school year (Bowen & Kisida, p.10, 2021). While an additional day does not seem like much in a larger school district, such an impact would be tremendous for a smaller school district.

Chicago Arts Partnership in Education

Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE), provides grants to public schools within and around Chicago, to form partnerships with local artists, art agencies, and teachers. Through doing so, CAPE integrates arts across the school curriculum. The program itself encompasses 37 schools, 53 professional art organizations, and 27 community organizations (ArtsEdSearch, 2022). CAPE was designed to help engage students, inspire educators, and demonstrate impact of the arts. CAPE uses partnership, art integration, and research, to bring traditional subjects to life through the arts. To accomplish this, educators are paired with professional teaching artists and Chicago public school teachers for long-term partnership and training. To spark student engagement and passions for learning, CAPE uses a variety of art learning platforms, such as visual and digital art, music, theater, and dance. Using any of the listed art medias to weave traditional subjects such as science, math, history, and language arts, through art integration.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

One of the benefits of CAPE is having an organization with the funds and resources able to collaborate with researchers. This additional benefit allows CAPE to analyze and determine the impact of their program on students, teachers, and artists. Through consistent research, CAPE can refine their work and teaching teams to contribute to the field of art education (CAPE, 2016). Research conducted over the span of five years showed promising insight into the effects of CAPE, especially on educators and students. In general, the research found that an after-school art program could be beneficial to schools, teachers, students, and the community (Burnaford, Vazquez, & Tan, 2008). Through the implementation of CAPE, research saw that educators and teachers were more likely to integrate arts into reading, and that visual arts were the most popular art form with teachers. The students themselves, enjoyed the arts-integrated lessons. Students with the CAPE schools performed better in reading and mathematics than students from comparison schools. However, this finding was only statistically different at the elementary level (CAPE, 2016).

Supporting Communities through Arts Learning Environments or SCALE, was an after-school art program developed by CAPE. The SCALE report encompasses three schools within the Chicago public school district who were in partnership with CAPE for five years. This project was altered within each of the three schools, since each school had their own unique constraints, strengths, and challenges. What remained the same within each school was a consistent implementation of art integration and education through teachers and artists who co-paned and co-taught during the SCALE program.

Struggles for Smaller Districts

The programs led by PBS and CAPE aim to create coherent, sustainable quality art education for all art students, while providing the statistics to support and advocate for the arts.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Research and information collected from the SCALE program focused on the assessment of student progress in the following areas: skills needed to be an effective citizen, English, STEM, literature, history, and the arts. Like BPS, the evaluation of data aligned with what supporters of the arts advocate for. School districts and organizations like BPS and CAPE have ample resources, educators, artists, and opportunities for the successful implementation of a consistent art program; components that smaller district struggle to obtain. Given the duration of each study, community resources, participants and partnerships, and the willingness to study and modify an art education specific to individual communities needs and challenges, it is no wonder that such after-school art programs were able to find success.

Smaller districts struggle to obtain funding and support through and with organizations or communal partnerships. Fundraisers, grants, and budgets have a large impact on what is and is not available for art educators and their students. Many educators are willing to put in the time and effort applying for grants, hosting fundraisers, and advocating for their program. Due to the limited resources, for a small district to implement a successful after-school art program, the program itself would have to find consistency in the form of an art budget or funds, partnerships, and schedule. The construction of a successful after-school art program would require designing a budget, partnerships, and schedule tailored to the individual school's needs and challenges. Larger programs or districts, such as BPS and CAPE, do not struggle at finding the resources or assistance when it comes to the implementation and maintenance of an after-school art program.

Art Educations: Facts & Figures

The arts keep students in school, provide the tools and opportunities for success in school, their lives, and future work environment (Americans for the Arts, pgs. 1-3, 2013). In fact, students who participate in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for their academic

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

achievement. As shown in Figure 4.2 and 4.3 below (Americans for the Arts, p. 4 & 5, 2013).

The arts are shown to be just as important as any other core subject and are linked to motivating student success inside and outside the classroom.

Despite how impressive the impact of and arts education is, national studies have shown that with the influence of standardized testing and test scores, students have less time in the arts classroom (Americans for the Arts, 2013). This is happening because educators are finding themselves narrowing their curriculum to meet the needs and expectations of state demands. However, it has historically been shown that students who participate in the arts earn higher grade point averages and score higher on the SAT in comparison to students without an arts education. What this means is that the more years a student participates in the arts, the higher their SAT scores are on average. The arts impact on SAT scores are represented in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 (Americans for the Arts, pgs. 8 & 9, 2013). Such gains are also seen regardless of a student's socioeconomic status. This means that at risk students who are receiving an arts education are helping to close the achievement gap, as represented in Figure 4.6 (Americans for the Arts, pp. 10, 2013).

Evaluation of Interviews

85% of the students within my district are on free and reduced meals; our families in the community struggle to stay financially stable due to lack of resources, reliable transportation, isolation, and drug use. A substantial part of the population in my district is economically challenged due to these issues and after seeing the potential impact of an after-school art program for other communities, it would appear to be a beneficial addition for any school district, and my colleagues agree.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Interviewed participants were sourced from the community and district, with backgrounds in education varying in grade level and occupation. Interviewed participants are grade school educators, librarians, P.E. instructors, and school administration. One interviewee said that “when students complete a task or any assignment, they are proud of themselves. Students do not always get the support needed at home, and an after-school art program would aid, support, and promote creativity.” (Anonymous Informant #2) In general, the participants felt that an after-school art program would be beneficial for students who have no support outside of the classroom, do not participate in sports, and those who need a safe place after school.

One of the largest concerns expressed was brought about from issues that arose 15 years previously when Chase had an after-school program. The after-school program itself was initially developed to help students with homework, reading, and math skills. Due to the communities’ lack of resources, the program eventually transformed into an overzealous baby-sitting environment. Parents and guardians knew their students were safe for an hour or two and took advantage of that time. Granted, that is one of the benefits of an after-school program for working and single household families. However, when the teachers, as well as the students, did not know when they would be picked up after school hours, it caused distress, confusion, and eventually the elimination of the program.

Interviewed participants overall felt that the implementation of an after-school art program would be beneficial as long as the program was used as a benefit to the community, and not an accessory that was abused like the previous after school programs. “I see students’ behaviors benefiting from an after-school art program, since it will help them socialize with their peers and get caught up, just as long as it does not become a babysitting service” (Anonymous Informant #1). Community members and educators alike, are aware of the benefits and

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

opportunities that come out of an arts education. This is shown through the development and growth seven years prior, when the arts program was exclusively K-7th. Since 2015, the Jr. High and high school have had art electives. The largest challenge to overcome for the implementation of an after-school art program would be to avoid frustrations and burnout that arose years prior. This could be achieved by setting and maintaining consistent expectations, rotating after-school participants, helpers, and educators, and a small monetary fee or donation to the school's art program in order to attend the after-school art program.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The extent to which schools really understand the education opportunities of art remains unknown, even though art advocates claim the arts K-12 have intrinsic value. District policy makers rely heavily on scientific-based research, increasing the pressure and reliance on state testing (Bowen & Kisida, p.1, 2021). Conducting research on art education has proven difficult since very few states and districts collect data on the measure of arts education. However, such efforts have become critical with the preservation of the arts. Therefore, it is important to provide studies that show the impact of a consistent arts education, specifically within after-school art programs.

Students who come from economically disadvantaged homes, such as we have here in rural south-central Kansas, not only have the highest risk of chronic absenteeism, but they have also been shown to have the greatest benefit of the arts (Chen, para.11, 2022). Students living within poverty who have a history in the involvement of arts, have been shown to have improved and long-term academic, occupation, and social outcomes in comparison to their peers (Chen, para.12, 2022). When students have a higher involvement in the arts, they are more likely to start planning to attend college, increasing the likelihood of applying and furthering their education after high school. This is the goal for all educators; convincing our students to further their education to flourish and be the best version of themselves. Previously conducted research will show that art education promotes growth in academic, behavior, and attendance

A study conducted by the state of Missouri in 2010 by the Missouri Arts Council (MAC), revealed that the arts have a positive impact on attendance. Schools that had a greater student involvement in the arts reported having higher attendance ratings, an average of 95.1%.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

In comparison to schools with a lower number of students involved in the arts, an average of 94.1%. The change in percentage while it may be small, is often a key component for state funding, since schools with higher attendance rates receive more funding. (Chen, para. 11, 2022 & Scheuler, 2010). With continued involvement in art education, students develop and enhance critical thinking skills that improve their ability to read, write, and communicate effectively throughout their lives.

Despite the struggles within our district, our community is willing to support and help the school district in a variety of ways when invited into our schools or aware of the schools' needs. For this reason, I know that the community would donate their time and supplies necessary to help substitute expenses for art materials and support for the development of an after-school art program. To make a successful program for my district, we would have to adjust and modify the models shown through Boston and Chicago public schools. This could be accomplished by setting a set and consistent schedule in advance, such as one evening a week, or even a couple of weeks (14 days) in the summer. The art curriculum for the initial after-school program should be well organized with lessons specific to student needs and interests, while also incorporating STEM and reading skills. Lessons could follow a simple structure of distributing and acquiring supplies, review of tasks, time to practice, present main idea through visuals and demonstrations, student time on task, and ending with connections to history and their lives. Partnerships for the program would be established by inviting members of the community to share their talents and skillsets in the classroom learning environment. As the progress of the program gained stamina and interest, zoom calls could be established with willing artists from anywhere in the world. By developing an after-school program with this initial model and structure, our students'

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

relationship to and with the school and community would improve and flourish. Thus, encouraging their understanding of the world around them.

The arts are an invaluable academic subject, providing growth, lessons, and opportunities to students. The arts through small differences, learning to work from mistakes, repetition, and practice have large effects on students and their creative and cognitive abilities. The arts have a positive impact on school culture, providing a source of motivation, improve moral, attitudes, and promote better attendance (Americans for the Arts, 2013). Research has shown that a well-developed and consistent art education, or an after-school art program can improve student attendance, student behavior, testing abilities, and further the development of applicable skills necessary for adulthood. When there is consistency in the development of specialized art content that is specifically designed to each school or program's needs, such conditions provide a safe learning environment for students, especially students of minorities, economically challenged, and student with IEP's. An effective and consistent art education program tailored to the specific needs of the school or district results in a positive impact on student attendance, student and parental engagement, social, emotional, and personal developmental gains (CAPE, p.5, 2008). Therefore, the implementation of an after-school art program would benefit the students and the community of Chase Kansas, and other districts with similar demographics.

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

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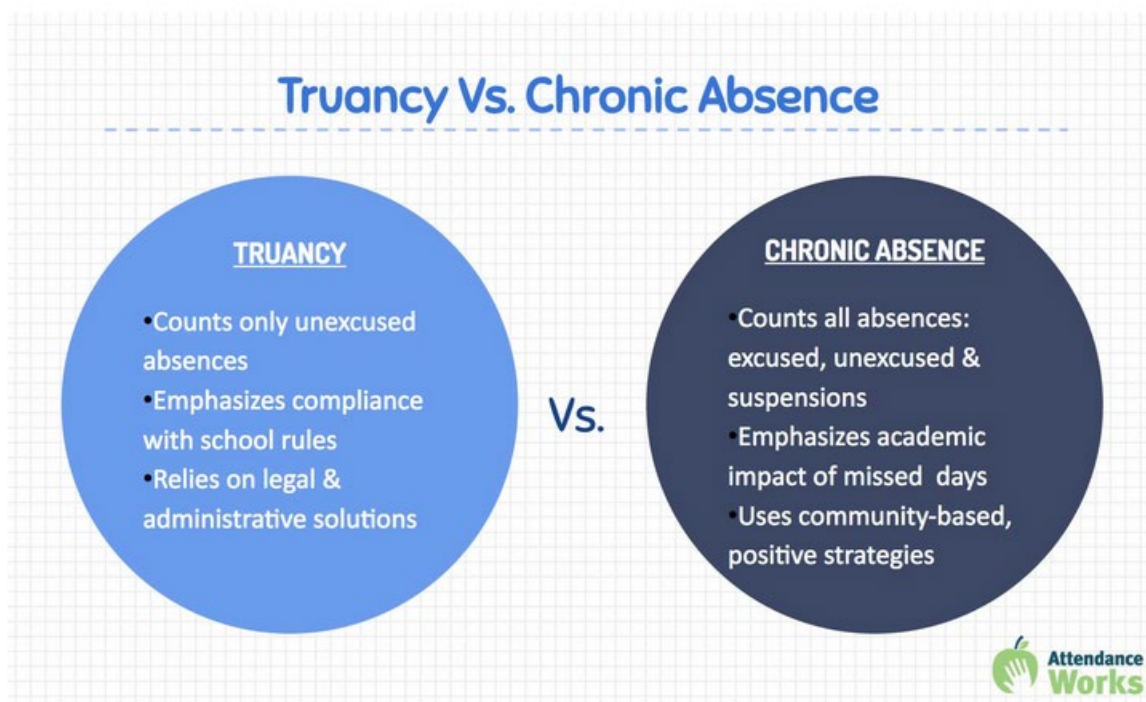
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Appendix A: Facts & Figures**Figure 2.1***Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence*

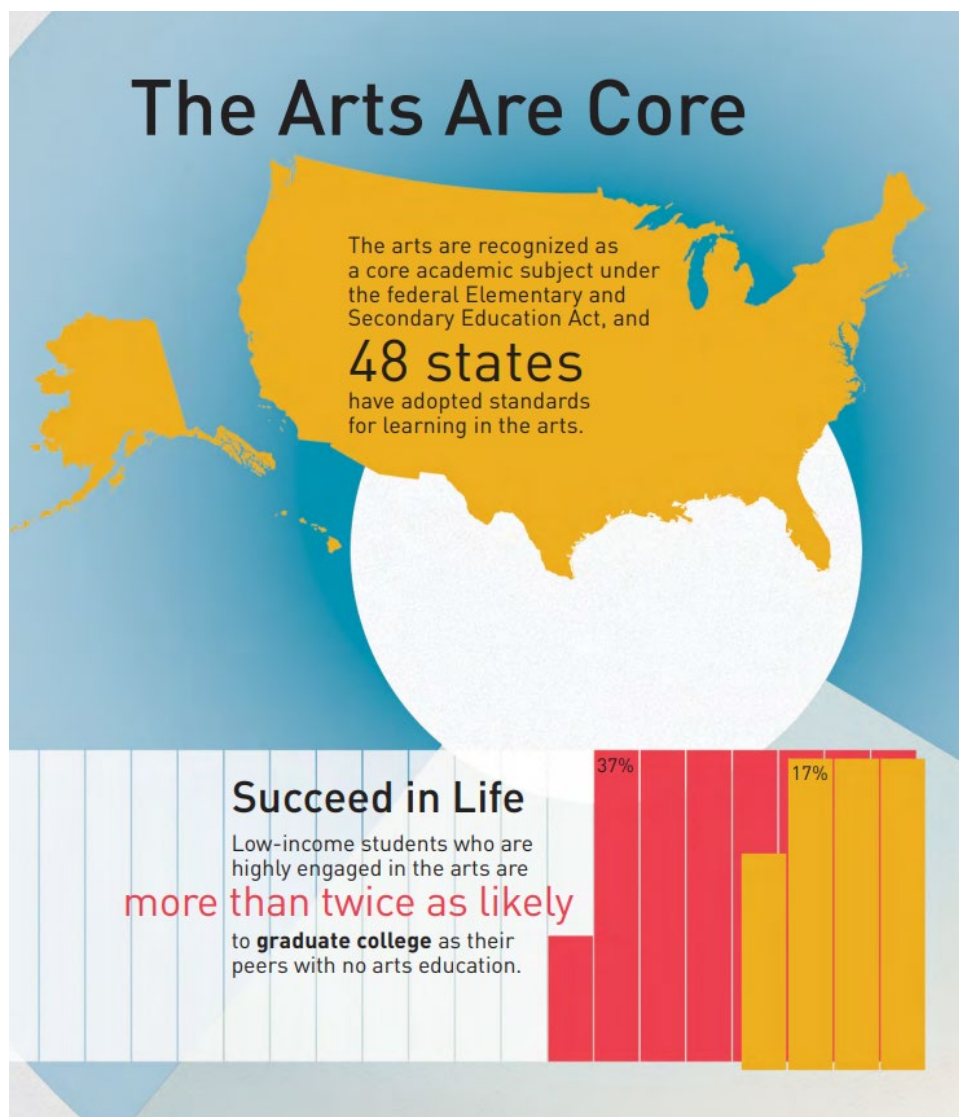
ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Figure 4.1

Impact of Chronic Absenteeism

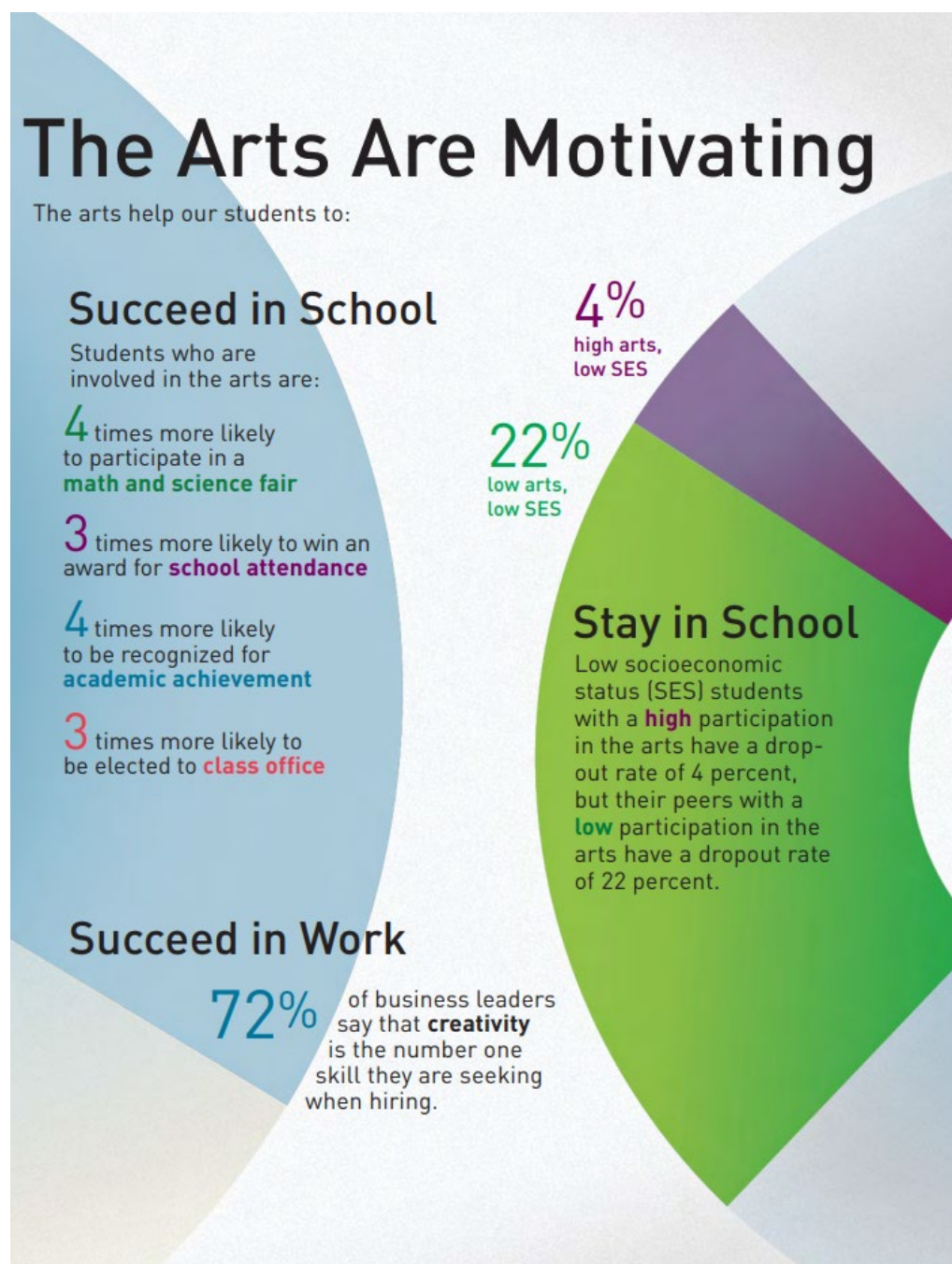
	Chronic absenteeism may prevent children from reaching early learning milestones.	Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are <u>much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade</u> . Students who cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade are <u>four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school</u> .
	Irregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out before graduation than test scores.	A study of public school students in <u>Utah</u> found that an incidence of chronic absenteeism in even a single year between 8th and 12th grade was associated with a seven-fold increase in the likelihood of dropping out.
	Frequent absences from school can shape adulthood.	High school dropout, which chronically absent students are more likely to experience, has been linked to poor outcomes later in life, from poverty and <u>diminished health</u> to <u>involvement in the criminal justice system</u> .

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Figure 4.2*The Arts Are Core*

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

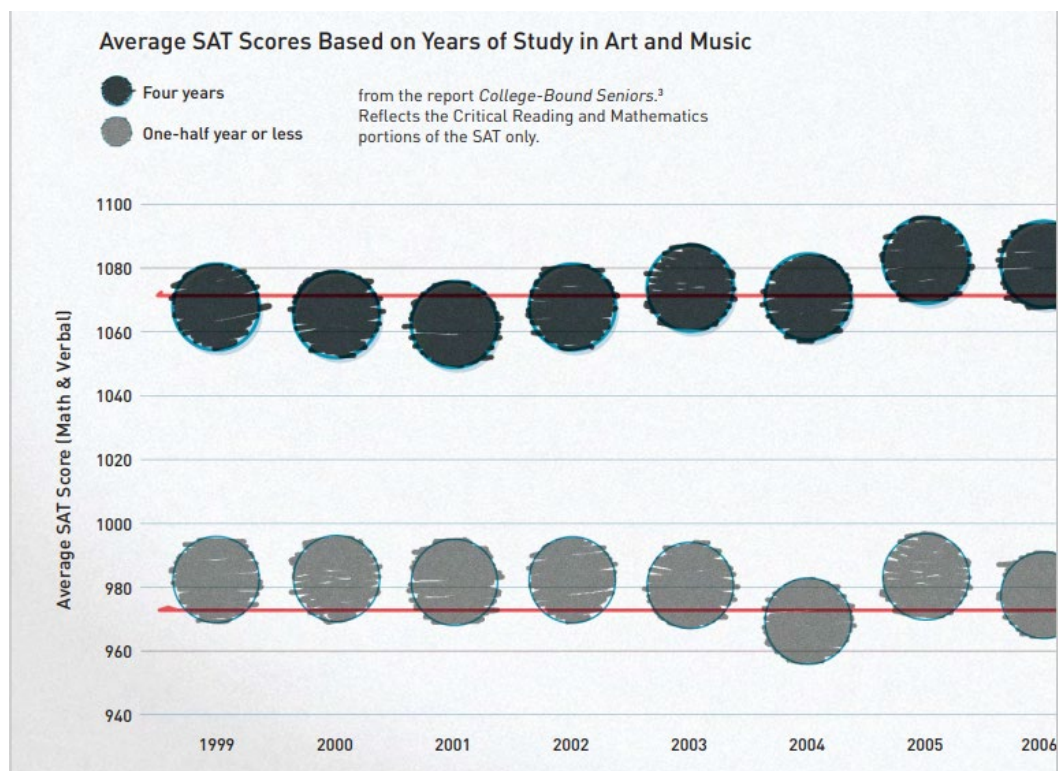
Figure 4.3

The Arts are Motivating

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Figure 4.4

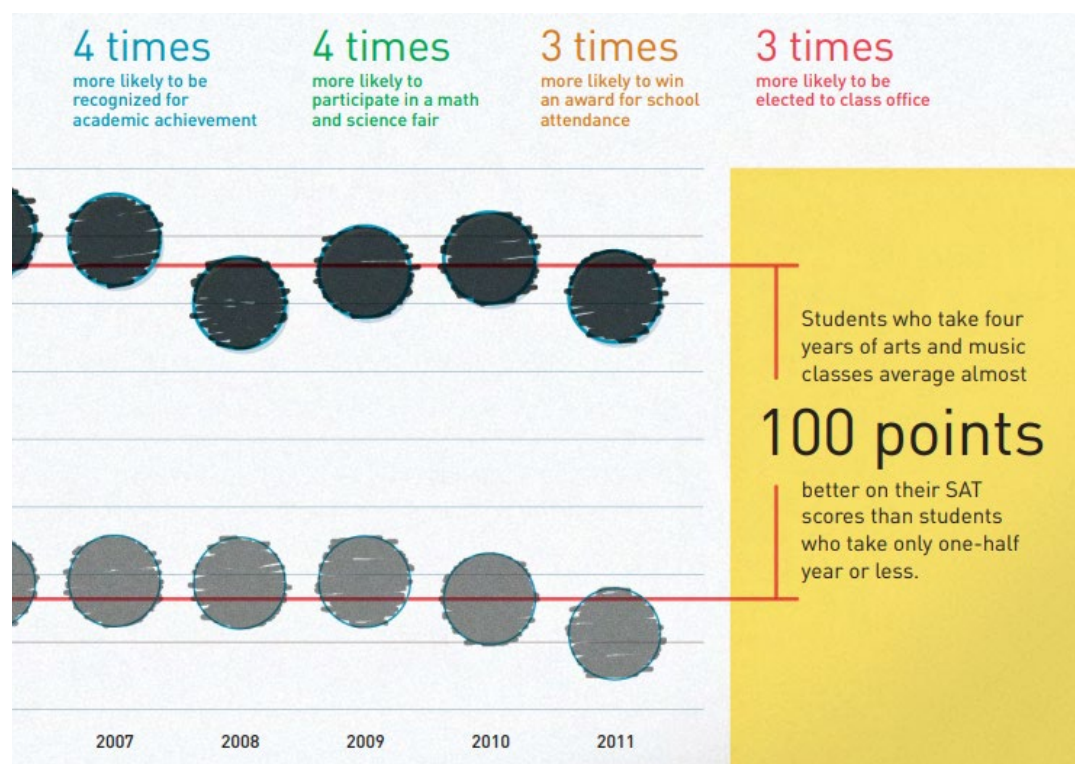
Average SAT Scores Based on Years of Study in Art and Music (Part 1)



ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Figure 4.5

Average SAT Scores Based on Years of Study in Art and Music (Part 2)



ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Figure 4.6*Succeed in Life*

ABSENTEEISM AND ART EDUCATION

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

Benefits of an art education:

Question 1: According to you, what are some benefits of art education?

Question 2: At your time at Chase, have you seen these benefits reflected in your students? If so, how?

Question 3: Why does participation in the arts and art programs make for better students?

After-school program experience:

Question 4: Have you instructed an after-school program?

Question 5: What are the benefits of after-school programs?

Question 6: What benefits have you seen in your students' behavior who have attended after-school programs?

Question 7: Do you feel an after-school art program would benefit our students here in Chase?

Complications and challenges of implantation of an after-school program

Question 8: What complications do you see arising with the implementation of an after-school art program?

Question 9: What are some challenges you feel our district struggles with that an after-school program would help address?