



# CHOICES in EDUCATION

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PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Encouraging creativity and imagination across all disciplines can help shine light on new concepts and help students discover connections and innovative ideas.

## CREATIVE STUDIES

# The many benefits of arts education

Why does art matter? This is a question that has given philosophers and artists food for thought for centuries. It's also been a leading question in many school districts when budget cuts have forced school administrators to put various curricula on the chopping block.

Very often arts programs are the first to be cut. From their earliest years, many children communicate and learn through artistic expression. Songs help them learn words and repetition to develop speech and reading skills. Drawing, painting and crafting helps to solidify motor skills.

Though 88% of Americans consider the arts part of a well-rounded education, an American for the Arts public opinion survey found that the percentage of students receiving arts education has

**Seeking to improve performance in reading and math may be as simple as including arts education. Researchers from the Johns Hopkins University School of Education say that instruction becomes more effective when educators integrate creative activities.**

shrunk dramatically over the last few decades.

Houston's Arts Access Initiative, in conjunction with Houston Education Research Consortiums, found a substantial increase in arts educational experiences had remarkable effects on students' academic, social and emotional outcomes. Students who participated in arts education experienced a 3.6% reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13% of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and an increase of 8% of a standard deviation in students' compassion for others. Compassion translated into wanting to help people who were treated badly and being more conscious of how other people feel.

The Nation's Report Card, the largest ongoing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do, shows that American students continue to score lower than many of their peers in Europe and Asia. Seeking to improve performance in reading and math may be as simple as including arts education. Researchers from the Johns Hopkins University School of Education say that instruction becomes more effective when educators integrate creative activities.

Encouraging creativity and imagination across all disciplines can help shine light on new concepts and help students discover connections and innovative ideas. To bolster support of

arts in the classroom, parents and educators can point out the following benefits of arts education:

- Increases creativity. The arts let students express themselves in different ways and offer outlets for all types of skills.

- Improves academic performance. A report by Americans for the Arts indicates young people who regularly participate in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement than non-participants.

- Develops motor skills. Arts helps foster motor skills, which are essential for writing letters and words, playing musical instruments, using paintbrushes, and much more.

- Helps one appreciate numeracy. Art involves patterns and problem solving. Learning these skills translates into many different disciplines, including mathematics.

- May accelerate brain development. Bright Horizons, a U.S.-based child care provider, reports learning to play an instrument has been found to improve mathematical learning, boost memory and lead to improved academic scores.

The benefits of arts in the classroom cannot be ignored. The arts encourage students to utilize many skills that translate to various subjects.

*Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



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## CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE

# How to help students improve their focus on their studies



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Various studies have found that periodic breaks improve mood, boost performance and increase a person's ability to concentrate and pay attention.

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Teachers strive to create supportive and challenging classroom environments for their students. Such settings can bring out the best in students and help them overcome obstacles, including an inability to focus.

The struggles students can have with focusing on their studies was apparent during the pandemic. A 2020 survey of more than 400 college students found that 64% were concerned about their ability to maintain their focus and discipline in remote instructional environments. Though educators, students and parents are hopeful that remote learning will soon be a thing of the past, no one is certain about what lies ahead for the rest of the 2021-22 school year. Ideally, students will remain in school full-time five days per week by the start of the new academic year. But even still, many students may need help focusing on their studies af-

ter a very unusual school year.

- **Emphasize one activity at a time.** Various studies have shown that multitasking adversely affects performance and makes it hard to concentrate. A recent study from researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that performing two or three activities simultaneously puts significantly more demand on the brain than simply doing those tasks one after another. All students, and especially those who are struggling with focus, should be encouraged to take on one task at a time.

- **Take breaks.** The Cleveland Clinic notes that various studies have found that periodic breaks improve mood, boost performance and increase a person's ability to concentrate and pay attention. Many students are well acquainted with lengthy cramming sessions on the eve of a big exam, which can feel like

a rite of passage for high schoolers and college students. Parents and educators can emphasize the importance of taking breaks during such sessions and how periodic rest can help improve performance.

- **Take a piecemeal approach to big tasks.** The Child Mind Institute notes that breaking big tasks down into smaller, more manageable pieces can help kids effectively tackle more challenging tasks. The piecemeal approach can make big tasks seem less daunting, and the success kids have at each smaller task can provide some needed momentum as they draw closer to solving the problem. Many students struggle to focus on their studies. Some simple strategies can help students overcome such challenges and fulfill their academic potential.

*Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



Various studies have shown that multitasking adversely affects performance and makes it hard to concentrate.



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## FOSTERING EDUCATION

# How to get kids excited about learning

Pre-K learning is fundamental, giving children the skills they will need to thrive in school and beyond. But sometimes kids need more encouragement to get excited about learning. Here are some tools and strategies that can help:

## Smart Screen Time

The plug-and-play TV video game LeapLand Adventures from LeapFrog is a great example of how learning video games can add value to your child's screen time. But it's not just educational, it's also fun. Players hunt for keys to unlock the Clever Castle, and along the way, learn letters, numbers, shapes and colors. A great tool for early learners, kids can choose be-

tween two characters to explore Letterland, Numbertown, Shapetown and Color Springs. Players can also explore more than 150 learning items at their own pace by playing the educational content directly in the Learning Center. With no web connection, downloads or account setup required, kids can start playing — and learning — right away. To get started, insert the plug-and-play HDMI game stick and USB power cable into the television and play using the wireless controller.

## New Adventures

Visit a petting zoo. Explore a botanical garden. Attend a free outdoor concert. Try a food from another culture's cuisine. Kids



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Kids learn best when they are exposed to new sights, sounds and ideas, so build time into your schedule to try activities with your child that will bring to life what they have learned in the classroom.

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## Learning is Fun

With the right tools, you can get kids excited about learning. One interactive, portable system to try is the LeapStart Learning Success Bundle, which grows with your child us-

ing touch-and-talk pages and features games, puzzles and creative challenges to help kids build math, reading and problem-solving skills. Many activities have two levels with over 50 key skills per grade level, so kids can play and learn at the right level and move up when they're ready. Included books are preloaded, one of which is "The Go! Go! Cory Carson Cory Carson Superhero School Book," based on the popular animated series. And an expansive library of books (sold separately) are compatible with the system, covering a variety of preschool through first grade subjects. The easy-to-hold stylus is comfortable for kids of all ages, promotes proper writ-

ing grip and neatly clicks into the cover for storage. A computer with an internet connection is required to load book content onto the LeapStart system.

## Social Hour

Pre-K learning is not all about academics. Kids also acquire valuable social skills like cooperation, communication, sharing and more. Whether it's with play dates or the playground, be sure to give your child plenty of opportunities to flex these valuable life skills beyond the preschool classroom.

For more inspiration and educational tools, visit [leapfrog.com/en-us/home](http://leapfrog.com/en-us/home).

*Story courtesy of StatePoint Media*



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## ACADEMICS

# Establishing a well-rounded school resume

A quality education is priceless. Lessons learned in the classroom are vital to students' long-term success, serving as a foundation as young adults transition from the role of student to professional.

An academic resume is a great vehicle for young people to illustrate how well-rounded their educational experiences have been. Such resumes also give college admissions departments a snapshot of students' accomplishments, hobbies and extracurricular activities. In fact, the National Society of High School Scholars says there are certain criteria that colleges and trade schools look for in students — and things graduate schools may look for in university students who hope to do postgraduate work. Recognizing these attributes can help students better prioritize their time as they look to build strong resumes.

- **Grade point average.** The NSHSS says some colleges will recalculate students' GPAs based only on core subjects, such as math, language arts, social studies, science, and foreign languages. It is essential to do well in these core subjects.

- **Advanced placement classes.** Many schools weigh honors or AP classes more heavily toward GPA or acceptance requirements due to their rigor. AP courses often translate directly into college credits, which can make them even more valuable to high school students.

- **Extracurricular activities.** Schools and even future employers look at more than just test scores and GPAs. In a competitive admissions climate, colleges will weigh the entire picture of a student. Someone who was heavily involved in sports, clubs and peer-run groups like scouting organizations may find that such participation is what sets them apart from other applicants. Pick extracurricular activities that align with passions rather than just ones that will look good on a resume. According to Christine Chu, a premier college counselor at IvyWise, a New York-based education consulting company, students who demonstrate grit, authenticity and integrity stand out.

- **Well-crafted essay writing.** Essays give students an opportunity to tell their unique stories in ways a resume cannot. An essay should be highly personal and thoughtful, and also present students as a real person. Students should write essays even when they are optional, as the essay can be a window into what makes applicants tick. It is important for students to continually hone their essay-writing skills, which they can ultimately utilize to make a strong impression with university admissions departments.

- **Depth, not breadth, of experience.** Students should focus their passions on a few select activities over widespread participation in many different ones. Activities that carry over into academic focus and a future major may be especially valuable. It's never too early for students to start building their school resumes. Achievements in and out of the classroom can lay the groundwork for both short- and long-term success.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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## OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

# How your child's playtime can be a pathway to future success

What if your family's playtime was not just fun, but a pathway to future success? In a recent survey of parents conducted by OnePoll on behalf of The Genius of Play, a leading online hub of expert-based play ideas and resources for families, 87% of respondents said the skills they learned while playing as a child helped them achieve success in their adult careers.

Those skills, according to survey respondents, include creativity, teamwork, problem-solving, empathy and communication, all of which are highly valued across many different industries and careers.

For example, when it comes to careers in science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM), the ability to solve complex

problems and think outside the box are key to driving innovation. According to child development experts, play lays the foundation for these and many other skills, while helping kids discover real-world applications of STEAM early on.

"Play driven by curiosity and wonder presents endless possibilities for STEAM learning," says Anna Yudina, senior director of marketing initiatives at The Toy Association, which spearheads The Genius of Play. "While many STEAM concepts may seem intimidating and lack real-world relevance when taught in a formal classroom environment, play gives kids an opportunity to engage in free, hands-on, child-led exploration, igniting their natural curiosity and fueling the innovative thinking



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Children of all ages enjoy building, and it's the perfect way to strengthen fine motor skills while using one's imagination.

they'll need in future careers."

To combine fun with STEAM learning and practical skill-building, consider these playtime ideas from The Genius of Play that get the whole family in on the fun:

- **Build a car.** Find materials at home to create a car. For example, an empty juice carton can be turned into the car's body, and a spool of thread can serve as wheels and an axle. Now, work together to make the car move. Slide it down an

incline, push it by hand or attach a balloon and use air as a propellant. Design additional cars to see which goes fastest or farthest!

- **Make colorful bubbles.** Blowing bubbles is a great opportunity to apply STEAM concepts to play. In a container, combine 1½ cups of hot water, ¼ cup of light corn syrup, ¼ cup of dish soap and washable paint and fill a glass jar half full. Make a wand out of a pipe cleaner. Explore how different shape wands change the shape of the bubbles.

- **Create structures.** Children of all ages enjoy building, and it's the perfect way to strengthen fine motor skills while using one's imagination. Whether building a volcano or a house, design the plan on paper and tap into your collective cre-

ativity. Then, construct your design. You may need to make changes and that's okay. That's part of the engineering process.

- **Experiment with cabbage colors.** Cabbage have tubes called xylem that allow water to be pulled up into their leaves, and you can watch this phenomenon in action. Slice each cabbage at the stalk and place in a jar of dyed water (made with food coloring). Watch the cabbage change color from the bottom up. Take notes. What do you observe after one hour, one day and one week?

For more play ideas that encourage children to enhance their learning and build lifelong skills, visit [thegeniusofplay.org](http://thegeniusofplay.org).

*Story courtesy of StatePoint Media*

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## PHYSICAL EDUCATION



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Participating in sports can be highly beneficial for young people.

## 5 reasons to participate in scholastic sports

Many kids are introduced to sports at an early age. Though young children may enjoy the recreational aspect of playing sports, a serious passion for a particular sport may develop as children reach high school. Such passions can be encouraged, as participating in sports can be highly beneficial for young people.

**1** . Learn resilience. Compared to generations past, when children may have had jobs during the school year, today's children do not have many demands placed on them beyond schoolwork and maybe some light chores around the house. The average student may use sports as a way to learn about and overcome challenges. Participating in sports can teach kids how to recover from setbacks (being the losing team) or dealing with adverse situations (sports-related injuries).

**2** . Improve fitness. School sports require ongoing physical activity, which is advantageous to children in an age when lifestyles are increasingly sedentary. A report from the National Federation of State High School Associations found that when female students are given more opportunity to engage in athletics in high school, their weight and

body mass improve. School sports can help students overcome the negatives of sedentary lifestyles.

**3** . Relieve stress. Exercise in any shape or form can help relieve stress. The camaraderie that develops within a team setting also can boost self-esteem and help some students overcome any feelings of isolation they may confront during adolescence.

**4** . Boost brainpower. School sports may work the body but they also benefit the brain. A report from the Institute of Medicine indicates children who are physically active show greater attention, have faster cognitive processing speed and perform better on academic tests than those who are sedentary.

**5** . Develop confidence and leadership skills. A study from Cornell University says teens who played sports developed stronger leadership skills and developed better confidence. That can work in a team or solitary setting, and translate into skills that serve a person well throughout life.

*Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



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