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Visual Arts Education for Grades 6-12 in Arkansas and Its Changes Since the Twentieth Century

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VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION FOR GRADES 6-12 IN ARKANSAS AND ITS CHANGES
SINCE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Senior Thesis

Spring 2019

The field of education in the United States has changed greatly in many ways since its foundation. No longer do students meet in small log cabins with all ages together to learn the basics of a few practical subjects before returning to regular life. The federal government seeks to provide consistently updated standards for how children of all ages should be instructed and have frequently modernized the education system. From creating mandated subjects of learning, such as math, science, reading, writing, foreign languages, and art, raising teacher salaries, and instigating assessments to ensure complete subject literacy, America has shown in many ways that it values education. However, the push for reform concerning STEM education, which stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, grossly outweighs the support for art education, specifically in the visual arts.

State governments also have a part in ensuring the proper education of their young citizens. In the state of Arkansas, the Department of Education, and more specifically the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, has done an excellent job at restructuring its curriculum support and standards for art education regarding content and literacy through the years, but needs to reconsider the number of fine arts credits, specifically in the visual arts, required for grades 6-12. The push for STEM-focused education is important but should not occur at the expense of art education.

The Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Vision for Excellence in Education is "transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education," their mission is to provide "leadership, support, and service to schools, districts, and communities so every student graduates prepared for college, career, and community engagement," and their goals include "prepared graduates, student growth, personal competencies, student success, and customer service." In order to accomplish these goals, the department includes many divisions,

such as Legal, Communications, Research and Technology, and Learning Services. The latter is “a team of professionals, within the Arkansas DESE, who support quality performance for all students and share a common vision for education in Arkansas.”¹

The Division of Learning Services supports DESE’s vision by restructuring its already existing support systems. A recent change of this type was achieved by creating the area of Curriculum Support. Containing three units: Humanities, Literacy, and STEM, which stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, Curriculum Support seeks to increase the amount of support dedicated for each of these fields. Before the restructuring, these units were known as the Curriculum and Instruction Unit. Each unit will “oversee standards and course development, professional development, alignment with Arkansas Department of Career Education, state-funded specialists, and other state level support structures surrounding education and policy in the unit’s respective content areas.”²

The Humanities unit includes English language arts, fine arts, health and physical education, library media services, social studies, and world languages, and the fine arts include dance, theater, music, and visual arts.³ The DESE in Arkansas maintains that the engagement in artistic processes created by the fine arts sub-unit “allows Arkansas students to develop and realize their creative potential, explore other times and cultures, think critically and creatively, and enjoy a satisfying lifetime of artistic practices.”⁴ Seeking to prepare students fully for college, their future careers, and their eventual civic engagement, the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education guides students on a path toward artistic literacy “by providing rigorous

¹ “Learning Services,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/>.

² “Curriculum Support,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/>.

³ “Humanities,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/humanities/>.

⁴ “Fine Arts,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/humanities/fine-arts/>.

academic standards in the arts, ongoing training and support for arts educators, and opportunities for collaboration with community artists and arts organizations.” Their goal is to make sure that every student in Arkansas receives a well-rounded education that includes high-quality arts learning experiences.⁵

In 1966, Arkansas formed a committee to research the importance of visual arts in public school education programs. Stating that “this complex, swiftly moving world in which we live demands the full development of *all* human potentialities, not only for the adjustment of the individual to this society but also for his very survival,” the committee recognized a lack of adequate teaching of the visual arts in most schools, discovered a deep conviction that experiences in the visual arts were crucial to the education of every child in the state, and sought to create a framework by which educators could develop their own visual arts education programs.⁶

“Art, in its broadest sense,” they write, “is a way of life, of experiencing life in its fullest dimensions.” Since the arts encompass so many facets, why focus on making visual art part of every school? The powerful effects of visual art on a child can cause almost incalculable contributions to their emotional, creative, and intellectual growth. “Visual art education,” the guide goes on to say, “gives each student an opportunity to use the imaginative, creative approach to many different experiences and then helps him to use with ease and skill the language of the visual arts in order to give this imaginative approach form and meaning.”

⁵ “Fine Arts,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/humanities/fine-arts>.

⁶ “A Guide to Art Education in the Elementary Schools of Arkansas.” (Little Rock: Arkansas Department of Education Division of Instructional Services, 1967), 7.

Reaching back to antiquity, the visual arts as a discipline have existed and served society by teaching students of art about themselves and how to express themselves through art media.⁷

In 1988, the Arkansas Business Council Foundation released a series of recommendations to bolster the Arkansas education system. Worried that many Arkansans were “functionally illiterate,” despite the 1983 legislature that raised the state sales tax to implement higher school standards, the foundation counselled that “a bold attack was the state’s best defense.”⁸ The committees involved argued that while more schools than ever were offering computer science, advanced math, chemistry, physics, foreign language, and votech (short for vocational-technical) classes, Arkansas was still at risk as “the level of skills required to function competently in an ever more complex society” was rising.⁹

Recommending changes in the areas of Curriculum, Teacher Credentialing and Pay, Accountability, Educational Research and Planning, and Business Support, the Arkansas Business Council Foundation suggested that the standards for education should be considered as minimum requirements rather than completely effective. While not mentioning a change to art education standards directly, they did suggest that Arkansas’ education standards should be evaluated and updated frequently, in comparison with nearby states and specifically with the James Madison High School curricula, which required one semester each of art and music education in high school.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid, 8.

⁸ “In Pursuit of Excellence: Recommendations for Reform of Education in Arkansas from the Arkansas Business Council Foundation. (Little Rock: Arkansas Business Council Foundation, 1988) 25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 27.

In 2014, Arkansas' Division of Elementary and Secondary Education changed the Fine Arts Curriculum Framework, updating the content standards and literacy standards for visual arts, theater, music, and dance from the 2008 standards. The crucial differences are listed in Table 1.

2008	2014
All disciplines and courses have different strands and content standards.	All disciplines and courses share four strands and eleven content standards, which reflect the organization of the new national arts standards.
Survey of Fine Arts includes both music and visual art standards and provides a 0.5 credit, entry level course.	SFA will be replaced by an appreciation course in each of the four arts disciplines to give students more choices at the entry level and a full semester of the discipline chosen. This will allow for more depth of content.
Fine Arts K-8 contains both music and visual art standards. Visual Art strands include Foundations, Creative Processes, and Reflections and Responses.	Visual Art K-8 is separate from music framework. Strands include Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting.
Visual Art I-IV contains only four levels of general art instruction.	Visual Art I-IV contains four levels of general art instruction as well as appendices for Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking. Some of these have prerequisites and multiple levels but all are separate courses with their own course codes. This provides a wider variety of entry-level courses for students.
Art History I and II are organized by time periods and AHI is the prerequisite for AHII.	Although the time periods are the same for 2014 Art History courses, the content is organized into Responding and Connecting strands. The I and II have been removed from the

	titles because the early history course is no longer a prerequisite for the more contemporary history course.
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Table 1¹¹

The classes available in visual arts are Visual Art Appreciation, Visual Art K-8, Visual Art I-IV, Studio Art 2-D, Studio 3-D, Art History Prehistoric to Renaissance, and Art History Baroque to Post Modern, and each have specific requirements to fulfill the content standards.¹²

Visual Art Appreciation is a one-semester course designed to develop perceptual awareness and aesthetic sensitivity, as well as a foundation for a lifelong relationship with the arts. Students will learn the elements of art and principles of design; explore the basic processes, materials, and inherent qualities of visual art; examine a broad range of methods; conduct critical analyses of the creative processes involved in the various art forms; and reflect on the connections between society and visual art.

The Arkansas Visual Art K-8 Framework provides a standards-based, rigorous approach to teaching the visual art. It gives Arkansas students the opportunity to delve deeply into visual art, while giving their teachers the latitude to create an instructional program that demonstrates student learning over time in varied dimensions. The framework supports multiple modes of learning and assessment for the diverse needs of students.

Visual Art I-IV are two-semester courses designed to teach students to apply the elements of art and the principles of design. Students are expected to use a variety of media, techniques, processes, and tools to create original artwork that demonstrates understanding of aesthetic concerns and complex compositions. These basic concepts are introduced at the Visual Art I level. As students progress through each course, they will develop, expand, and increase their real life application of problem solving through artistic maturation. Students will create, critique, reflect, and make connections to art. Students will exhibit original artwork and develop portfolios that reflect their personal growth.

Studio Art 2-D is a one-semester course designed for students who have successfully completed Art I. Studio Art 2-D is a course in which students further explore, apply, and move toward mastery of the elements of art and principles of design in specific areas of

¹¹ "Overview of the Changes in 2014 Fine Arts Curriculum Framework," Arkansas Department of Education.

¹² "Fine Arts," <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/humanities/fine-arts/>.

art, such as painting, drawing, printmaking, digital art, photography, mixed media, surface design, or other 2-D media. Student art will demonstrate evidence of complex problem-solving skills, higher order thinking, risk taking, imagination, and innovation. Students will exhibit art and will assemble portfolios that reflect personal growth in media, techniques, processes, and tools used to create complex 2-D compositions. Student compositions will cover a breadth of media and subject matter and will demonstrate successful completion of Studio Art 2-D student learning expectations.

Studio Art 3-D is a one-semester course designed for students who have successfully completed Art I. Studio Art 3-D is a course in which students further explore, apply, and move toward mastery of the elements of art and principles of design in specific areas of art, such as ceramics, jewelry, mosaics, fiber arts, sculptures, mixed media, altered books, or other 3-D media. Student art will demonstrate evidence of complex problem-solving skills, higher order thinking, risk taking, imagination, and innovation. Students will exhibit art and will assemble portfolios that reflect personal growth in the media, techniques, process, and tools used to create complex 3-D compositions. Student compositions will cover a breadth of media and subject matter and will demonstrate successful completion of Studio Art 3-D student learning expectations.

Art History (Prehistoric to Renaissance) is a one-semester course designed to teach students the significance of art throughout history. Students in Art History (Prehistoric to Renaissance) will examine periods of art history from around the world, with emphasis on art from ancient civilizations, classic civilizations, the Middle Ages, and the Early and High Renaissance. Students will examine characteristics of art including themes, artists, major works of art, media, and processes involved in creating works of art that is unique to each period of art; explore societal influences on art from each period and the impact art from each period has had on society; apply basic terminology and higher-order thinking skills and draw inferences from works of art and artists from each period of art history.

Art History (Baroque to Postmodern) is a one-semester course designed to teach students the significance of art throughout history. Students in Art History (Baroque to Postmodern) will examine periods of art history from around the world, with emphasis on Baroque, Rococo, Pre-Modern, Modern, and Postmodern art. Students will examine characteristics of art including themes, artists, major artworks, media, and processes involved in creating artwork that is unique to each period of art. Students will explore societal influences on art from each period, and the impact art from each period has had on society. Additionally, students will apply basic terminology and higher-order thinking skills and draw inferences from artwork and artists from each period of art history.¹³

The public schools in Arkansas answer and report to the state government and the Arkansas Department of Education, directly applying the content and literacy standards for fine

¹³ "Fine Arts Standards and Courses," <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-support/humanities/fine-arts/fine-arts-standards-and-courses/>.

arts, among other school subjects. However, there are many other types of schools in Arkansas. Private schools, charter schools, and home schools are all free to interpret the fine arts standards as they wish, as long as they meet the minimum graduation requirements. Some choose to have stricter graduation requirements. Pulaski Academy, Baptist Preparatory School, and Central Arkansas Central are three examples of private schools in Arkansas. Lisa Academy, Haas Hall Academy, and eSTEM Charter are charter schools in the area. Also, homeschooling is an option in Arkansas of which many families take advantage. Each family will choose to homeschool their children differently, and no matter how they approach education in the home, there are many co-operatives in Arkansas that provide opportunities for home schoolers to take classes and participate in other activities outside of the home. Home Educators of Greater Little Rock, also known as Home Ed, is a widespread resource for finding these opportunities.

Pulaski Academy is an independent, non-sectarian school for boys and girls two and a half years old through 12th grade. They believe “the balance of academics and arts prepare our students for high school and college as well as real-world experiences.” In their Middle School, art electives are available for grades 6-8, but in the Upper School, or High School, one fine arts credit is required for graduation. They offer the electives of Art I, Art II, Art III, AP Studio Art, Art Through the Ages, AP Art History, Sculpture, Contemporary Mixed Media, and Community and Public Arts. Their course descriptions are similar to the Arkansas’ content standards, but with their own unique interpretations.¹⁴

Art I puts heavy emphasis on the elements and principles of design. Art history topics are infused with each project. Media explored in this course are: pencil and color pencil, watercolor, charcoal, collage, acrylics, printmaking, and textiles. Students will have the opportunity to participate and perform in cultural art projects and school community events.

¹⁴ “Pulaski Academy,” <https://www.pulaskiacademy.org/>.

Art II gives students more in-depth exposure to media used in Art I. New media introduced in this course include batik, acrylic paint, and printmaking among others. Emphasizing effective use of the elements and principles of design will continue with more individualized, personal opportunities for self-expression. In addition to class projects students are required to keep and maintain an art journal.

Art III is for students who want to prepare for AP Studio Art as well as advance their techniques and creativity in the visual arts. Assignments are more open-ended with more emphasis on creating art with personal meaning. New media introduced include oil paint and mixed media techniques. In addition to class projects students are required to keep and maintain an art journal.

Advanced Placement Studio Art requires the completion of a portfolio in either Drawing, 2-D Design, or 3-D Design (sculpture). The portfolio requirements are rigorous and require a considerable amount of time devoted to making art both in and outside of class. Portfolio requirements include 12 “breadth” projects showing students’ diverse artistic abilities and mastery in different media; and a “concentration” of 12 works developed around a personal theme. A brief writing about the concentration is sent in with the AP portfolio. In addition to class projects students are required to keep and maintain an art journal.

Art through the Ages is an introduction to the principles of design and elements of art with an emphasis on art history and ancient cultures throughout the ages. Students will have hands-on experience creating historical pieces of art through media and technique exploration in a studio setting. Serves as one fine art credit and is a prerequisite for AP Art History.

AP Art History is an introductory college course that will focus on the history of art, including basic information about artists, schools, movements and chronological periods, as well as the subject, styles, and techniques of particular works. Various field trips to museums and art galleries will be part of this course.

Sculpture is designed to introduce students to basic ceramic vocabulary, building/sculpting techniques, applied finishes, and principles of aesthetics. The class will look at both historical and current art practices for producing sculpture. Students will explore sculpting techniques using clay, wood, wire, paper, found objects, Styrofoam, and other material. Critical and creative thinking will be utilized and encouraged to solve logistical problems concerning design, size, placement, and materials.

Contemporary Mixed-Media will explore the new art mediums of the Twenty-first Century. Contemporary mixed-media will teach students how to work with a variety of materials including photography, installation art, environmental art, and performance art as well as more traditional materials. Students will be working with Mac technology in this course.

Community and Public Arts will explore how art can enrich communities and provide social change, and will be a combination of public service and art. Students will work together to meet specific community needs through a variety of art mediums. Students

who are involved in the Community and Public Arts course should have a heart for the public and want to make a positive change in their communities.¹⁵

Baptist Preparatory School, previously known as Arkansas Baptist and currently called Baptist Prep, is a Christian private school whose mission is “to glorify God by assisting families in the Christ-centered, biblically-directed education of their children.”¹⁶ Furthermore, their Visual Arts program seeks to give students a hands-on introduction to artistic media such as drawing, watercolor, acrylic/mixed media, sculpture, sewing/costume design, and stage design so that they may discover their “God-given potential as artists” through practical experience.¹⁷ Within the Visual Arts program is the Baptist Prep Digital Media & Print Department, which included digital photography, digital filmmaking, web design, and the creation of the school yearbook, which all teach students “to produce organic media content to develop their own portfolios as well as to create content for the school.”¹⁸

Digital Photography students learn how to shoot with DSLR cameras in manual mode. Students learn through hands-on projects that may include images for school sports teams, website, social media content, school portraits and documenting school events for the entire school year.

Digital Filmmaking students are molded into visual storytellers through learning the technical aspects of digital cameras as well as the artistic and creative process of producing video.

Web Design students learn skills to construct and develop websites using a collection of Web development platforms. Students learn Adobe Photoshop skills, gain an understanding of search engine optimization (SEO) and produce social media content.

Yearbook students serving in staff positions for our *Cornerstone* yearbook will develop skills in desktop publishing, layout and design, photography, journalistic writing and advertising. Throughout the year, students travel to attend conferences and compete in prestigious journalism contests.¹⁹

¹⁵ “Pulaski Academy Art Courses,” <https://www.pulaskiacademy.org/achieve/visual-arts/>.

¹⁶ “Arkansas Baptist,” <https://www.baptistprep.org/>.

¹⁷ “Visual Arts,” <https://www.baptistprep.org/visual-arts/>.

¹⁸ “Digital and Print Media,” <https://www.baptistprep.org/digital-print-media/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Central Arkansas Christian School is a private school whose mission is “to partner with parents to provide a distinctively Christian education that inspires excellence, independence, and a transforming faith in God.” Prominently featured on their website, Central Arkansas Christian is “proud to offer a robust and active Fine Arts program.” It continues to praise their art department, saying, “with diverse opportunities for involvement in choir, drama, band and visual arts, students of all ages are encouraged to develop skills in a variety of areas.”²⁰ Their mission for their Fine Arts is striving “to cultivate a well-rounded community by providing space for self-expression and self-fulfillment. At the core of each of our student organizations is a strong spiritual life that molds the school’s activities and inspires our students to bond together and to perform to their greatest ability for the glory of God.”²¹

Beginning in elementary school, students experience a variety of art lessons based on different subjects. Students are introduced to a wide range of art techniques, artists, and vocabulary while gaining an appreciation of the arts. Secondary students have the opportunity to participate in Art I and Advanced art classes. Students in Art I study drawing in the fall and painting in the spring. The Advanced Art classes consist of the study of art elements and principles. During the course, they learn about a variety of media techniques, artists and art genres.

The three previously discussed private schools in Arkansas all offer many ways to study and get involved in the arts. Not only do they provide these opportunities, but they boast proudly of them on their websites and consider them to be important assets to their schools.

²⁰ “Central Arkansas Central,” <https://www.cacmustangs.org/>.

²¹ “Fine Arts,” <https://www.cacmustangs.org/fine-arts/>.

LISA Academy is a charter school in Arkansas that seeks to provide “an academically rigorous college preparatory program...and guide all students in gaining knowledge, skills, and the attitude necessary to direct their lives, improve a diverse society, and excel in a changing world by providing dynamic, resource-rich learning environments.”²² Being a STEM-focused school, LISA Academy’s curriculum website boasts English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Computer Science, but no references to visual arts. However, they do offer music and theater classes.

Like LISA Academy, Haas Hall Academy is a charter school in Arkansas. With small classes that allow for more interaction between students and teachers, Haas Hall also provides an accelerated curriculum “that is immersed in technology and individualized to each scholar’s unique course of study.”²³ Haas Hall’s Visual Arts program caters to students of all levels from beginner to advanced with “hands-on exploration in painting, sculpture and drawing as well as in-depth classes in art history.” Outside the classroom, students “engage with creative professionals and visit local artists in their studios, explore museums and galleries, and participating [sic] in community projects” to encourage a rich appreciation of the arts.²⁴

Another charter school, eSTEM’s name is derived from the acronym that expresses the importance of the sciences, but includes “economics” as well to represent what they call the “five pillars of a 21st century educational experience...[that] serve as the foundation for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary educational approach for all students.”²⁵ Their mission according to their website “is to develop students who are critical thinkers, problem solvers and

²² “LISA Academy,” <https://sites.google.com/lisaacademy.org/curriculum/home>

²³ “Haas Hall,” <https://www.haashall.org/>.

²⁴ “Visual Arts,” <https://www.haashall.org/student-life/culture/arts/>.

²⁵ “eSTEM Charter,” <https://www.estemschools.org/>.

collaborative members of a learning community and society [by encouraging] students to be risk takers and enthusiastic life-long learners who are versed in engineering, science, technology, economics, math and literacy.” While eSTEM’s website doesn’t include any information concerning any fine art classes, the faculty directory lists one art teacher and one music teacher.

Two of the three charter schools mentioned, LISA Academy and eSTEM, focus heavily on STEM studies, to the unfortunate detriment of arts education. Another method of education in Arkansas is homeschooling, which allows for a large amount of personalization of curricula for each family. Some choose to create their own lesson plans, others buy pre-made curricula for each subject or for all disciplines combined, and others rely on local teaching co-operatives among homeschooling parents to supplement their own personal involvement.

Home Educators of Greater Little Rock is a local support group for homeschoolers in the Little Rock. Their group is currently comprised of over 365 families, which makes it the largest local homeschool group in Central Arkansas. Beginning in 1985, when homeschooling became legal in Arkansas, Home Ed’s goal “is to serve as advocates for homeschooling in providing encouragement, organizing helpful events, and communication through up-to-date website, meetings, and weekly email updates.” Completely run by volunteers, Home Ed offers support to homeschool parents with information and connection opportunities for socialization such as parent support meetings, roller skating nights, group attendance at local theater productions, field trips, Homecoming dances, Junior-Senior Prom, a graduation ceremony, and other events and small groups based on interest and leadership.²⁶

²⁶ “Home Educators of Greater Little Rock,” <https://www.homeedonline.com/>.

Little Rock Homeschool Academy, Communication Central, and HOPE Co-op are three homeschool co-ops that exist under the organizational leadership of Home Ed. A once a week learning opportunity, LRHA “provides supplemental education for homeschool students in grades K-12.” Their twofold goal is to provide educational and social enrichment for homeschool students and provide a day off for the parents. LRHA offers an art class for grades 6-8. For high school, it currently offers Art, Upcycling Crafts, and Calligraphy classes. Communication Central currently offers no fine arts classes, visual or otherwise. And lastly, HOPE Co-op offers one visual art class for high schoolers.²⁷

A second aspect to homeschooling in Arkansas is The Education Alliance, which is a division of Family Council. A conservative research and educational organization based in Little Rock, Family Council was established in 1989 in association with Focus on the Family and Dr. James Dobson to uphold traditional values in accordance with biblical principles. Many families who choose to homeschool do so in part because of their religious beliefs.²⁸

The Home School Office, established in October 1999, promotes collaboration between home school parents, public schools and the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education within the Arkansas Department of Education. Mainly, the Home School Office makes available “information and technical assistance on laws and regulations governing home schools to all interested persons” including the state content and literacy standards for visual arts education in the area.²⁹

²⁷ “Little Rock Home School Academy,” <https://www.mylrha.com/>.

²⁸ “Education Alliance,” <https://arkansashomeschool.org/>.

²⁹ “Home School Office,” <http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/home-school>.

Emily Stern and Ruth Zealand write in *Starting Your Career in Art Education* that understanding education models of the past is crucial to teaching today. The components of art and artistic movements, such as religion, politics, and economic events, also affect how art is taught. From the Middle Ages to the 19th century, the atelier, a French word meaning workshop, was the main method of passing down instruction. In these workshops, apprentices would live and train with their masters in their trade, learning masonry, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, or whichever trade in which their master was proficient. The apprentices would create work under their master's eye and even under their name when it came to selling the work. Later, the instruction in trade became part of academics.³⁰

The earliest forms of education were considered privileges, not rights. The masses were uneducated in the 18th century, and even the children who had tutors, were tutored mainly in reading and mathematics. As Europeans came to America to practice their own religion and way of life, they were included in the education of the colonies, which mainly focused on hard skills such as farming and building. With time, more and more children were taught to read and do basic math.³¹

The Industrial Revolution changed many things, especially how goods were manufactured. The children not being trained in workshops were sent to mines, farms, or train yards to do manual labor. Some reformers called for education for all children, but education was mainly held for white male students with money. Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), introduced drawing as a type of visual language, which spurred the addition of art into formal education on. Drawings from abroad were sent to America, and wealthy Americans visited Europe, spreading

³⁰ Emily Stern, *Starting Your Career in Art Education* (New York: Allworth Press, 2013), 165.

³¹ Ibid, 165.

this style of art. Soon, universities such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia offered art classes.³²

The history of education in the United States begins before the country was even independent. Benjamin Franklin advocated for a formal introduction to the visual arts in American public schools as early as 1770. In the first half of the 19th century, art was taught in public and private schools when teachers chose to do so. There were no national organizations of art teachers, no state laws requiring teaching art, and no standards for how art should be taught. William Minifie of Philadelphia and William Bently Fowle of Boston taught visual art through drawing alone, these two being synonymous for many years in American schools. Minifie based his teaching of drawing on geometry in order to aid industry by raising up draftsmen and designers. Drawing was also taught because it led to better penmanship, being focused on line and value.³³

Formal education in Arkansas can be traced back to a cave in Ravenden Springs in Randolph County, where Professor Caleb Lindsay taught the first classes in Arkansas. But schooling as we know it today was not common. The 1860 census showed that half of the children of Arkansas who were of school age didn't attend. The only education reform of this time was during Reconstruction, allowing former slaves to attend school and receive an education. Public schools began to crop up in Arkansas around the turn of the century, but those who taught them had little more education than those learning.³⁴

³² Ibid, 165-166.

³³ Elliot W. Eisner, "Some Historical Developments in Art Education," in *Concepts in Art and Education*, ed. George Pappas. (London: Macmillan Company, 1970), 12-13.

³⁴ Antonio D. Cantu, *Early Education in the Arkansas Delta* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2001), 19-35.

In the early 1900s, before the first World War, schools' main goal was to make good citizens. Instruction was strict, following Victorian principles. As people rebelled against those strict rules, art education changed as well, allowing for the study of new trends in art such as Cubism by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Edward Hopper and Thomas Hart Benton in America were developing their own unique styles. After the Great Depression and the second World War, the Works Progress Administration helped reform the education system again, also bringing art into the communities by commissioning public works of art such as murals and sculptures.³⁵

The Arkansas Delta area saw much growth in the 1920s, which led to more and bigger school buildings, which created a sense of pride in the education system and an understanding for the need for more standardized curricula. Arts were lumped in with sports as an after-school activity to add on as desired. In the 1930s and 1940s, Arkansas' school year was ruled by the demands of the cotton crops, as everyone needed to farm to survive during The Great Depression. A second factor that resulted in the slower development of Arkansas' education system was the negative emotions regarding formal education, with some residents arguing that it was not necessary and made graduates uppity.³⁶

Moving into the 1950s and 1960s, all school subjects were emphasized as education in schools shifted yet again. With the beginning of the Space Race between Russia and the United States in 1957, schools began to amp up math and sciences training to stay relevant in technological pursuits. At this time, standardized tests were also accentuated to keep all students

³⁵ Stern, *Starting Your Career in Art Education*, 166.

³⁶ Cantu, *Early Education in the Arkansas Delta*, 57.

challenged to stay at their very best. Curricula in reading, writing, math, and science became more efficient, but unfortunately pushed art education to the back burner.³⁷

In Arkansas, most of the reform in the school districts focused on desegregation and the fight against it. Even though Arkansas did have some integrated schools before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the “Little Rock Nine” proved that Arkansas was primarily and violently against desegregation. The slow process to integrate took longer in Arkansas than almost all other states and kept the state’s education system from making any other reforms.³⁸

The 1960s were a time of great reform in many areas of society, education none the least. Jerome Bruner, an American psychologist, wrote *The Process of Education* to discuss how science education for grades K-12 could be improved. The book also addressed the process of learning, and not just the push for children to become proficient in the sciences. Stern writes, “[The Process of Education] set the stage for educational reform, in particular, in his chapters entitled Structure, Readiness for Learning, Intuitive Thinking, and Motives for Learning.” Bruner posited a circular curriculum that would constantly revisit key themes and basic skills in order to clarify and build upon them.³⁹

With the energy crisis and decreased populations of school age children in America in the 1970s, the budget for arts education took a massive hit. Thankfully, private organizations affiliated with wealthy personages such as the Carnegies and Rockefellers supported arts programs alongside their other existing endeavors. As the 1980s rolled around, research showed shocking findings that poor school districts all over America were greatly behind in programs

³⁷ Stern, *Starting Your Career in Art Education*, 167.

³⁸ Cantu, *Early Education in the Arkansas Delta*, 91.

³⁹ Stern, *Starting Your Career in Art Education*, 167.

from all disciplines and that a large number of students were illiterate in the United States compared to other countries.⁴⁰

Bill Clinton, the governor of Arkansas, focused heavily on education reform during his terms in office. In a progress report from September 1992 titled *A Decade Committed to Change*, Clinton outlined his six goals for the Arkansas education system to achieve by the end of the millennium.

Every child ought to show up for school mentally and physically ready to learn.

We will reach the international graduation rate of 90 percent. If it can be done anywhere, we can do it in America.

We will measure the performance of our children in science, math, history, social science and language and then help the children who are not doing well to improve.

We will not take a back seat to anyone in math and science achievement.

We will establish a system of lifetime learning through community and technical colleges, four year colleges, adult education, vocational-technical education, continuing education and retraining.

We will rid our schools of violence and drugs.⁴¹

Art Education is mentioned nowhere in these goals for the advancement of Arkansan schools. Even in the objectives for Goal 3, where there is a push for second language acquisition and knowledge of cultural heritage, there is no mention of the arts, visual or otherwise. Only in the first of the four Learner Outcomes expected of graduates from Arkansas' public schools is there a requirement to "acquire core concepts and abilities from the...arts."⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid, 168.

⁴¹ Bill Clinton, "A Decade Committed to Change," Arkansas Progress Report: Meeting the National Education Goals. (Little Rock: Office of the Governor, 1992), 7.

⁴² Ibid, 19.

In May 2018, Ipsos Public Affairs for Americans for the Arts conducted a survey called “Americans Speak Out about the Arts in 2018.” Based on a nationally representative sample of 3,023 American adults, it is one of the largest public opinion studies about the arts ever collected. Ten basic things Americans believe about the arts were curated by Randy I. Cohen for the Americans in the Arts website. The first thing Americans were found to believe about art is that they “provide meaning” for their lives. 69 percent of Americans said the arts lift them up beyond everyday experiences, 73 percent feel the arts give them pure pleasure, and 81 percent say the arts are a positive experience in a troubled world. Secondly, “the arts unify our communities.” 72 percent believe that the arts unify communities regardless of age, race, or ethnicity. 73 percent said that art helps them understand other cultures better.⁴³

This survey also showed that many adults seek out arts experiences. 72 percent of adults surveyed attended an arts or cultural event during the previous year, such as theater, a museum, a zoo, or a musical performance. Americans like to enjoy the arts in nontraditional venues such as parks, airports, hospitals, and shopping malls. Almost all Americans support arts education. 91 percent agree that the arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education through classes in elementary school, middle school, high school, and the community. Americans support the funding of art by local government (60 percent), state government (58 percent), federal government (54 percent), and also by the National Endowment for the Arts (64 percent).⁴⁴

Americans also like to make art in their personal time. Half of all Americans are personally involved in art-making activities such as painting, singing in a choir, making crafts, writing poetry, or playing music (47 percent). Americans even believe that creativity boosts job

⁴³ Randy I. Cohen, “Twelve Things Americans Believe About the Arts in 2018,” (11/21/19).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

success. More than half of the surveyed adults said that their job requires them to be creative to come up with ideas that are new and unique, suggesting that those who are more creative and innovative at the workplace have more success. Americans also believe that cultural institutions add value to communities. An overwhelming 90 percent said that cultural facilities improve their quality of life. And 86 percent believe that those same cultural facilities are important to local business and the economy. And finally, Americans don't believe that everyone has equal access to the arts. Even though most Americans believe in the great benefits that the arts can bring to communities and the individuals inside them, half are concerned that not everyone in their community has equal access.⁴⁵

If Americans truly believe these things, why is there a large discrepancy in visual arts education and STEM education? America went straight from the era of the Space Race and the new push for math and science training into the Information Age, which fairly worships technology and the Internet. Caught between the past and the future, America's education system needs to look at what is good for our children now.

In *24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week* by Tiffany Shlain, released in September 2019, Shlain argues that the speed of technology is faster than the speed at which people can understand its impact. A powerful statement coming from the woman who founded the Webby Awards, an annual award for excellence on the Internet, and co-founded the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, Shlain is an expert on the Internet and its amazing capabilities, those made possible by STEM research. However, she argues that hard

⁴⁵ Cohen, "Twelve Things Americans Believe."

skills such as mathematical reasoning, coding, and science, should not take the place of the advancement of soft skills like cooperation, creativity, and communication. She writes,

Valuing these skills starts in our education systems. STEM-focused education, while it has tremendous benefits, has been promoted as the only path to success, as if the lingua franca of the future will be only numbers, formulas, and lines of code. But these tools grow in their power and usefulness when they are combined with the skills provided by artists, designers, writers, teachers, communicators, and cultural creators. They are the ones who can make new technologies accessible, sustainable, and beneficial to society at large.⁴⁶

While STEM research is crucial to our society, and thus important to be included in America's education systems, it cannot exist on its own. As Ada Lovelace, the inventor of the computer, said, "imagination seizes points in common, between subjects having no very apparent connexion, & hence seldom or never brought into juxtaposition.[sic]"⁴⁷ Without the complex human nature, and the expression of such through visual art, children will not achieve their highest potential.

Visual arts education is not more important than reading, writing, and STEM-focused learning, but should be considered an equal. Arkansas has consistently reevaluated its standards for a quality education through the school system but remains under the backward assumption that arts are secondary players in the intellectual development of children. The quality of the Arkansas' visual art education content standards may be high, but the quantity is lacking, which should be rectified immediately for the good of the people of Arkansas.

⁴⁶ Tiffany Schlain, *24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week* (New York: Gallery Press, 2019), 157.

⁴⁷ Schlain, *24/6*, 157.

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