

Arts education in America:  
**What the declines mean for  
arts participation**



Nick Rabkin and E. C. Hedberg  
NORC at the University of Chicago



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Nick Rabkin and E. C. Hedberg  
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Based on the 2008 Survey of  
Public Participation in the Arts

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTE

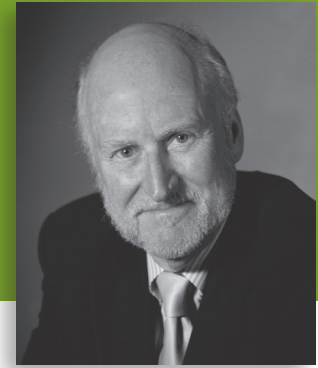


Photo by  
Michael Eastman

“Art works.” Those two words — with their three meanings — are perhaps the simplest and clearest declaration of what we are about at the National Endowment for the Arts. They first refer to works of art themselves, to the creations of artists. They also remind us that art works on audiences, to comfort, challenge, and inspire us. And finally, they are a bold reminder of the artists and arts workers across this country who earn wages, pay taxes, and contribute toward our country’s economy.

Our *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* seems to report that art is working for fewer Americans, a finding that is deeply disturbing to all of us who care about the arts in our country. It reports a 5 percentage point decline in arts participation by Americans.

But as I have been traveling across this country, those findings did not ring true with what I was seeing: young people signing on to Pandora and plugged into all manner of mp3 players; people of all ages watching *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*; the prevalence of etsy.com and the quarter of a million military families who visited one of our 920 Blue Star Museums over 4 months this summer; the Kindles and Nooks in front of every airport passenger; Netflix and YouTube allowing all manner of film and media, past and present, to be consumed anywhere. And how about *Glee*?

I am witness to a voracious American appetite for the arts that does not seem to track with a decline in arts participation. Luckily, Sunil Iyengar, our director of research and analysis, had the foresight to commission a series of deeper looks at this data, and asked fellow researchers to interrogate this data about the roles that technology, arts education, age, and personal arts creation play in American arts participation.

Each of these reports individually expands and shades our understanding of the arts participation numbers. Collectively they report that one factor, above all others, is the prime indicator of arts participation — a factor not surprising to any *Glee*-ks:

Arts education in childhood is the most significant predictor of both arts attendance and personal arts creation throughout the rest of a person’s life.

All of us who care about the arts in this country *have* to care about arts education, about exposing young people, early and often, to the arts in rich, rigorous, and repeated ways. That is largely why, over the past year, we funded arts education projects in every Congressional district in America.

The reports on technology and personal creation greatly expand our institutional understanding of meaningful arts participation.

And the report on age shows that it’s not the audiences who are graying, it’s our country: the age distribution of audiences generally mirrors the adult population of the United States. Baby Boomers continue to dominate audiences, just as we did in the 1980s, when we were among the youngest audience members.

Taken together, the *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* with its follow-up reports, present the most nuanced understanding of arts participation that the NEA has yet presented. I am pleased to share these reports with you, and proud of the way we are expanding our understanding of how art works in America.

Rocco Landesman  
Chairman  
National Endowment for the Arts

“In America, we do not reserve arts education for privileged students or the elite. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, students who are English language learners, and students with disabilities often do not get the enrichment experiences of affluent students anywhere except at school. President Obama recalls that when he was a child ‘you always had an art teacher and a music teacher. Even in the poorest school districts everyone had access to music and other arts.’

Today, sadly, that is no longer the case.”

– *U.S. Department of Education Secretary  
Arne Duncan, April 9, 2010*

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# PREFACE

The National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) is the nation's largest periodic survey of adult involvement in arts and cultural activities. For more than a quarter-century, since the survey was first conducted, researchers at the Arts Endowment have issued summary reports and key findings to the public. In addition to reporting the survey results as a whole, the NEA has made the data files available to other arts and cultural researchers for their own analyses and publications.<sup>1</sup>

The 2008 SPPA provided a fascinating glimpse into changing patterns of arts participation. Since the prior survey period of 2001–2002, rapid advances in technology had enabled more access to arts events and arts creation through portable devices and the Internet. Also, in 2007–2008, many representatives of Gen Y (or the “Millennials”) — the second largest generation since the Baby Boomers — became eligible for taking the survey.

These factors alone would have made the 2008 SPPA data an attractive prospect for researchers. But in still other ways the 2007–2008 survey year marked an aberration. For the first time since 1982, attendance rates declined for virtually all art forms captured by the survey; also for the first time, many of those declines occurred for adults 45 years or older — an age group that historically has accounted for the largest share of arts audiences.

Therefore, even before the 2008 SPPA results had been announced, the NEA posted the survey data online, to allow researchers to conduct their own analyses. The NEA also commissioned reports on five cross-cutting topics: media and technology, arts education, arts creation, age, and race and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

Results from the study of media, technology, and arts participation appeared in June 2010.<sup>3</sup> For the remaining topics, the NEA was fortunate to obtain the services of four researchers or research teams already renowned for their work in characterizing trends in arts participation. Those researchers included Mark Stern, University of Pennsylvania, and separate teams at WolfBrown and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.

Each of these researchers has added a vitally new dimension to the NEA's official summary of the 2008 data, as published in 2009.<sup>4</sup> This report, one of three to become available in 2011, is a direct result of their efforts.

In their analysis, NORC researchers Nick Rabkin and Eric Hedberg test and ultimately confirm the validity of an assumption made with prior SPPA data, that participation in arts lessons and classes is the most significant predictor of arts participation later in life, even after controlling for other variables. They also show that long-term declines in Americans' reported rates of arts learning align with a period in which arts education has been widely acknowledged as devalued in the public school system. Nor are the declines distributed equally across all racial and ethnic groups.

Working along quite different lines, Mark Stern similarly concludes that arts education is the most important known factor in influencing arts participation trends. But he is much more skeptical about the impact of other variables, especially age. Practically since the SPPA began, in 1982, there has been much talk about the “graying” of arts audiences. And while it is certainly true that the audiences

for many art forms tracked by the SPPA are aging more rapidly than the U.S. population, Stern brings out the sobering fact that age and generational cohort differences account for less than *1 percent* of the variance in the total number of arts events that Americans attended over the period of 1982–2008. Observing that arts attendance may be far less dependent on age than usually considered, he gives the lie to the notion of “demographic destiny” when it comes to arts engagement.

Based on their own analysis of the SPPA data, Jennifer Novak-Leonard and Alan Brown advance a “multi-modal” framework for understanding arts participation. Novak-Leonard and Brown challenge the orthodoxy of representing overall participation rates merely as a function of visual or performing arts attendance. They suggest that a more expansive benchmarking system — one accounting for participation across three modes (arts creation or performance; arts engagement through media; and attendance at a broader array of activities) — would produce more relevant results for arts funders, arts managers, and the general public.

The NEA’s Office of Research & Analysis already has begun to incorporate the ideas of these report-writers into its deliberations about the future of the SPPA. The authors offer three distinctive takes on a federal data source which, since 1982, has shaped much of the conversation about how arts and cultural policies and programming can engage audiences more effectively. By supporting independent research of this type, we hope to broaden the scope of that conversation.

Sunil Iyengar  
Director, Research & Analysis  
National Endowment for the Arts

## NOTES

- 1 For example, see the National Endowment for the Arts website, Supplementary Materials Related to the NEA's 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, [www.nea.gov/research/SPPA/index.html](http://www.nea.gov/research/SPPA/index.html).
- 2 The report on race/ethnicity and arts participation is still in progress. Authored by Vincent Welch, et al. of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), it will be made available via the NEA website in 2011.
- 3 This report was published in multi-media and PDF versions as *Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation*, based on research by Sameer Bawa, Kevin Williams, and William Dong, BBC Research & Consulting. *Audience 2.0*, Research Report #50 (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010), available online, [www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports\\_chrono.html](http://www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports_chrono.html).
- 4 See *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Report #49 (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009), available online, [www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA.pdf](http://www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA.pdf). The Executive Summary of that data appeared as *Arts Participation 2008: Highlights from a National Survey* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009), available online, [www.nea.gov/research/NEA-SPPA-brochure.pdf](http://www.nea.gov/research/NEA-SPPA-brochure.pdf).

Arts education had a strong relationship with adult arts participation across all four waves of the SPPA. Having had any childhood or adult arts education was significantly correlated with attendance at “benchmark” arts events.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPAs), conducted for the National Endowment for the Arts, have shown a steady decline in the rates of adult attendance at most “benchmark” arts events — specifically, classical music and jazz concerts, musical and non-musical plays, opera, and ballet performances — as well as declines in other forms of adult arts participation, including personal creation or performance of art and adult arts education — since 1982. The reasons for these declines, and potential strategies to mitigate or reverse them, are of vital importance to American artists, cultural policymakers, arts organizations, and other stakeholders concerned about the future of American culture.

An analysis of 1992 SPPA data found that “arts education was the strongest predictor of almost all types of arts participation (arts performance being the exception).”<sup>5</sup> The present study analyzes data from four administrations of the SPPA — 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 — to address several important questions prompted by that finding.

## **Was the strong relationship between arts education and arts participation found in 1992 consistent across all four administrations of the SPPA?**

Arts education had a strong relationship with adult arts participation across all four waves of the SPPA. Figure 1 (see page 14) demonstrates that having had any childhood or adult arts education was significantly correlated with attendance at benchmark arts events. More than 50 percent of adults who indicated that they had had any childhood arts education attended a benchmark event in the year before each survey, while fewer than 30 percent of those who had no childhood arts education attended a benchmark event. More striking results are apparent in the relationship between arts education as an adult and arts participation as an adult. Nearly 70 percent of those who had any arts education as an adult attended a benchmark event in the year preceding each survey, while 28 percent of Americans who had no arts education as an adult attended a benchmark event. Although adult classes or lessons appear to have a stronger association than childhood experiences with benchmark arts attendance, it is important to note that most Americans who had arts education as an adult also had had arts education as a child. Arts education also showed strong associations with personal creation or performance, as well as consumption of the arts through media.

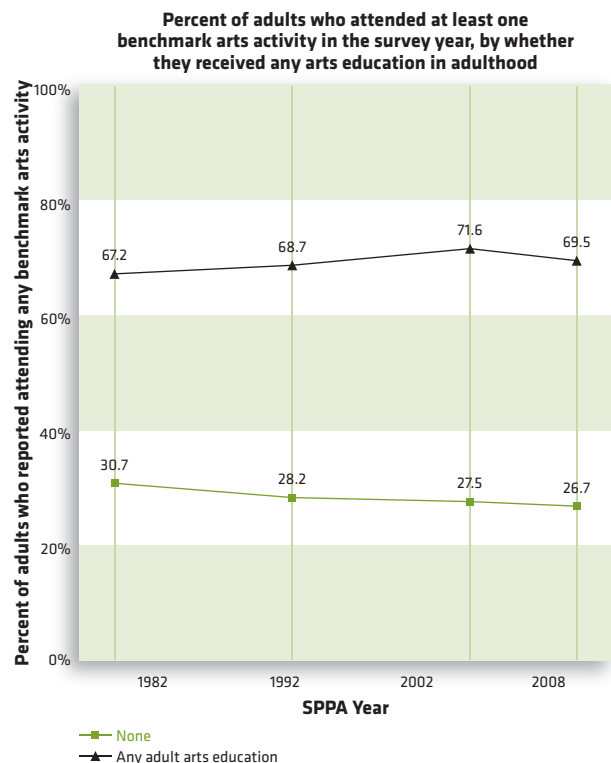
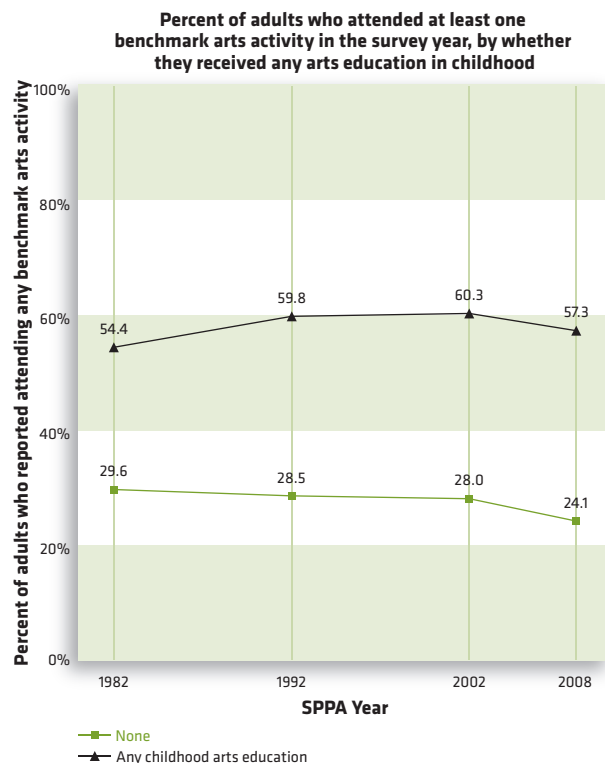
## Did participation in school-based arts education decline from 1982 to 2008, or did it increase?

There is a dearth of credible data about the rate at which American children have studied the arts over time. Yet trend data from the SPPA do suggest a decline in school-based arts education offerings, particularly since 2001–2002. Figure 2 (see page 15) tracks the rate of participation in childhood arts education, as reported by 18-year-olds in each SPPA year. It shows a long-term pattern of decline since 1985, a decline first documented with the 1992 SPPA. Declines were greatest in music and visual arts, the two arts subjects taught most in schools, while theater and dance actually recorded small increases. Given the mandatory status of public education, there is good reason to believe that the general decline in arts education participation in childhood was in large measure the result of cuts in school-based arts instruction.

## What can we learn from SPPA data about the rate of childhood arts education before 1982?

The decline of childhood arts education after 1982 followed a steady increase in childhood arts education throughout most of the 20th century. Figure 3 (see page 15) shows the proportion of people who reported they had taken any classes or lessons in music, visual art, dance, theater, or creative writing before age 18 (for simplicity, we refer to this as “any childhood arts education”) across all SPPAs. In 1930, slightly over 20 percent had some arts education. By the early 1970s, more than half of American children had had some arts education. It is likely that this increase was the consequence of the 20th-century trend to stay longer in school, where many had access to classes and lessons in the arts, particularly in music and visual art. But by

**FIGURE 1**  
Benchmark arts attendance, by childhood and adult arts education and SPPA year



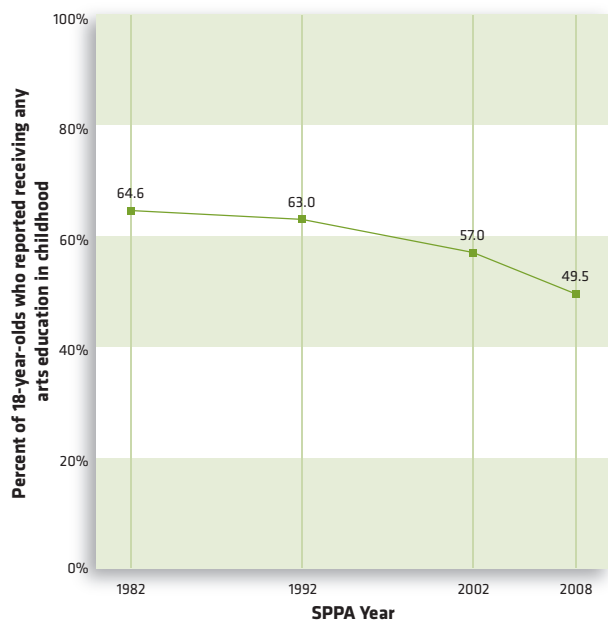
Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

1985 a decline began, which continued through the last survey year (2007–2008). This pattern is not typical of social change, which is generally more gradual. It suggests there was likely a significant precipitating event or events. (It is important to note that the data points on the graph are assigned to the year in which respondents became 18 years old. Their childhood, of course, occurred over the 17 years before that date. So, the data point for 1930 actually represents childhood arts education between 1912 and 1929, the childhood years of an 18-year-old in 1930. The downward “turning point” for arts education actually occurred sometime during the 17 years before 1985 — not in that year precisely, but between 1967 and 1984. If there were precipitating events that prompted the decline, they were likely to have occurred during or shortly before that period.)

### How have changes in arts education been distributed across the population?

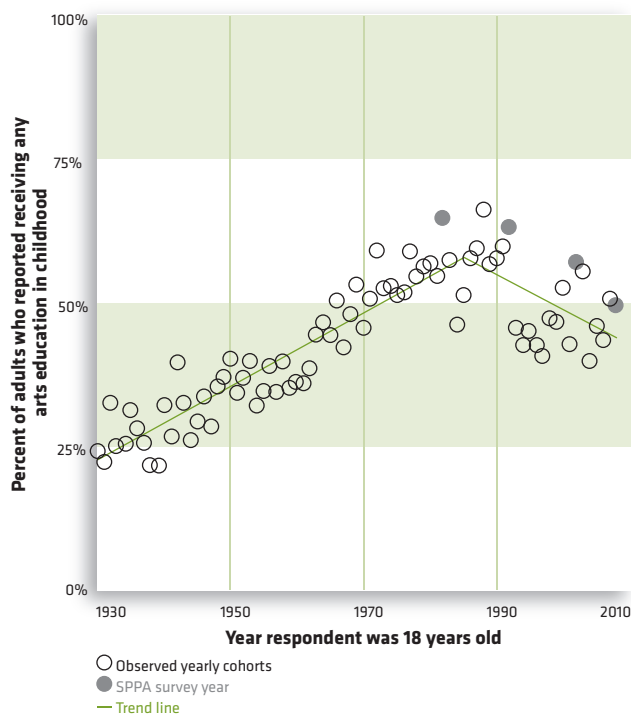
In 2008, all 18- to 24-year-olds, no matter what their socioeconomic status as children, were less likely to have had a childhood arts education than the 18- to 24-year-olds of 1982. As Figure 4 (see page 16) illustrates, the decline of childhood arts education among white children is relatively insignificant, while the declines for African American and Hispanic children are quite substantial — 49 percent for African American and 40 percent for Hispanic children.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 2**  
Percent of 18-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 3**  
Percent of Americans who received any arts education in childhood over the past 77 years



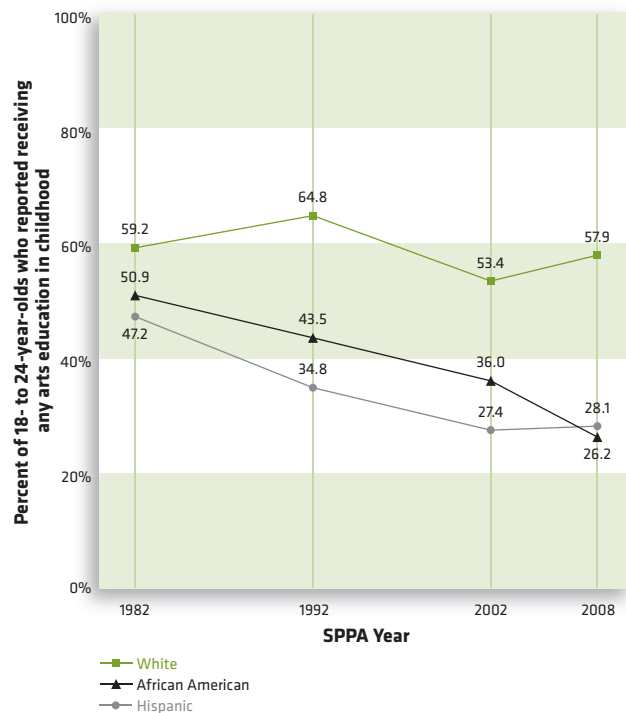
Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**Can arts education contribute to arts participation, mitigating or reversing the trend of decline?**

Adult classes or lessons have a stronger statistical association with benchmark attendance than childhood classes or lessons, but very few adults who took advantage of arts learning opportunities as adults had had no childhood arts education. This pattern may suggest that childhood arts education is ultimately more important, and that adult arts education and benchmark arts attendance may both simply be expressions of adult interest in the arts, with neither factor causally related to the other. A reasonable case can be made for the vital importance of childhood arts education as a gateway to lifelong participation in the arts. Still, we are not prepared to claim that all arts education will have this effect.

More fine-grained research is needed to identify the kinds of arts education experiences that are most likely to inspire students to pursue further or deeper engagements with the arts into adulthood. For that matter, moreover, childhood arts education has also been declining. Reversing this decline will be necessary if arts education is to play a significant role in stemming the erosion of adult arts participation.

**FIGURE 4**  
Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by race/ethnicity and SPPA year<sup>7</sup>



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.



## NOTES

- 5 L. Bergonzi and J. Smith, *The Effects of Arts Education on Participation in the Arts*, NEA Report #36 (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 1996), 5.
- 6 Demographic data, including race and ethnicity data used in SPPA analyses, are drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's main survey (e.g., Current Population Survey) to which the SPPA was a supplement. While the U.S. Census Bureau has fairly consistently collected data on three "racial" categories – white, African American, and other – as well as "ethnic" data, it is critical to note that the Census Bureau has revised race categories over time. Because of these changes, the calculation of the "Hispanic" category for SPPA analysis has changed over time. For instance, the "Hispanic" category was determined differently in 1982 than in subsequent SPPAs because, at the time, the Census Bureau did not separately ask if the respondent was of Hispanic origin. In 1982, the Census Bureau did ask separately about ethnicity for the household via a checklist of ethnic categories. Therefore, the "Hispanic" category for 1982 was derived by combining categories such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc. Beginning with the 1992 SPPA, respondents were asked whether they were of Hispanic ethnicity. The questions on race were reworded to indicate that individuals could select categories such as Asian and American Indian. Because of these changes in Census race/ethnicity categories over time, data on race/ethnicity across the SPPAs are not always directly comparable, and some caution should be exercised when interpreting trend data.
- 7 See note 6 above.

Arts participation requires capacities for understanding and appreciating the modes of expression, symbol systems, aesthetics, and the cultural context in which the arts are embedded. People who have not cultivated and developed these capacities are less likely to find arts experiences rewarding, and they are less likely to invest time and resources in the arts, according to a 2008 study.

# INTRODUCTION

Arts participation takes many forms. Americans attend performances and exhibitions of art in theaters, concert halls, festivals, and museums. Many engage with the arts through electronic media, which is rapidly changing in terms of technology, content, and affordability. Large numbers of Americans *make* art themselves, performing or creating work professionally or informally, alone or in groups, for their personal pleasure or for their friends or community. Pathways for arts education are also diverse: Americans participate through classes and lessons in schools, colleges, and conservatories, in a wide range of other community venues, and in private lessons throughout their lives.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has tracked adult arts participation through a series of Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPAs) since 1982.<sup>8</sup> The surveys have focused principally on adult attendance at jazz, classical music, opera, musical theater, non-musical theater, ballet and other dance performances, and visits to art museums and galleries. Collectively, these arts experiences are referred to as “benchmark” activities or events. But the SPPAs also have collected data about personally creating and performing art, consuming the arts through media, owning art, taking classes or lessons in the arts, reading literature, and visiting historical sites.

The most recent SPPA (2008) found that a smaller proportion of Americans participated in benchmark activities in the year before they were questioned than in any prior survey. All but one benchmark activity showed substantial, double-digit declines in the proportion of Americans who attended between 1982 and 2008.<sup>9</sup> Only museum and gallery attendance increased between 1982 and 2008 — a modest three percent rise — but not at a statistically

significant rate. Overall, the proportion of adult Americans who attended any benchmark arts event in 1982 was 39 percent. By 2008 it was 34.6 percent, a decline of 15 percent from the 1992 peak rate.<sup>10</sup>

Surely the economic recession that began in late 2007 contributed to the decline, but the NEA’s report on 2008 SPPA data stressed that the trend was well underway by the time of the 2002 SPPA, when the economy was relatively stronger. It also reported that audiences for the performing arts were aging more quickly than the general population and that participation was declining even among the most educated adults — historically the most reliable segment of the arts audience.<sup>11</sup>

There are, no doubt, multiple reasons for the declines in adult benchmark arts participation. Arts education appears to be one of these reasons. A study of the 1992 SPPA explored the relationships between arts education and adult arts participation. It found that “arts education was the strongest predictor of almost all types of arts participation (arts performance being the exception). Those with the most arts education were also the highest consumers and creators of various forms of visual arts, music, drama, dance, or literature.” While socioeconomic status (SES) also had a strong relationship to adult arts participation, the study found “at least half of the effect of SES on all types of arts participation was attributable to differences in arts education.”<sup>12</sup>

By 2008, a report by the RAND Corporation, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, advanced a theory of arts participation grounded in a fundamental understanding of the importance of arts education to arts participation: adults participate in the arts when they find personal

value in the experience. Arts participation requires capacities for understanding and appreciating the modes of expression, symbol systems, aesthetics, and the cultural context in which the arts are embedded. People who have not cultivated and developed these capacities are less likely to find arts experiences rewarding, and they are less likely to invest time and resources in the arts, according to the 2008 report. RAND proposed that arts education is the most promising pathway to the development of these capacities for many people, suggesting that arts education should be the cornerstone of a strategy to reverse the long-term decline in arts participation.<sup>13</sup>

The present report goes beyond the study of SPPA data from 1992. It examines data from four SPPAs (1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008) to determine if arts education is consistently associated with higher levels of arts participation. It adds to the depth of our understanding of the relationship between arts education and adult arts participation, and confirms the validity of the 1992 findings over time.

Although our research did find a very strong correlation, it is premature to conclude that arts education of merely any kind or in any dose will precipitate higher levels of arts participation. The effects of arts education may depend on *the kind, the quality, the intensity, and the longevity* of arts education experiences. For example, all American children are required to study mathematics in school, and most study the subject throughout their elementary and high school years. The time and attention devoted to math in American schools dwarfs the time and attention devoted to the arts in schools. We can say with some confidence that math study inspires some students to pursue further learning in math, and that some of those students go on to take a life-long or professional interest in math or related subjects. But studying math in childhood certainly does not have that effect on all children. Some math education experiences surely drive some students away from mathematical thinking and learning.

The same is likely to be the case with arts education. There are different approaches to arts education, characterized by different pedagogical strategies, and with many distinct purposes and objectives,

both in and out of schools. More fine-grained research than is possible with the SPPA data is required to determine what kinds of arts education experiences have the effect of inspiring students to pursue further or deeper engagements with the arts — engagements that are sustained into adulthood.

Moreover, much has changed in American popular culture since 1982. New technologies, new media, and the Internet compete for scarcer leisure time. The arts themselves have changed, and the historical distinctions between art forms and the traditions of cultural hierarchy have eroded, partly as a result of the efforts of contemporary artists. Consequently, the SPPA's concentration on attendance at benchmark events may be becoming too narrow to capture the range and complexity of adult arts participation.

Nonetheless, SPPA data certainly shows that some arts education experiences have a relationship to adult benchmark attendance, and they also have strong relationships with other forms of arts participation. If those experiences can be identified and made widely available, then arts education has the potential to play a vital role in changing patterns of arts participation and in improving the prospects of the hundred-thousand-or-more not-for-profit and for-profit organizations offering benchmark arts events to the public.

Making arts education experiences widely available represents an enormous challenge. As we will see when we examine the data itself, a childhood arts education is crucial. Although adult experiences have an even stronger association with benchmark activities, relatively few adults take arts classes or lessons unless they have had some childhood arts education. Private classes or lessons outside school are voluntary. Although there are some free programs and some scholarship programs for needy students, children generally require both a financial commitment from their parents and additional parental support to attend non-school programs. While non-school arts education programs are vital resources in communities all across the country, schools are the only institutions that have the potential to deliver arts education experiences to virtually all children.

Broadly scaling up arts education in schools would require substantial support from school leaders who have been, in recent decades, focused increasingly on improving student performance in reading and math as measured by state standardized tests. Despite formal designation as one of 10 “core subjects” by federal education legislation, there are some indications that the arts have been cut back in schools since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act. A 2008 survey of school district officials found that, since 2002, 16 percent of the nation’s school districts that had decreased instructional time in subjects other than English-language arts and mathematics had reduced instructional time in art and music by an average of nearly an hour a week.<sup>14</sup> Yet caution must be applied in interpreting these findings; a recent report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) presented evidence from a U.S. Department of Education survey that 90 percent of elementary teachers reported that instruction time for arts education stayed the same between the 2004–2005 and 2006–2007 school years.<sup>15</sup>

A small but growing body of research has shown that arts education is associated with the development of dispositions and inclinations that scaffold learning in general, reaching well beyond the arts to a broad range of positive cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes. Some studies have found that arts learning has a more significant effect on low-income student achievement than it does on the academic performance of more privileged students, and that arts education is an effective pathway to deeper engagement and success in school for students who are at the greatest risk of academic failure. Some research has shown that arts education can have significant influence on student achievement, even when measured by the narrow standard of improving test scores.<sup>16</sup> For example, one study found that the effects of arts involvement on low-income youth, like the effects of early childhood education, are sustained well into young adulthood. Youth who have substantial engagements with the arts are more likely to go to college, get good grades in college, and get a degree. They are more likely to do volunteer work, register to vote, and hold a full-time job, and they are less likely to require public assistance or food stamps, according to the study.<sup>17</sup>

Research linking the arts to academic achievement is not without its skeptics, including some who are strong supporters of arts education. They assert that the correlations between arts education and positive outcomes do not conclusively demonstrate that arts education is the *cause* of the outcomes. They are concerned as well that arts learning will become the “handmaiden” of other subjects, and that the intrinsic value of the arts themselves will not be recognized.<sup>18</sup>

In the view of this study’s authors, however, education policy is likely to favor the arts only if the link to general academic achievement is further established *and* if the current narrow focus on reading and mathematics is broadened. Recently, the U.S. Department of Education has called for a more inclusive curriculum that explicitly includes the arts and new assessment strategies that will capture “higher-order skills [and] provide more accurate measures of student growth” and progress toward college readiness and the world of work.<sup>19</sup> The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an organization formed through the efforts of the U.S. Department of Education and leaders of some of the nation’s leading high-tech corporations, has specified that those higher-order skills include creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, and collaboration.<sup>20</sup> There may be less resistance to the notion that arts learning can contribute a great deal to an education that makes creativity and communication core objectives.

This report, of course, has a limited purpose. It probes data from SPPA surveys completed in 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008, about arts education and its relationship to adult arts participation. Have patterns of arts education contributed to the reported declines in benchmark arts activities? Or has arts education mitigated what otherwise may have been a more precipitous decline? If arts education has a role in arts participation generally, does a decline in arts education, particularly a decline for young people, signal a continuing cycle of decline in arts participation? These are not trivial questions. In all its forms, the arts and participation in the arts are vital pathways to profound pleasure for millions of individuals; to finding meaning in

life and to understanding our place in the world; to exploring and developing our national character; and to representing ourselves to others in all our complexity. Arts education is a portal to all of this. While this report is not intended to construct a case for the arts' place in American education, it is within our educational system that most Americans enter, or do not enter, that gateway. So it is necessary that our understanding of the data be grounded in an understanding of this larger context.

Arts education is not only a pathway to further participation in the arts; it is by itself a vital mode of arts participation. And beyond its role in a strategy for revitalizing participation in the benchmark activities, arts education itself may be at risk. It has been little more than a marginal concern in debates about education and school reform over the last few decades, and, as stated earlier, some evidence suggests that its role in schools is declining. So, in addition to understanding the relationship between arts education and arts participation, this report explores what can be gleaned from SPPA data about trends in arts education itself — as a mode of arts participation and as a contributing factor to other forms of arts participation. Has it declined or risen among children? Among adults? Does SPPA data suggest reasons for observable trends? Are the trends affecting some sectors of the population more than others?

We have tried, within the limits of a short discussion, to find meaning in SPPA data in two contexts: the challenge of sustaining arts organizations that depend on adult arts participation to support their operations, and the challenge of providing arts education to children, particularly in schools and school systems that are themselves facing profound challenges. Chapter 1 is a deeper exploration of the complex but powerful relationship between arts education and adult arts participation. The second chapter is a discussion of trends in arts education over the last eight decades that helps illuminate the challenges and opportunities presented by arts education as a strategy to increase arts participation.

## NOTES

- 8 The SPPA was used to collect arts participation data from American adults in 1982, 1985, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2008. Due to the considerable differences in survey methodologies, the 1997 SPPA telephone survey produced results that are not comparable to other SPPA surveys. Data from the 1997 survey is not used in research that examines change over time.
- 9 Jazz attendance was down from 9.6 percent to 7.8 percent of adults, a decline of 19 percent from the 1982 rate; classical music attendance was down from 13.0 percent to 9.3 percent, a decline of 29 percent; opera attendance was down from 3.0 percent to 2.1 percent, a decline of 30 percent; musical theater attendance was down from 18.6 percent to 16.7 percent, a decline of 10 percent; non-musical theater attendance was down from 11.9 percent to 9.4 percent, a decline of 21 percent; ballet attendance was down from 4.2 percent to 2.9 percent, a decline of 31 percent. *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Report #49, National Endowment for the Arts (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009).
- 10 Ibid., 1.
- 11 Ibid., iii.
- 12 Bergonzi and Smith, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation*, 5; and R. Orend, *Socialization and Participation in the Arts*, Research Report #21 (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1989).
- 13 L. Zakaris and J. F. Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).
- 14 Center on Educational Policy, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects* (Washington, DC: Center on Educational Policy, 2008), 2.
- 15 Government Accountability Office, *Access to Arts Education: Inclusion of Additional Questions in Education's Planned Research Would Help Explain Why Instruction Time Has Decreased for Some Students* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2009).
- 16 An analysis of longitudinal data on 25,000 students showed that those with higher levels of involvement with the arts did better across a wide range of outcome variables than those with lower arts involvement, and that low-income students benefited from their involvement in the arts more significantly than did higher-income students. "Involvement in the Arts and Human Development," J. Catterall, R. Chappleau, and J. Iwanaga, in *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, ed. E. B. Fiske, 1-18 (Washington, D.C.: Arts Education Partnership, 1999).
- Minneapolis' Arts for Academic Achievement program apparently boosted student achievement, and had substantial effects on the performance of low-income students in public schools. "Arts for Academic Achievement: Summative Evaluation Report," D. Ingram, and K. R. Seashore (unpublished manuscript, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota, 2003).
- Schools working with the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education raised test scores significantly faster than comparable schools between 1993 and 1998. "Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education: Summary Evaluation," J. Catterall and L. Waldorf, in Fiske, *Champions of Change*, 47-62.
- Affiliates of the A+ Schools, a network of arts-centered schools in North Carolina, improved student performance on standardized tests, and higher levels of success were associated with higher levels of commitment to an arts-centered school identity. *Creating and Sustaining Arts-Based School Reform: The A+ Schools Program*, G. Noblit, H. D. Corbett, B. Wilson, and M. McKinney (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 17 J. Catterall, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art* (Los Angeles: Imagination Group/I-Group Books, 2009).
- 18 E. Eisner, *Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement?* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, 1997); and E. Winner and M. Cooper, "Mute Those Claims: No Evidence (Yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34 (2000): 3-4, 11-76.
- 19 U.S. Department of Education, "A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," 2010, accessed online March 14, 2010, [www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html).
- 20 Partnership for 21st Century Skills, "Framework for 21st Century Learning," 2009, accessed online March 14, 2010, [www.p21.org/documents/P21\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.p21.org/documents/P21_Framework.pdf).

People who have had more general education have more opportunities to take art classes and often do. And socioeconomic status is strongly correlated to general education. Yet when each of these factors is analyzed, arts education emerges as the most powerful influence on arts participation.



# ARTS EDUCATION AND ARTS PARTICIPATION

## CONTEXT

The paying audience for the arts grew quickly after World War II and unleashed a wave of institutional development and growth, much of it in the not-for-profit sector, a pattern that continued for decades. This growth, in turn, made the arts accessible and available to Americans in many different places across the country, stimulating growth of arts audiences.

By the 1960s, economists theorized that this virtuous cycle was limited because of what came to be called Baumol's cost disease or the Baumol effect. Economist William Baumol first observed that labor-saving productivity gains that kept prices low in some economic sectors were unavailable in the performing arts: a Shakespeare script that required a dozen actors in the 16th century still requires a dozen actors in the 21st. Since artistic labor is the biggest expense in the performing arts, prices must rise more quickly than in sectors that benefit from improved labor productivity so that pay levels remain competitive. By this argument, the price of the performing arts inevitably rises more quickly, ultimately moving admission beyond the means of more and more people.<sup>21</sup>

A report released by the American Symphony Orchestra League (now the League of American Orchestras), which analyzed the finances of orchestras in the 1980s, found substantial evidence of the Baumol effect. The report authors predicted that classical music was likely to become overwhelmed by growing deficits, an aging audience, and increasing irrelevance as more Americans rejected it as an elite and prohibitive cultural tradition unless it underwent a "paradigm shift."<sup>22</sup> Similar trends and dark predictions were

noted in other disciplines. A 1991 report on the performing arts found a high proportion of arts organizations operating "30 to 50 percent above the floor of available human and financial resources" and predicted that the "human and financial deficit" would continue to grow.<sup>23</sup> Related concerns were expressed in a report of the American Association of Museums in the same year. It called attention to an expanding gap between the nation's growing demographic diversity and its audiences for museums.<sup>24</sup> Theaters have historically higher levels of earned revenue than symphonies, but the Theatre Communications Group's annual survey of theaters reported in 2000 that for one group of theatres under long-term study, total expenses grew by 21.9 percent from 1997 to 2000, outpacing the growth in earned income for that period by 2.5 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Arts organizations have adapted to the Baumol effect by becoming more agile marketers and more resourceful fundraisers, so there has been no catastrophic collapse in our nonprofit arts system. But the economic logic of the Baumol effect is sound, and the rising cost of benchmark arts activities is one possible reason for the recent declines in arts audiences. There is evidence now that these declines are taking a toll. From 1998 to 2008, one out of three nonprofit arts organizations failed to achieve a balanced budget, even during the strongest economic years of this decade.<sup>26</sup>

The 2008 SPPA documented the trends in adult participation that underlie these developments. Audiences for the arts are declining as a proportion of the American population. For many art forms, Americans are performing and creating art at lower rates as well.<sup>27</sup> Those who attend arts events, like the population as a whole, are growing older.<sup>28</sup>

Further, despite much effort by some arts organizations, there is evidence that audiences are not diversifying racially and ethnically to nearly the degree of the general population. The stark predictions discussed earlier about the future of the arts may have been exaggerated or premature in the 1990s, but they had some merit. Unless these trends are reversed, they surely will lead to greater financial issues in the nation's arts organizations and are likely to reverse the growth that characterized the arts nonprofit sector throughout much of the 20th century.

Based on evidence from numerous arts audience surveys,<sup>29</sup> SPPA survey report-writers assumed a likely relationship between individuals' experiences with arts education and their adult behavior with regard to arts participation. They have assumed relationships between adult arts participation and other variables such as general education, socioeconomic status, race, gender, family background, and geographical location. Their assumptions proved correct. An analysis of data from the 1992 SPPA showed that arts education had a stronger association with adult arts participation than any other variable.<sup>30</sup> The first goal of this review, therefore, is to determine if that relationship was consistent across all the survey years. A secondary goal is to determine if it has intensified or become weaker over time, and to consider the meaning of changes in the strength of the relationship.

Analysis of SPPA data does show that arts education — lessons or classes in school, at other community venues, or in the home — has more influence on arts participation than any other factor captured by all administrations of the entire survey. Arts education has more influence on adult arts participation than overall educational attainment, socioeconomic status, race, parent education, or gender. For example, childhood lessons or classes in three art forms had a stronger influence than a college education on benchmark attendance. Adult lessons or classes in two art forms had an even greater influence.

The findings take into account that arts education is closely related to these other factors. Individuals who have had more general education have more opportunities to take arts classes and often do. And socioeconomic status is strongly correlated to

general education. In other words, arts education is co-dependent with those factors. Yet when each of these factors is analyzed, while holding the others statistically constant, arts education emerges as the most powerful influence on arts participation.

## ANALYTIC APPROACH

The principal focus of the SPPAs has been on a set of core questions about attendance at benchmark performing arts events — jazz, classical music, opera, musical theater, non-musical theater, and dance performances — and visits to art museums and galleries in the last 12 months. Our first query was about the relationship of those benchmark activities to arts education. The first and simplest way to determine if there is a significant relationship between benchmark activities and arts education is to compare participation in benchmark arts activities by those who had no arts education to those who had some arts education. The relationship can also be explored by considering the differences in benchmark rates among those with more arts education and those with less, those with arts education in adulthood, and those with arts education in childhood.

This analytic approach yielded clear and significant results. Still, it is important to understand limitations with the SPPA data. Each SPPA asked respondents to report on their arts education experiences. They were asked if they had taken lessons or classes in visual arts, art appreciation or history, music, music appreciation, theater/acting, dance, and creative writing while they were children (i.e., before the age of 18). They were also asked if they had lessons or classes in those art forms as adults. They were not asked about the depth, intensity, or longevity of their study in the arts, nor were they asked about their subjective experiences — how much they enjoyed or cared about learning in and about the arts. Private weekly piano lessons for 10 years and recorder lessons in a class of 30 second-graders for a few months are equivalent in SPPA data and recorded as childhood music education, provided that those experiences are remembered and reported. However, the data *do* indicate *how many* art forms a respondent studied. Depth of study and subjective experience may have more or less power than the number of art forms studied; but for the purpose of this report, we are able to determine only whether

studying more art forms has a stronger association with adult arts participation than studying fewer. Our results may be distorted by the absence of data about these other dimensions of arts education.

In our analysis, for simplicity's sake, we merged music and music appreciation classes into a single category of music. Likewise, rather than counting visual art, art appreciation, and art history classes as distinct categories, we merged them into a single category: visual art.

The benchmark activities in the four SPPAs have varied slightly from survey to survey. In the most recent SPPA, for example, a new musical category — Latin, Spanish, or salsa music — was added. Early SPPAs asked about just one dance form, ballet. Later iterations added modern dance, and the most recent surveys asked about ballet and “other” dance forms including modern, folk, tap, or Broadway style.

To permit cross-wave comparisons of surveys with slightly different questions and to simplify our analysis, we collapsed several benchmark activities into just four categories that correspond broadly to the four arts disciplines. Classical music, opera, and jazz were collapsed into a single category — music. (Since Latin music was not included in three of four SPPAs, it could not be included in the collapsed music category or in our count of music attendance in the 2008 SPPA.) Musical theater and non-musical theater were also collapsed into a single category — theater. And ballet and other dance were collapsed into one category — dance. Art museums and gallery visits constitute the fourth art form — visual art.

For our purposes, the most significant changes were in the questions about arts education. As new questions were added to successive surveys, some old ones were cut to keep the survey from becoming too long. Questions about arts education were among those changed or eliminated. In early surveys, respondents were asked if they had taken arts classes or lessons before they were 12, when they were between 12 and 17 years old, when they were adults, and in the past 12 months. Later iterations collapsed “under 12” and “12 to 17” into a single category: “under 18”. To permit comparisons across all SPPA administrations, we aggregated data about classes and lessons for children “under 12” and from “12 to 17” into a single variable, comparable to later

surveys’ questions about classes and lessons taken by people “under 18.”

The SPPAs in 1992 and 2002 asked if childhood classes or lessons were taken in school, outside school, or both. But in the surveys of 1982 and 2008, the distinction between school-based classes and non-school lessons was not included. Therefore, the data from those years does not yield a measure over time of school-based childhood arts education. Nonetheless, it does yield measures of overall childhood arts education (from birth to age 17), and we can make informed deductive judgments about the proportion of school-based and non-school arts education from the early SPPAs and from our understanding of the status of the different art forms in school curricula.

Multi-variant logistic regression analysis was used to compare the influence of arts education to other factors that also have relationships to adult arts participation. This statistical methodology holds all factors constant while testing the power of the relationship of any single factor to a particular outcome. It is an essential method when, as with adult arts participation, there are multiple influential factors, each of which is also likely to have an influence on the others. In the case of arts education, for example, educational attainment is strongly correlated with arts education, as is socioeconomic status, gender, race, and age. Multi-variant analysis makes it possible to untangle this web of influences and measure and compare the effect of each individually.

In doing so, we created a hypothetical “baseline person” (BP) — in this case, an 18- to 24-year-old, married, white male who has had no arts education in childhood or since, who graduated from high school but has not attended any college. His mother and father also had high school educations. BP worked, and was in the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status. He lived in a city under one million in population. We then examined the statistical effects for each covariant — arts education, general education, gender, race, socioeconomic status, age — while holding constant the others to test the relative power of each. A detailed discussion of logistic regression is presented in the appendix on the study’s methodology.

## FINDINGS

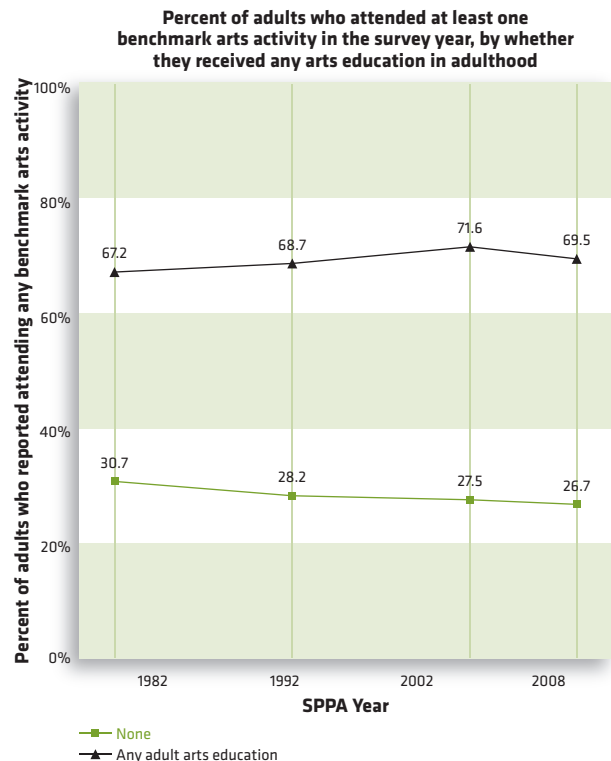
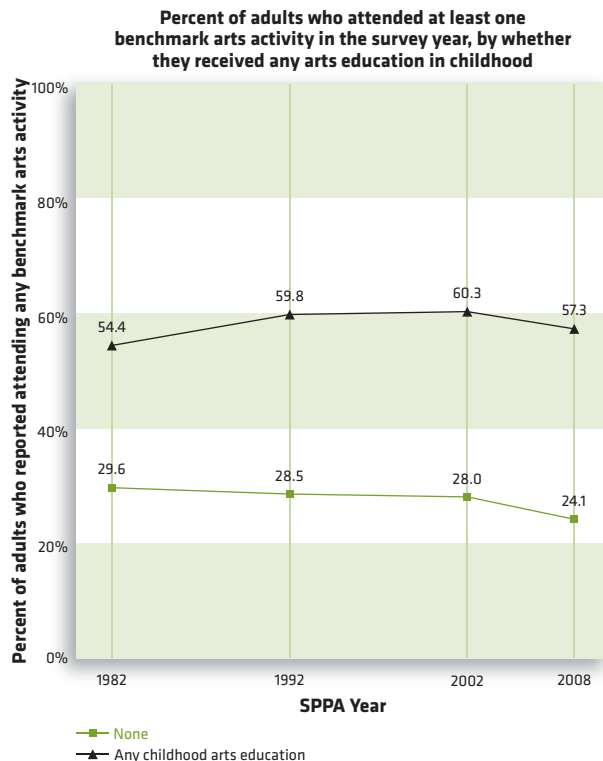
### 1. Arts education has a powerful positive effect on adult benchmark arts attendance.

Arts education in childhood has a strong relationship to adult attendance at benchmark arts performances and exhibitions. Four SPPAs spanning 26 years all show that more than half of those who reported any arts education in childhood attended at least one benchmark event in the last year, far more than those who had none, as shown on the left side of Figure 5, below. From 1982 to 2008, those who had had no childhood arts classes or lessons were consistently and considerably *less likely* to attend a benchmark event. And the strength of the relationship between childhood arts education and benchmark attendance increased slightly over time. Those who had had any arts education as children were slightly *more likely* to attend a benchmark event in 2008 than in 1982, while those who had had no childhood arts education were slightly less likely to do so in 2008. Those who

reported having some childhood arts education in 1982 were 1.8 times more likely to attend a benchmark event than those who had none. Those who reported having some childhood arts education in 2008 were 2.4 times more likely to attend a benchmark event than those who had none. This finding suggests that childhood arts education has mitigated factors that contributed to the decline in adult benchmark arts participation.

The right side of Figure 5 shows that people who have taken any adult arts classes or lessons are also more likely to attend a benchmark arts event than adults who do not take arts classes or lessons. Over all four SPPAs, more than two of three respondents who had any adult arts education attended a benchmark event. Like childhood arts education, the association between adult arts education and benchmark attendance has intensified. Those who had any adult arts education in 1982 were 2.2 times more likely than those who had none to attend a benchmark event. In 2008 they were 2.6 times more likely to attend.

**FIGURE 5**  
Benchmark arts attendance, by childhood and adult arts education and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

## 2. More arts education predicts more arts attendance.

Figure 6 (see page 30) shows that benchmark arts attendance is positively associated with arts education in a greater number of art forms in childhood, adulthood, and in the past year. Overall, those who took any lessons in a single art form during childhood and adulthood were twice as likely to attend a benchmark arts event as those who had no art education. Those who took any lessons in two art forms were almost three times as likely as those who had no arts education to attend a benchmark event. Adult lessons are associated with higher levels of attendance than childhood lessons, and may be a proximal cause of benchmark attendance. However, it is just as likely that people who take adult classes and attend benchmark arts events simply enjoy the arts. Taking adult classes may not be a *cause* of adult attendance, but simply another expression of interest in the arts.

## 3. Arts education has similar effects on other forms of arts participation: personal art-making, participation in the arts through media, and additional arts education.

### *Creation and performance*

Figure 7 (see page 31) shows the number of art forms in which people took classes or lessons (as children, as adults, in the past year, and over their lifetimes) and the percent that performed or created art of their own in the last year. It confirms that arts education is clearly and strongly associated with higher levels of personal creation of visual art and performance of music, theater, or dance, and that lessons in more art forms are associated with higher levels of personal creation and performance. Those who had any childhood lessons were more than twice as likely as those who had none to create or perform art themselves; further, the likelihood of creating or performing art increased if they studied additional art forms as children. The pattern is even stronger for lessons or classes in the arts as adults and in the past year, both of which are strongly associated with higher levels of personal creation and performance by adults.

### *Arts participation through media*

Participation in the arts through the media, which includes recorded or broadcast music, dance or theater, as well as use of the Internet to access art or arts information or to post one's own creations, is also positively associated with arts education. Figure 8 (see page 32) shows that those who had any lessons or classes in the arts in childhood or in adulthood were more likely to participate in the arts through media across all four SPPAs. (2008 SPPA data are excluded from this figure because substantial changes in the questions about media participation make the comparison to other years unreliable. However, the strong association of arts education and media-based arts participation was consistent in the 2008 data as well.)

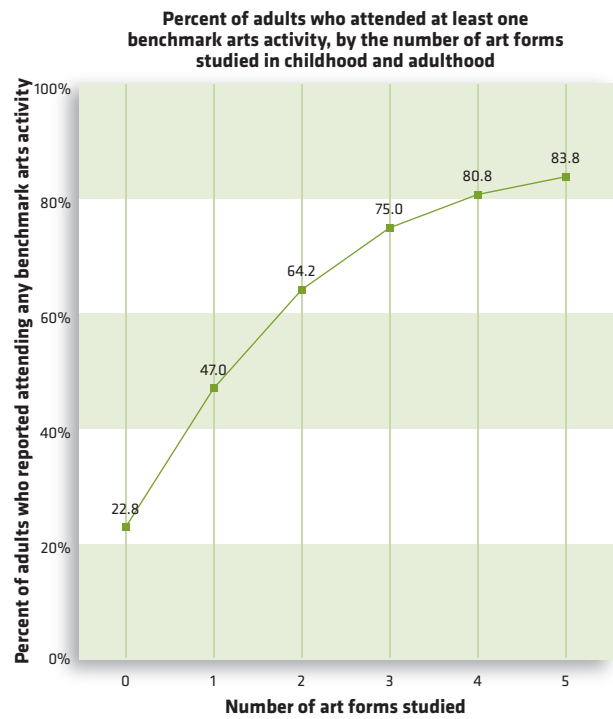
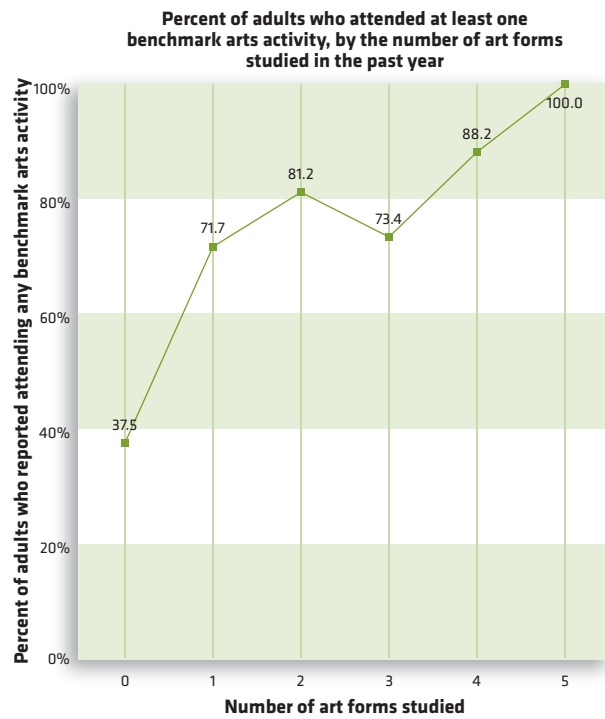
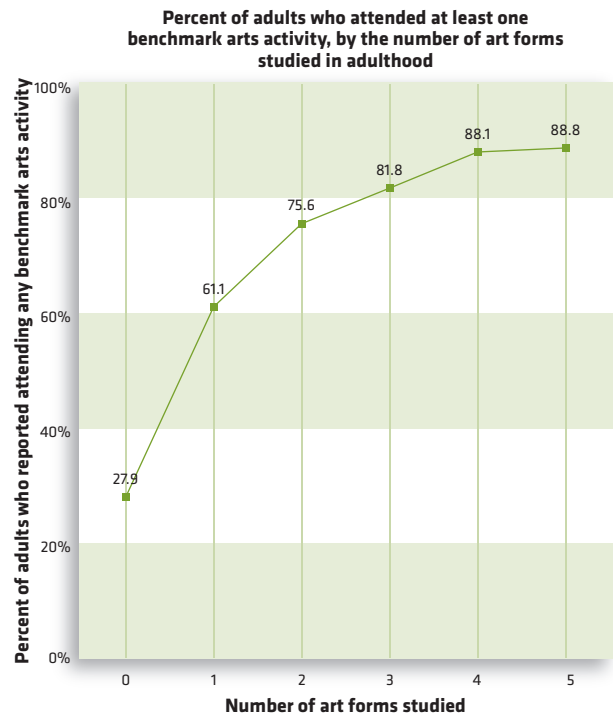
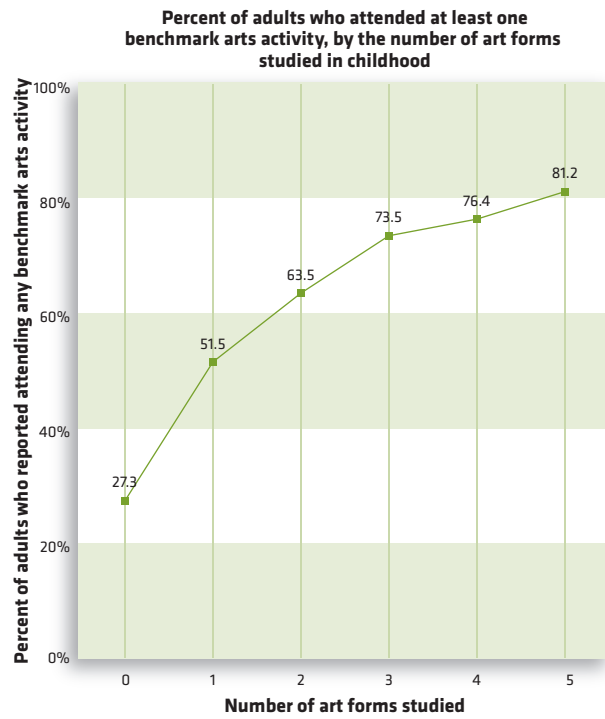
Figure 9 (see page 33) shows that those who had childhood or adult lessons or classes in one art form are roughly twice as likely to consume art through the media than those who had no childhood arts education. Further, the greater the number of art forms studied by survey respondents, the more likely the adults were to participate in the arts through media. The exceptions to this pattern for adults are those who had lessons in all five art forms, and those who took lessons in more than three art forms in the past year. Perhaps some of those who take many classes or lessons feel that education is their preferred form of arts participation, leaving little time for other modes of participation.<sup>31</sup>

### *Adult arts education*

People who had arts classes or lessons in childhood are far more likely to take classes or lessons as adults. Those who took no arts lessons or classes as children were highly unlikely to take lessons or classes as adults. Figure 10 (see page 34) shows that only about one of 10 who took no childhood lessons or classes took adult arts lessons or classes. Nearly half of those who took lessons or classes in one art form as children took lessons or classes as adults, and more than half who took lessons or classes in two art forms as children took lessons or classes as adults.

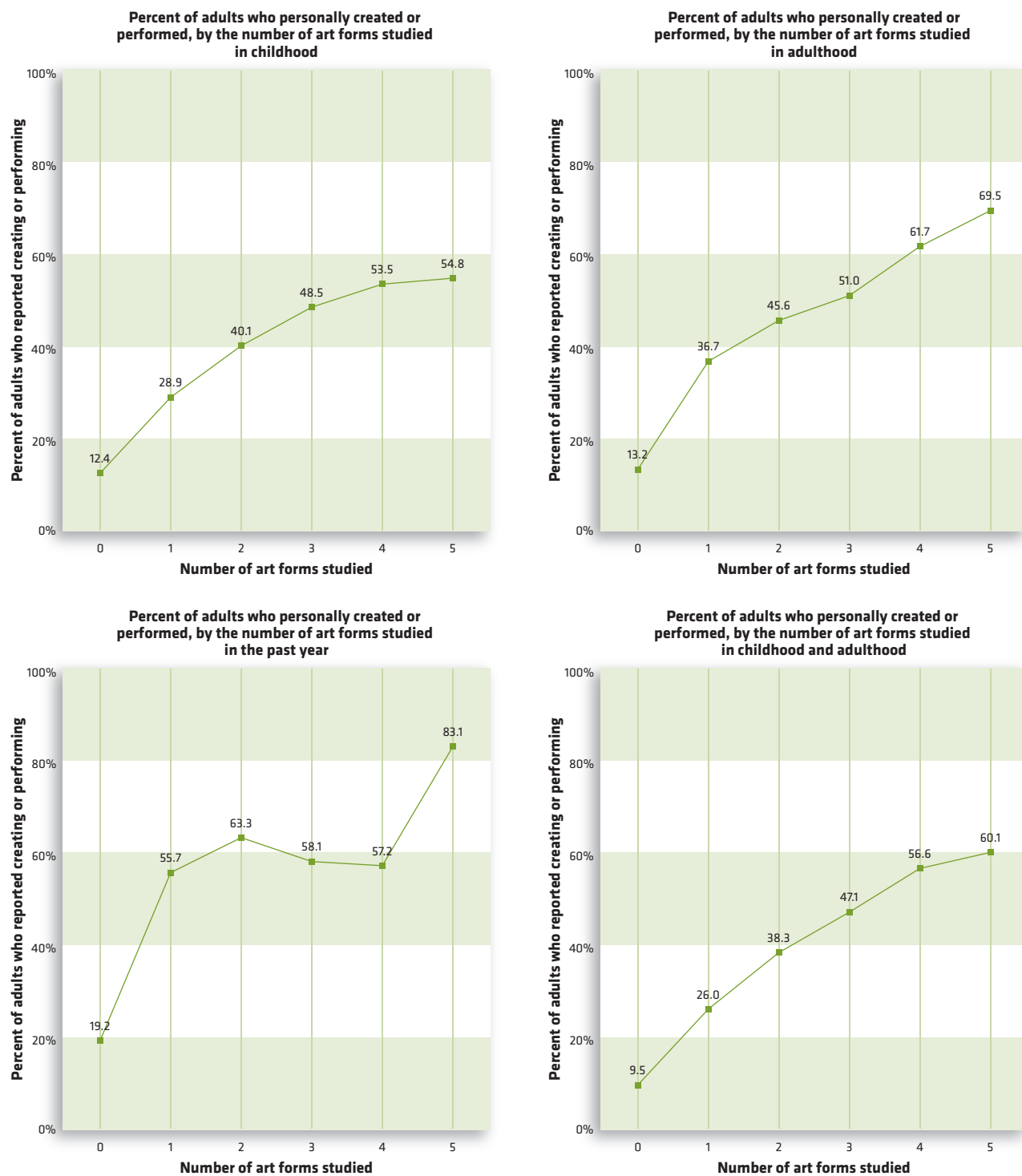
**FIGURE 6**

**Benchmark arts attendance, by number of art forms studied**



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 7**  
Percent of adults personally creating or performing,  
by number of art forms studied



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

#### 4. Arts education has a more powerful effect on arts attendance than any other measurable factor.

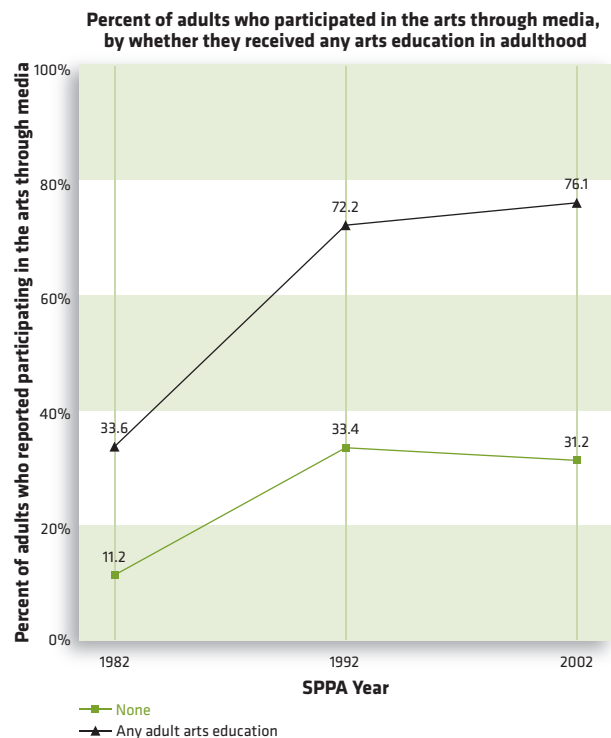
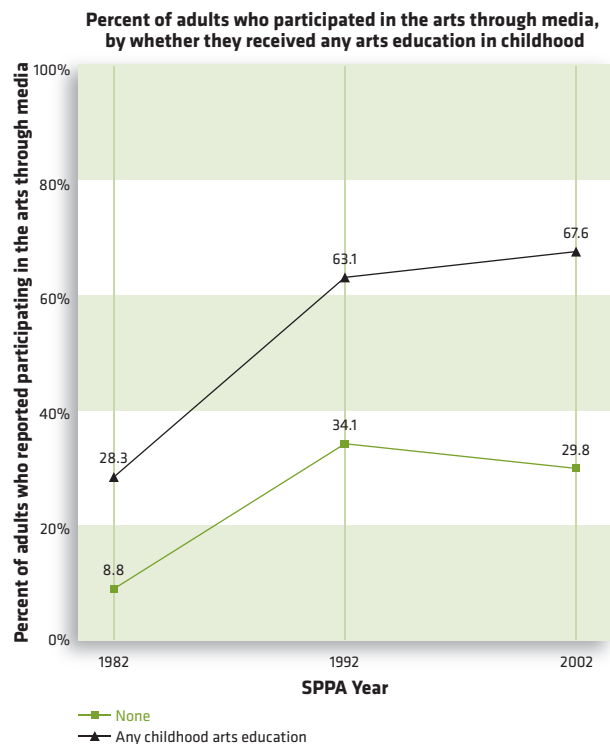
For the purpose of determining the significance of arts education relative to other factors that affect adult benchmark arts attendance, we created a hypothetical “baseline person”, whom we call BP. As discussed earlier, we deliberately assigned a set of characteristics to BP that made him less likely than the average adult to participate in the arts. BP is not designed to be a “typical” American but a useful statistical baseline. In the real world, as it turns out, there are very few individuals who share all of the characteristics we assigned to BP. BP is a white male, between 18 and 24 years old, who has had no arts education as a child or as an adult. He had a high school education, as did his parents. He is married and works, is in the lowest socioeconomic quartile, and lives in a city with fewer than one million people. As shown in Figure 11 (see page 34), BP was not very likely to attend a benchmark arts event in the year before the 1982 survey — the chance that he did was 12.5 percent. By 2008, the chance that BP (still 18 to 24 years old, etc.) attended a benchmark

arts event in the past year had dropped to just 8.8 percent. That decline, 3.7 percent in absolute terms, represents a 30 percent decline in the likelihood of attendance at a benchmark event from 1982 to 2008. BP may not be a “typical” American, but he clearly reflects the general decline in benchmark adult arts participation found in the SPPA data between 1982 and 2008.

Some of the demographic factors we assigned to BP have a small relationship to adult “benchmark” arts attendance. BP would be slightly more likely to attend a benchmark event if he had never married. He would be somewhat more likely to attend a benchmark event if he were a woman, or lived in a city with over one million people, for example.

But some demographic and social factors would have a significant influence on the likelihood of BP’s attendance at benchmark arts events. Age appears to have some effect on benchmark arts attendance. If BP were between 25 and 45 (rather than 18 to 24) in 2008, he would be more likely to attend a benchmark event; if he were 45 to 54, he would be still more likely to attend; and he would be most likely to attend a benchmark event if he were 55 or older, as shown in Figure 12 (see page 35).

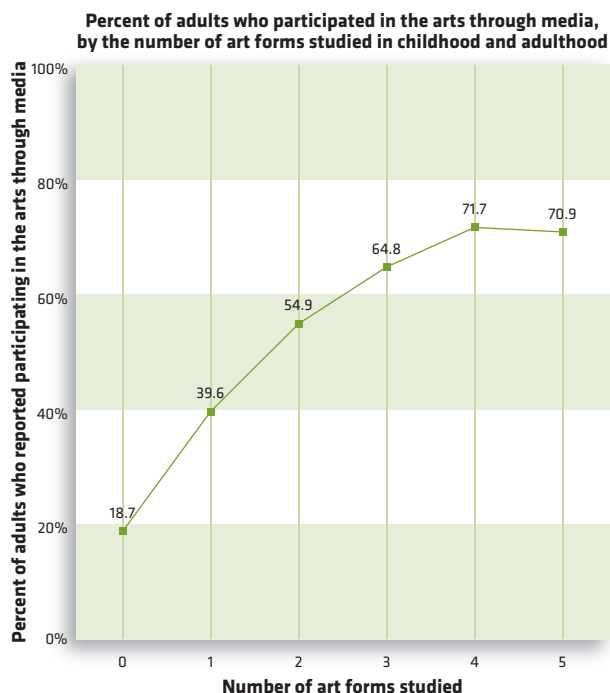
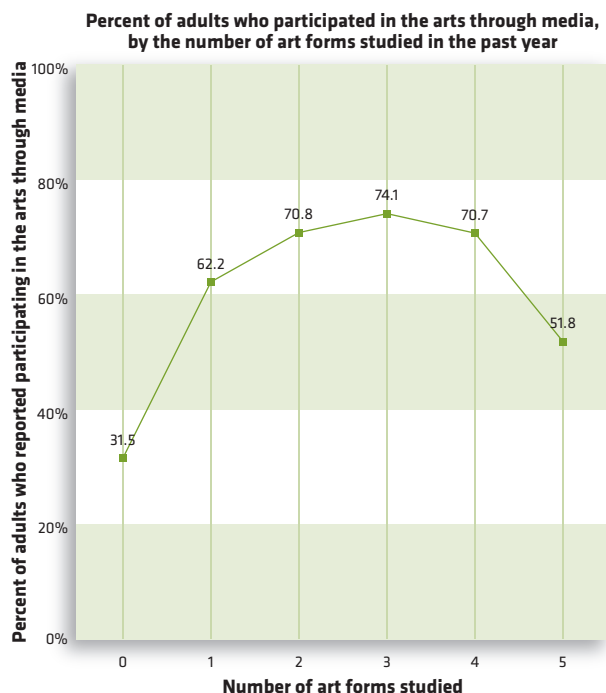
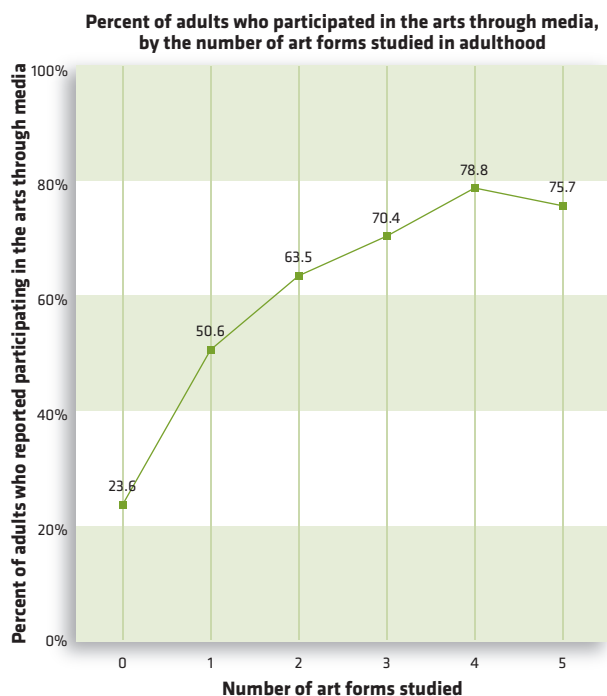
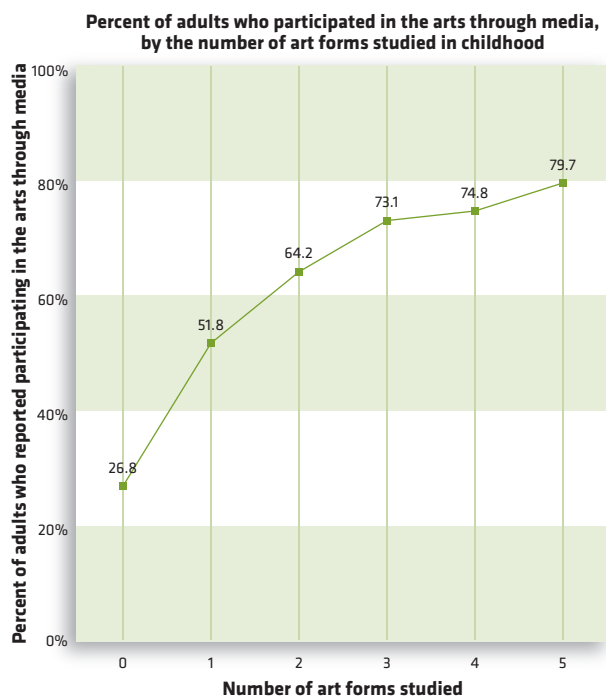
**FIGURE 8**  
Percent of adults participating in the arts through media, by arts education and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, and 2002 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.



**FIGURE 9**  
Percent of adults participating in the arts through media, by number of art forms studied

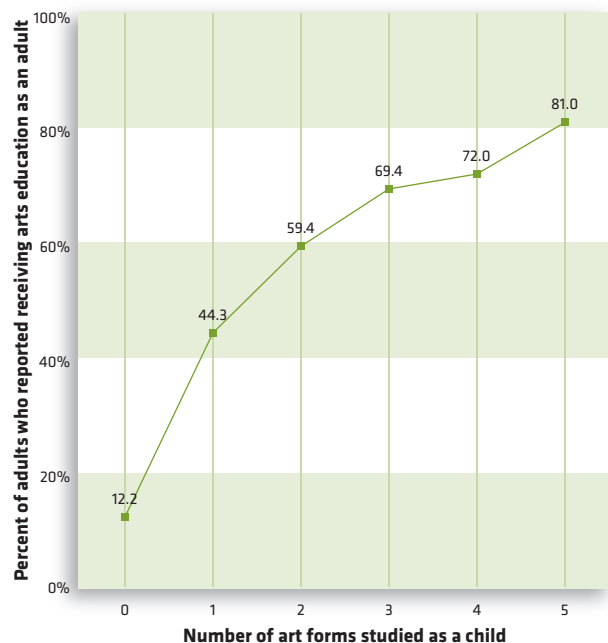


Source: 1982, 1992, and 2002 administrations of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

Adult arts participation is strongly influenced by educational attainment and somewhat influenced by the educational attainment of one's parents. In Figure 13 (see page 35), we see that if BP had not graduated from high school, he would be less likely to attend a benchmark event. However, if he had more than a high school education, he would be more likely to attend a benchmark event. The figure also shows that if either parent had more than a high school degree, BP would be more likely to attend a benchmark event.

Changes in socioeconomic status, as indicated by income level in the SPPA data, show very substantial effects on adult arts participation. Figure 14 (see page 35) shows that if BP moved up a single socioeconomic quartile in 2008, from the lowest to the second lowest, there would be a significant positive effect. It would raise the likelihood of benchmark arts event attendance by 17 percent, from 8.8 to 10.3 percent. If he were to move from the lowest quartile to the highest, he would be twice as likely to attend a benchmark event.

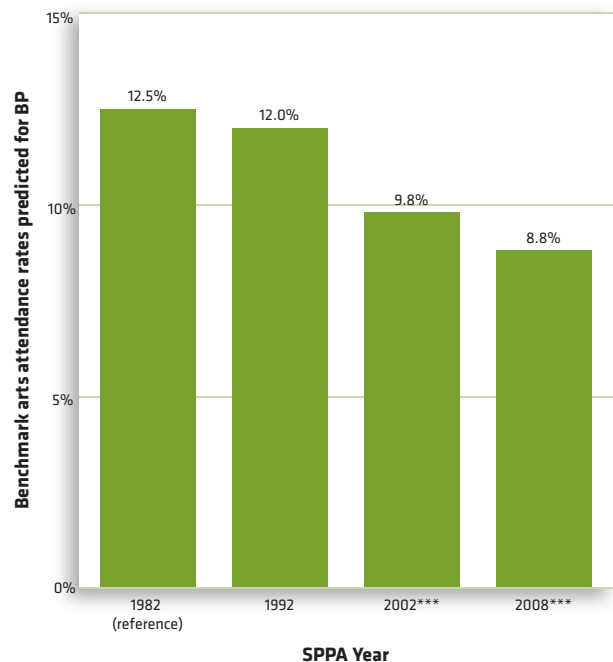
**FIGURE 10**  
Percent of adults who received arts education as an adult, by the number of art forms they studied as a child



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

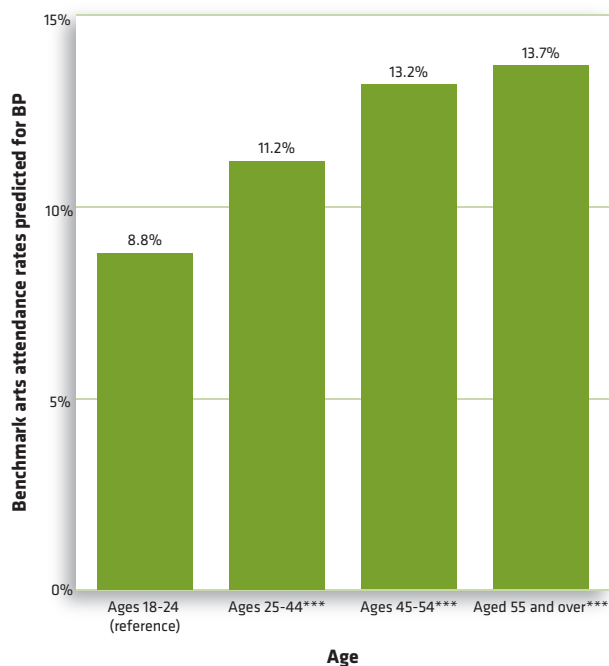
In Figure 12, benchmark arts attendance is positively associated with age. As benchmark attendance has declined over the years, the audience for the arts has also aged, and the likelihood of young people attending benchmark events has declined. Figure 12 is a dramatic illustration of how these effects have worked. The likelihood that BP (still 18 to 24 years old, of course) would attend a benchmark event in 1982 was 12.5 percent. Figure 15 (see page 35) shows that by 2002 only those 25 or older were likely to attend, and the likelihood of attendance by those under 25 had declined to 9.8 percent. By 2008, only those older than 45 were as likely to attend as BP was back in 1982, when he was under 25, and the likelihood of attendance among those under 25 had declined to just 8.8 percent.<sup>32</sup>

**FIGURE 11**  
Relationship between benchmark arts attendance rates and SPPA year for BP (a hypothetical "Baseline Person")



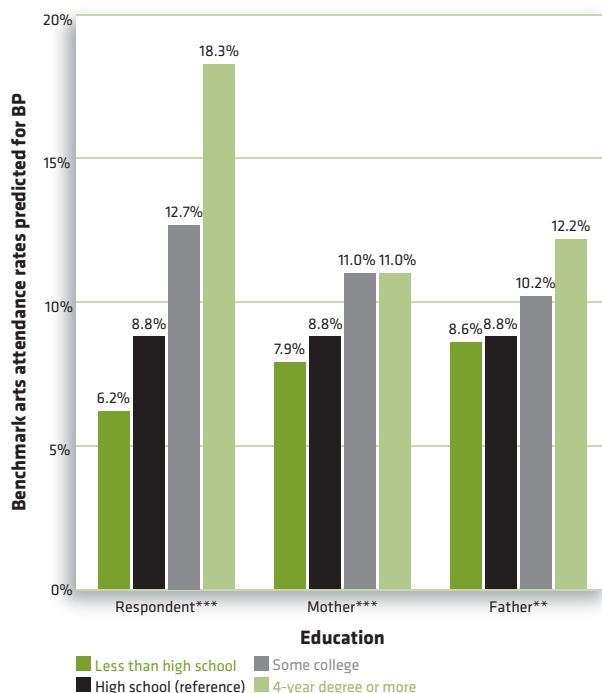
Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. \*\*\*p < 0.00.

**FIGURE 12**  
Relationship between age and benchmark arts attendance for BP (a hypothetical “Baseline Person”): 2008



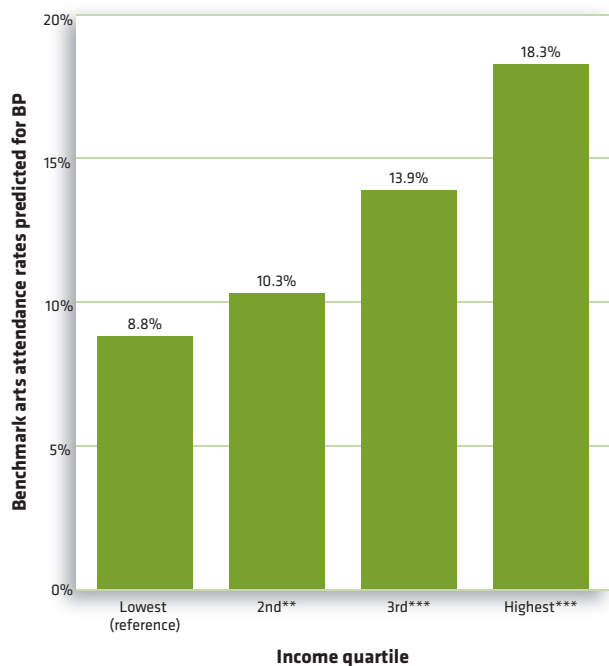
Source: 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Note: Predicted values assume the 2008 baseline chance. \*\*\*p < 0.00.

**FIGURE 13**  
Relationship between education and benchmark arts attendance for BP (a hypothetical “Baseline Person”): 2008



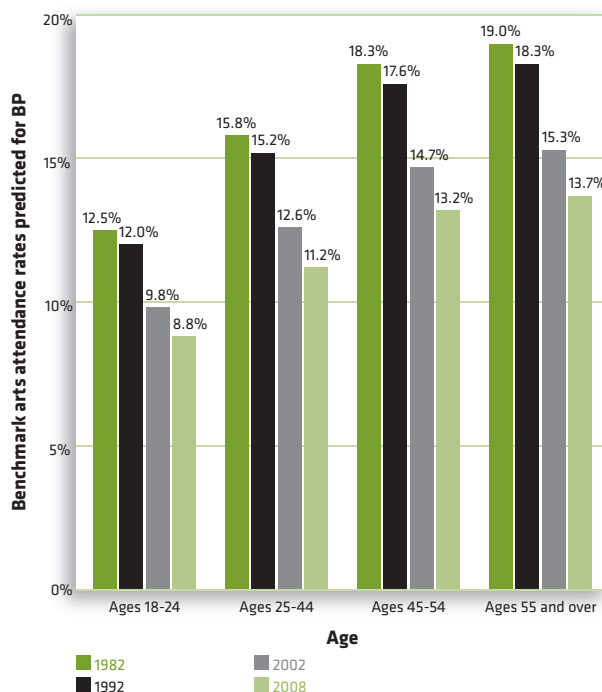
Source: 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Note: Predicted values assume the 2008 baseline chance. \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.00.

**FIGURE 14**  
Relationship between socioeconomic status and benchmark arts attendance for BP (a hypothetical “Baseline Person”): 2008



Source: 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Note: Predicted values assume the 2008 baseline chance. \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.00.

**FIGURE 15**  
Relationship between age and benchmark arts attendance for BP, by SPPA year

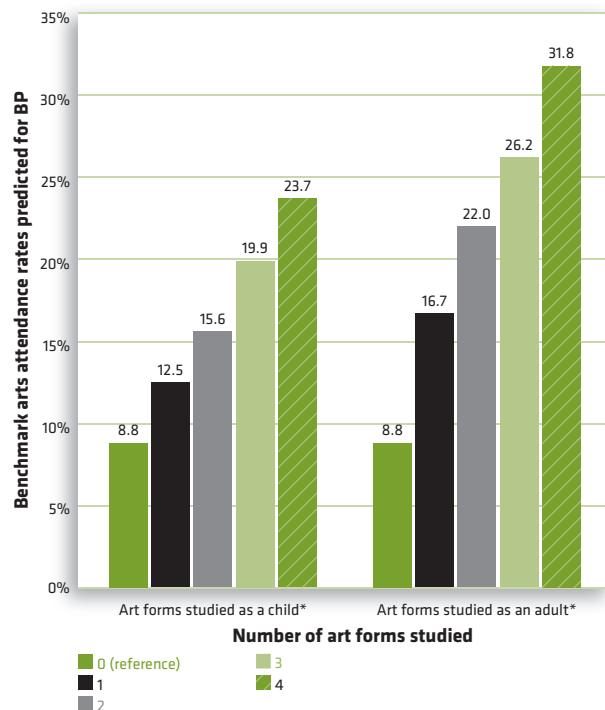


Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

The most substantial influence on BP's attendance at benchmark events is arts education. Figure 16, below, shows the ascending likelihood that BP would attend a benchmark event if he had lessons or classes in one or more art forms as a child or as an adult. If he were to take a childhood class in one art form, and no other significant variables were to change, he would be 42 percent more likely to attend a benchmark event as an adult. To have an equivalent influence, BP would need to attend at least some college or rise from the lowest to the third socioeconomic quartile. If BP had childhood lessons in three art forms, it would have more influence than if he were in the highest socioeconomic quartile. Adult arts education in one art form nearly doubles the likelihood of

attendance (an increase of 90 percent). Adult arts education in two art forms has more influence on the likelihood of benchmark attendance than if BP had attained a college degree or more. Adult lessons in three art forms triple the likelihood of BP's attendance at a benchmark event. No other measurable variable has a larger estimated impact on adult benchmark attendance than taking at least three lessons in childhood or two in adulthood.

**FIGURE 16**  
 Relationship between arts education and benchmark arts attendance for BP, by number of art forms studied in childhood and adulthood: 2008



Source: 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Note: Predicted values assume the 2008 baseline chance. \*p < 0.00.

## 5. Children of parents who had arts education or who attend benchmark arts events are more likely to take private arts classes or lessons and more likely to attend arts events themselves.

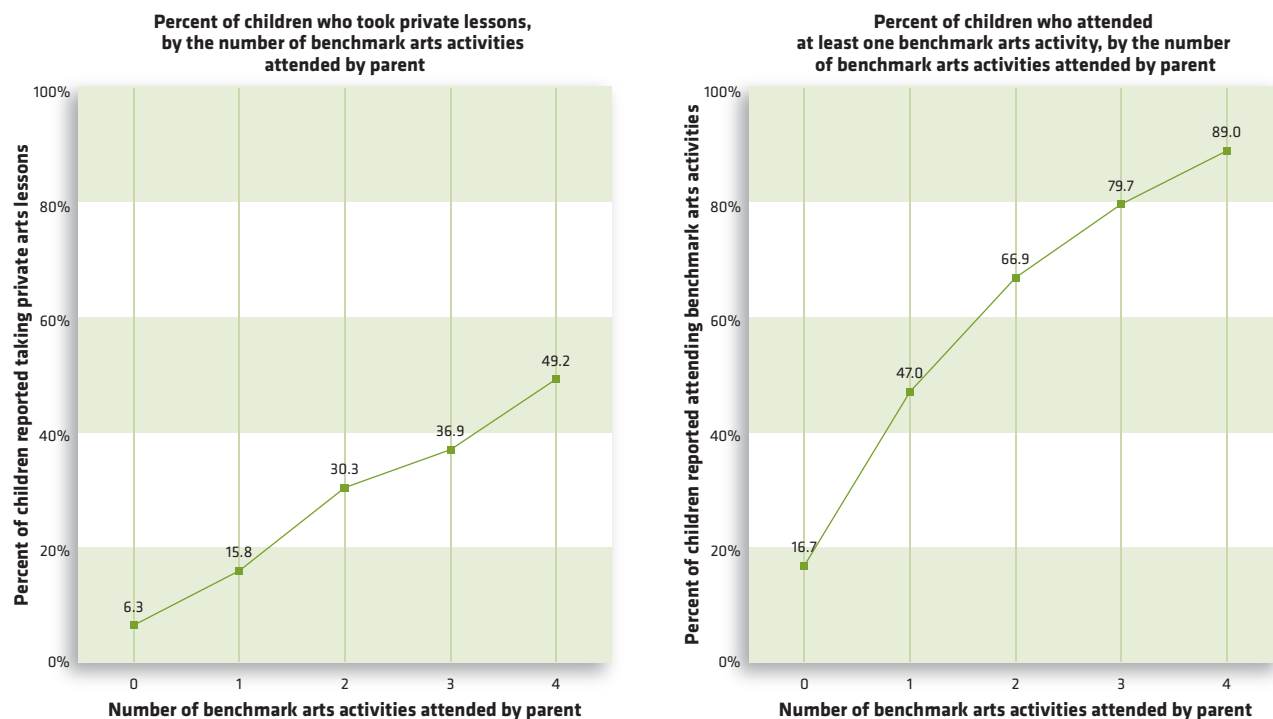
The SPPA is a survey of adult arts participation. It has collected data about childhood arts education to flesh out the background and preconditions of adults' behavior. But in 2008 the survey added three new questions for parents of school-aged children that establish some limited baseline information about their children's participation in the arts: rates of attendance at live music, theater or dance events, and rates at which children take private lessons or classes in the arts. In a certain sense, these questions are also about adult behavior, as children's private lessons and attendance at benchmark events often require parental support of some kind. The results are not surprising, showing strong intergenerational transmission of arts participation habits.

The children of parents who attend benchmark events are more likely to take private arts classes or lessons. They are also more likely to attend benchmark events themselves. The likelihood increases as parents attend events in more art forms, as shown in Figure 17, below.

Children of a parent who had arts education were more likely to take private lessons and to attend benchmark events than were children of parents who did not have an arts education. The more art forms that the parents studied, the more likely the children were to take private lessons and attend benchmark arts events, as shown in Figure 18 (see page 38).

**FIGURE 17**

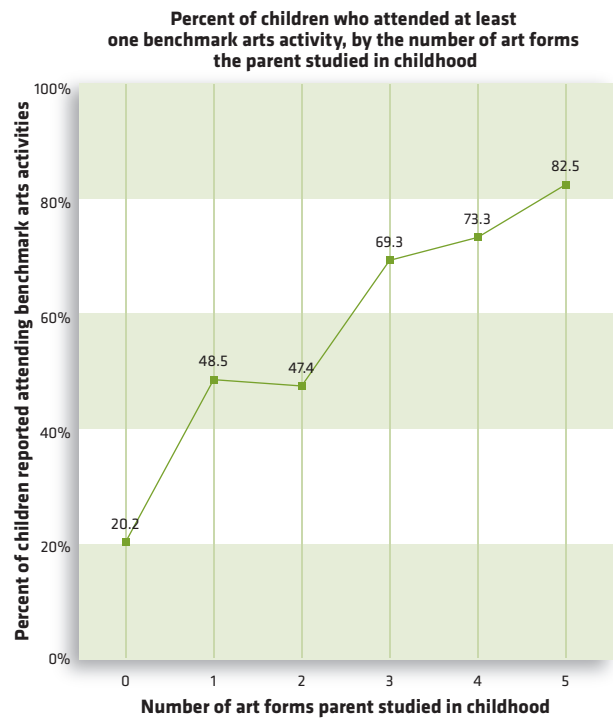
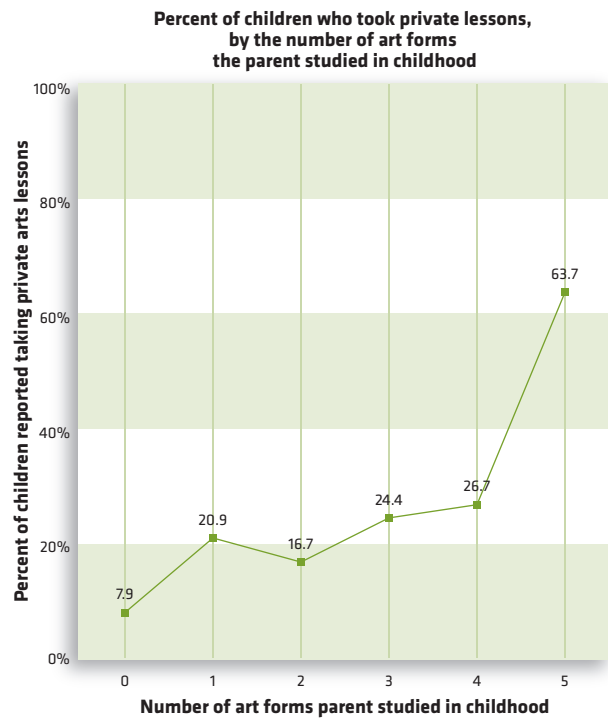
Private arts education in childhood and benchmark arts attendance in childhood, by benchmark arts activities attended by parent: 2008



Source: 2008 wave of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 18**

Private arts education in childhood and benchmark arts attendance in childhood, by number of art forms the parent studied in childhood: 2008



Source: 2008 wave of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

## NOTES

- 21 The Baumol effect, or Baumol's Cost Disease, was first articulated in *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, W. J. Baumol and W. G. Bowen (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1966). For a recent and briefer discussion see J. Surowiecki, "What Ails Us," *New Yorker*, July 7, 2003.
- 22 The Wolf Organization, *The Financial Condition of Symphony Orchestras* (Washington, DC: American Symphony Orchestra League, 1992).
- 23 G. Thorn and N. McDaniel, *The Quiet Crisis in the Arts* (New York: FEDAPT, 1991).
- 24 Ellen Cochran Hirzy, ed., *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1992).
- 25 Zannie Giraud Voss and Glenn B. Voss, with Christopher Shuff and Dan Melia, *Theatre Facts 2000* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), accessed online September 24, 2010, [www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TheatreFacts\\_2000.pdf](http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TheatreFacts_2000.pdf).
- 26 R. Kushner and R. Cohen, *National Arts Index 2009: An Annual Measure of the Vitality of Arts and Culture in the United States* (Washington, DC: Americans for the Arts, 2010).
- 27 National Endowment for the Arts, *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Report #49 (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009).
- 28 National Endowment for the Arts, *Art-Goers in Their Communities: Patterns of Civic and Social Engagement*, Research Note #98 (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009).
- 29 P. DiMaggio, M. Useem, and P. Brown, *Audience Studies of the Performing Arts and Museums: A Critical Review* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1978).
- 30 Bergonzi and Smith, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation*, 5.
- 31 L. Mizell, *Arts Education in the U.S.: 1982–2002* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).
- 32 For a fuller treatment of the relationship between age and arts participation, see *Age and Arts Participation: A Case against Demographic Destiny*, M. J. Stern (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2011).

The proportion of 18-year-olds who had arts education as children has declined with each wave of the SPPA, reaching a low of less than half in the most recent survey (2008).



# TRENDS IN ARTS EDUCATION

## CONTEXT

Americans participate in arts education in both school- and community-based settings. Arts education is taught across the full range of academic settings — public and private, elementary, middle, and high school, and post-secondary. The arts are also taught in a wide range of community settings at levels for beginners through virtuosos, in private individual lessons and in group classes, in homes, arts institutions, community centers, parks, and storefronts across the nation. Whether formal or informal, these settings play valuable roles — as gateway experiences and as introductory instruction to professional training at the highest levels.

Arts education in primary and secondary schools is of particular importance. Millions of parents seek opportunities for their children to study the arts outside school, but millions more are not inclined to do so, cannot afford to, or lack convenient access to those opportunities. Schools serve virtually all American children, including those least likely to receive arts education in any other way. Again, analysis of 1992 SPPA data showed that “socioeconomic status is the strongest determinant of obtaining an arts education,” and that “members of all racial/ethnic groups attained comparable levels of school-based arts education.” But outside schools, the reverse was found, “with non-whites accruing significantly less education in the arts than whites. This suggests that school-based arts education is more accessible to a broader cross-section of Americans than is arts education in the private sector.”<sup>33</sup> Policies that affect the availability of arts education in public schools, then, are likely to be decisive when it comes to making arts education available to young Americans on an equitable basis. Accordingly, trends in the provision of arts education in public schools are of great significance to future participation in the arts.

As public education took root and blossomed in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th century, Americans became a far better educated people, and more entered the middle class. Across the entire 20th century more Americans tended to stay in school longer, graduate from high school, go to college, and earn post-secondary degrees. We hypothesize that as Americans became better educated a growing proportion had access to and many more took school-based arts lessons or classes; childhood arts education grew as education grew in the 20th century.

The arts, however, have never enjoyed a secure place in American public education. There have been earnest debates about the value of the arts in education throughout our history, and the rationale for their inclusion in the curriculum has rarely been based on the value of learning the arts themselves. Rather, it has focused on their value in achieving other broadly accepted goals of public education. These goals have changed with the times, but have often been linked to vocational training needs, moral development, or to strategies for acculturating and socializing the children of new immigrants. Music, for example, was accepted into the curriculum of the first public schools “to improve singing in the church service.”<sup>34</sup> An influential report in 1836 urged the new schools to include music instruction to “promote his [the student’s] progress in other subjects.”<sup>35</sup> By the 20th century, progressive educators, including John Dewey, the leading educational philosopher of the time, began asserting that learning in the arts was essential to a complete education. They proposed that students needed to learn about culture and how to express themselves. Dewey, in particular, theorized that learning happens as a consequence of experience, and that the arts, which are often

thought of as the artifacts of human culture, are “refined and intensified forms of experience” that make unique contributions to human learning and understanding.<sup>36</sup>

Over time, art and music teachers became more common in elementary schools, and art and music classes were offered as electives (and sometimes as requirements) in high schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that 94 percent of American elementary schools offered music and 87 percent offered visual arts classes in the 1999–2000 school year; dance and theater were offered in far fewer elementary schools, just 20 percent and 19 percent respectively. NCES also found that music and visual arts were offered in 90 percent and 93 percent of American high schools, respectively, that same year. Theater was offered in 48 percent of high schools (much, presumably, as literature in the context of the English curriculum), while dance instruction was offered in just 14 percent of high schools.<sup>37</sup> More recent, smaller-scale investigations show the same pattern. In Chicago, for example, 67 percent of elementary schools offered visual arts and 70 percent offered music, while just seven percent offered theater and four percent offered dance in 2001.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, the availability of classes in the arts in schools is not the same thing as delivering meaningful arts instruction to students. While many schools make arts education available, the evidence in the SPPAs suggests that they do not deliver it regularly to all their students. For example, the Chicago school district — the third largest in the country — budgets a half-time art or music teacher in elementary schools with up to 750 students. A single art or music teacher could be responsible for teaching up to 1,500 students in Chicago elementary schools.<sup>39</sup> Given this staffing situation, some students may not receive regular instruction in either art form.

Data are inconclusive about how access to arts education has fared since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001. As we mentioned earlier in this report, findings from a 2008 survey of school district officials conducted by the Center on Educational Policy<sup>40</sup> suggest that arts education has been reduced nationally since the passing of this legislation. On the other hand, a recent GAO report on arts instructional time found that 90 percent of

elementary teachers reported that instruction time for arts education remained the same between school years 2004–2005 and 2006–2007.

While national data is inconclusive, there are findings at the metropolitan and state level that suggest declines in access to arts education.<sup>41</sup> The average elementary school student in Chicago, for instance, received less than 45 minutes of art or music a week in 2001.<sup>42</sup> A state-wide study in Washington showed that schools had reduced time for music instruction, which was most commonly provided, by 40 percent between 2005 and 2009. Time for the visual arts in Washington schools, the next most commonly provided art form, was reduced by 42 percent in the same period, even though a high proportion of Washington schools still provide visual art and music instruction.<sup>43</sup>

The early disinclination to consider the arts as serious academic subjects continues to this day. The arts are widely assumed to be expressive and affective, not cognitive or academic. Despite growing awareness among some educators and cognitive scientists that many of the fundamental processes of art-making are profoundly cognitive — reinforcing the building blocks of all thought<sup>44</sup> — and despite the enormous discipline required to master arts skills and make high-quality art, the arts are often associated with play and luxury, not with the work ethic and discipline associated with school and academics. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the highly influential 1983 report that framed the wave of school reform that continues today, barely mentioned the arts. It argued that pervasive “mediocrity” in American education was the result of insufficient focus on the basics and a decline of standards in the classroom. Arts education was appropriate, according to the report, for high school electives, particularly for students who hope to pursue professional careers in an arts field.<sup>45</sup> Given this subordinate role, the arts remain vulnerable to cuts whenever school budgets are tight.

That was the case in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, when school systems across the nation were confronted by fiscal crises precipitated by structural change in the economy, particularly in large urban areas, and resistance to taxes that fund public services such as education.<sup>46</sup> School districts from coast to coast cut budgets, and arts education was one of the first places many of those districts

chose to cut. New York City cut arts education drastically in its schools in 1976. Chicago schools laid off all elementary art and music teachers in 1979. Similar cuts were made to districts large and small across California after Proposition 13, an amendment to the state constitution passed by the voters in 1978, imposed profound limits on property tax increases. Based on our understanding of these developments, we hypothesize that the growth of arts education in American schools slowed or even reversed by the late 1970s.

Despite methodical collection of great volumes of data about American education and schools, there is no consistent record of how much arts education has been provided to American students in schools over the years. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) acknowledged that the arts were a core subject in its 1997 review of time spent teaching core subjects in elementary schools, but then did not report on time spent teaching the arts.<sup>47</sup> While the U.S. Department of Education has supported comprehensive studies on arts education in public elementary and secondary schools, the studies are infrequent; the last report was issued in 2002,<sup>48</sup> while the next report is not scheduled for release until the summer of 2011. It is worth stating that this Department of Education report, on survey data collected during the 2009–2010 school year, promises to yield results that could prove very useful for further research.

The general dearth of high-quality, comparable data about arts education in public schools is itself an indication of the low status of the arts in American education. We cannot learn the depth of the cuts to arts education in the late 1970s and 1980s from the available educational statistics. Nor do we know the extent to which arts education may have been restored during the 1990s and the 2000s.<sup>49</sup>

We approached this study of data from the four SPPAs with the hope that it would offer insight into the extent to which Americans have received arts education as children, and, in particular, the extent to which they received arts education during their childhood school experiences. And we hoped to go beyond the years of the surveys themselves to find evidence of the expansion and contraction of arts education across the 20th century. We hoped, in short, to test our hypothesis: that childhood arts

education, particularly arts education in schools, grew across most of the 20th century, but that in the late 1970s and 1980s it declined. And we hoped to learn whether it had been restored during the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century.

## ANALYTIC APPROACH

The SPPAs have collected data about Americans' arts education experiences during their childhood years. Linking the age of respondents to childhood arts education makes it possible to use the SPPAs to draw a picture of the ebbs and flows of arts education over much of the 20th century. Absent longitudinal data from reliable primary or secondary sources about arts education budgets in school districts nationwide, or the number of art, music, and other arts teachers employed by schools, this SPPA data may be the best available way to track trends in public school arts education over the decades.

The most accurate data on childhood arts education in the SPPAs may be the responses of young adults to each survey. They are least likely to have forgotten their experiences in childhood. So we used data provided by 18-year-olds, the youngest respondents in each survey, to track childhood arts lessons or classes from 1982 to 2008. The data are not fine-grained. They do not give us insight into the intensity, duration, or subjective value of the educational experiences, as previously discussed, and they refer to experiences over Americans' entire childhoods — from birth until their 18th birthday — a 17-year period *before* the survey date.

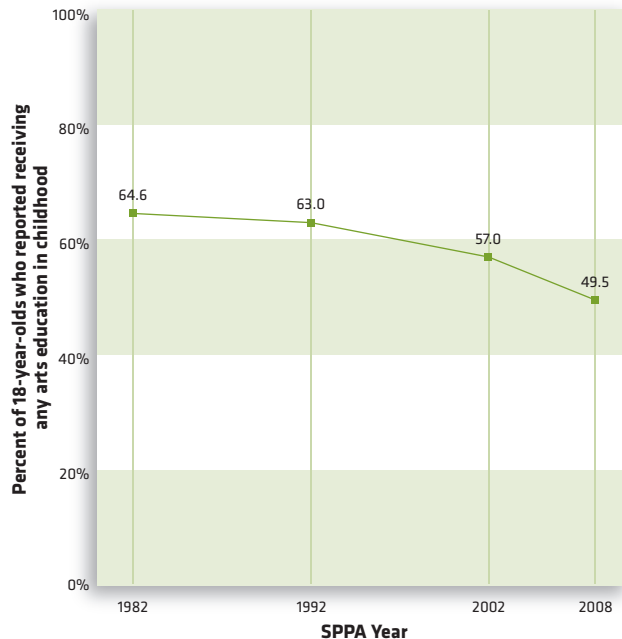
To determine the level of childhood arts education for the years before those represented by 18-year-olds in 1982 (1964 to 1981), we relied on the reports of older survey-takers. Of course, older adults may have forgotten more about their childhood experiences than young adults; their responses, therefore, are somewhat less reliable. But their responses to the SPPAs are the best evidence available about young people's arts education across much of the twentieth century. For analytic purposes, we grouped all respondents in each SPPA into cohorts by birth year and identified the proportion of each cohort that reported having arts education in childhood. We report on the years in which the samples were large enough to be statistically reliable, creating data points that go as far back as 1930.

## FINDINGS

### 1. Reported rates of childhood arts education declined significantly from 1982 to 2008.

Nearly two-thirds of 18-year-olds reported that they had lessons or classes in at least one art form as children in the 1982 SPPA. The proportion of 18-year-olds who had arts education as children has declined in each succeeding SPPA, reaching a low of less than half in the most recent survey as shown in Figure 19, below — a drop of 23 percent. (It is important to remember that while these figures are associated with the dates of the four SPPAs on the chart, they represent the childhood of people who turned 18 that year — a period of 17 years *before* the date of the survey. In other words, 65 percent of 18-year-olds had arts education between 1964 and 1981, and that is represented on the graph by a data point in 1982, the year of the SPPA. Further, 49.5 percent of 18-year-olds in 2008 had arts education between 1990 and 2007, and that is represented on the chart by the data point in 2008.)

**FIGURE 19**  
Percent of 18-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by SPPA year

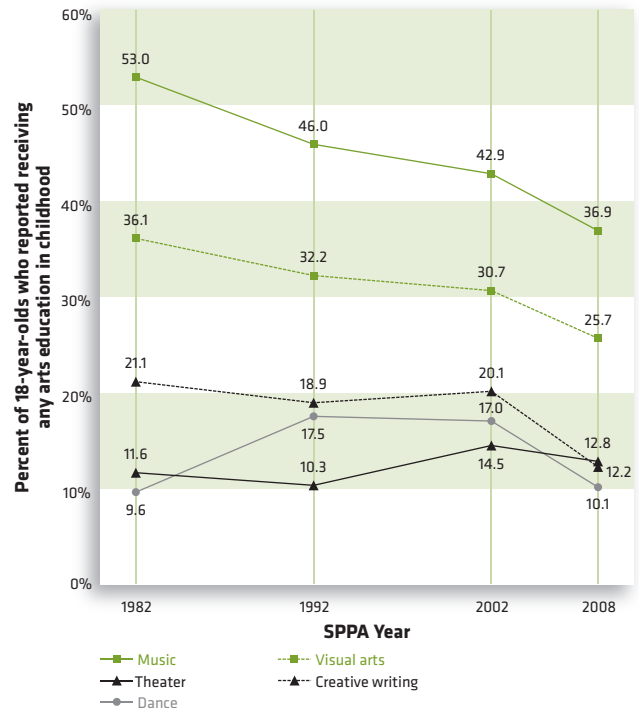


Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

### 2. Declines were substantial in childhood music, visual arts, and creative writing, while dance and theater increased slightly.

Declines were most significant in visual arts, music, and creative writing classes and lessons, as shown in Figure 20, below. Music learning declined from 53 percent to 37 percent, a drop of 30 percent. Visual arts decreased from 36 percent to 26 percent, a decline of 28 percent. Creative writing dropped from 21 percent to 12 percent, a 42 percent decline. Theater increased from 12 percent to 13 percent. Dance increased from 9.6 percent to 10.1 percent. Theater and dance, of course, were far less pervasive than music and visual arts in 1982 and, despite their small increases, they remained far less pervasive than music and visual arts in 2008. (Note that the 2002 and 2008 surveys were simplified, aggregating questions about classes and lessons taken when the respondent was “under 12” and/or “between 12 and 17” into a single category: classes and lessons taken when the respondent was “under 18.” For the

**FIGURE 20**  
Percent of 18-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by art form and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

purposes of creating comparison across all surveys, we aggregated the 1982, 1992, and 2002 SPPA data about classes and lessons taken when the respondent was “under 12” and/or between 12 and 17 into a single category: “childhood classes and lessons,” taken when the respondent was under 18.

### **3. It is likely that the declines in music, visual arts, and creative writing represent, in large measure, reductions in in-school arts education.**

The 1992 and 2002 SPPAs include data indicating if childhood arts classes were taken in school, out of school, or both in and out of school. Those data show that of the children who took music and visual arts classes, more took those classes in school than out. Theater and creative writing classes followed the same pattern on a smaller scale. In contrast, most of those who had dance classes took them outside school.<sup>50</sup> These patterns suggest that the declines shown in Figure 20 probably included substantial declines in classes taken in school in those subjects. Given the general decline in arts education in schools, the small increases in dance and theater suggest some growth in classes outside school in those art forms, but does not rule out the possibility of growth in schools. Absent data from the 2008 SPPA about school-based arts education, these are speculative, but reasonable, conclusions.<sup>51</sup> It is also reasonable to assume that many children pursue lessons outside school after an introduction to an art form within school. As school-based introductions to the arts become less common, it is also reasonable to assume that some children — those whose parents do not actively intervene and support their children’s arts education — will be less likely to pursue non-school classes.

### **4. Childhood arts education rose across most of the 20th century before declining in its final decades.**

Figure 21 (see page 46) represents the proportion of Americans who reported that they had any childhood arts education from 1930 to 2007. The data points are placed in the year of the respondents’ 18th birthday, and represent data on childhood arts education from Americans of all ages in all of the SPPAs, including data from older Americans. A 65-year-old respondent to the 1982 SPPA contributed data about experiences between 1917, her birth year,

and 1934, when she turned 18. The average for each birth year is represented by the open circles on the graph. The solid line is what is known as a “best fit line,” and it represents the trend across the years by smoothing the irregularities of the data. (The black circles represent data from 18-year-olds in SPPA years.) The graph shows that arts education rose steadily from 1930 — the first year the data included a statistically reliable sample size (birth year 1912) — when over 20 percent of children had any arts education. By about 1972, half of American children were receiving some arts education, and the percentage continued to rise until 1985, when it began to decline sharply. It crossed the 50 percent threshold again in about 2000, this time moving downward. By 2007, it had retreated to roughly the level it was at in 1965. The sharp and dramatic “turning point” we see in this graph is not typical of patterns most often seen in social change, which are generally more gradual. It suggests the likelihood of a very significant event or events that precipitated the change.

The data clearly indicate that a growing proportion of Americans received childhood arts education through most of the 20th century. The decline that began in the last decades of the century has continued into the new century.

The dates in Figure 21 should not be interpreted literally. The points on the graph represent childhood experiences of those who turned 18 in that year, the 17 years *before* the date on the graph. So the real “turning point” for arts education did not occur in 1985, as it appears in the graph, but sometime during the childhood years of people who turned 18 in 1985 (1967 to 1984), and most likely during their years in school (1972 to 1984). Those dates align neatly with the policy and practical developments in education — deep cuts to school budgets and intensifying focus on “the basics” — that began at the end of the 1970s.

This data and analysis support our hypothesis that childhood arts education in schools increased across much of the 20th century as Americans became better educated as a people, and that it has declined since the late 1970s, as school reform and fiscal constraints made arts education a lower priority in districts across the country.

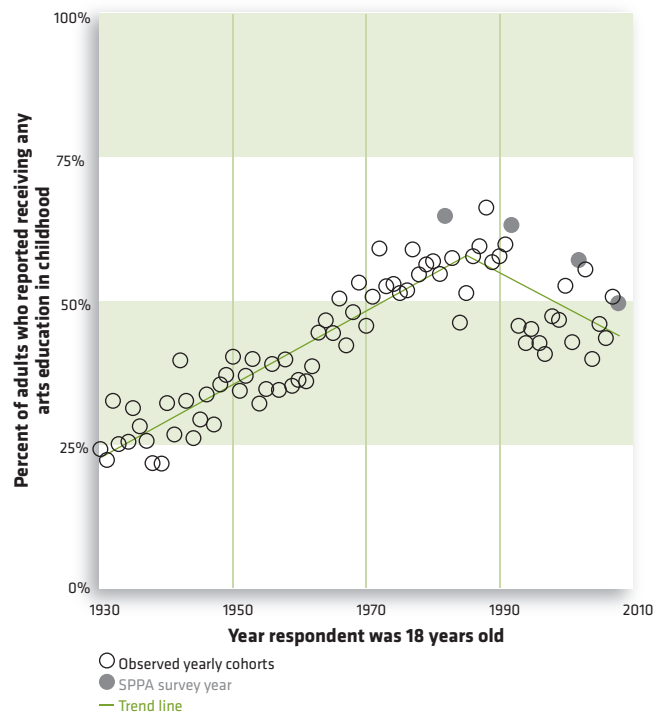
**5. Childhood arts education has not been equally distributed by SES or race. Its decline has been concentrated among low-income children and among African American and Hispanic children in particular.**

Figure 22, below, shows that girls have consistently had more arts education than boys, but there was not a statistically significant difference between the decline of childhood arts education for girls and boys from 1982 to 2008.<sup>52</sup>

Educational attainment is a consistently robust predictor of income,<sup>53</sup> and the SPPAs included questions about parental education, so we chose parental education as the best available proxy for childhood socioeconomic status. Figure 23 (see page 47) shows that unlike gender, children's socioeconomic status mattered a great deal as childhood arts education declined. It shows the proportion of those 18 to 24 years of age who reported that they had lessons or classes in any art form in

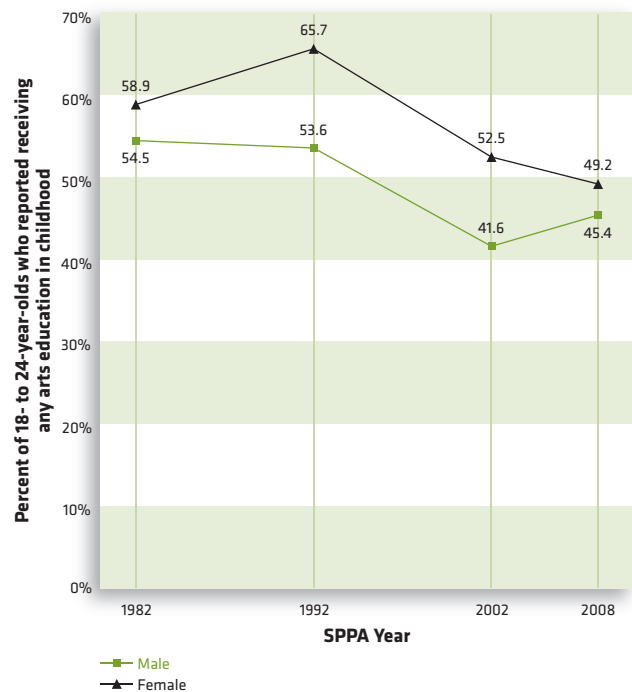
childhood by parents' educational attainment and survey year. Those whose parents had less than a high school education (lowest socioeconomic status) were the least likely to have had any arts education in their childhood across all four surveys. Those whose parents had a college degree or more (highest socioeconomic status) were consistently most likely to have had childhood arts education. All 18- to 24-year-olds were less likely to have had childhood arts education in 2008 than in 1982, no matter what their parents' educational attainment, reflecting the general decline in arts education. In 2008, adults whose parents had the highest educational attainment (highest socioeconomic status) were 17 percent less likely to have had a childhood arts education than the adults of 1982. Those whose parents had the lowest educational attainment (lowest socioeconomic status) were nearly 77 percent less likely to have had childhood arts education.

**FIGURE 21**  
Percent of Americans who received any arts education in childhood over the past 77 years



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 22**  
Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by gender and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

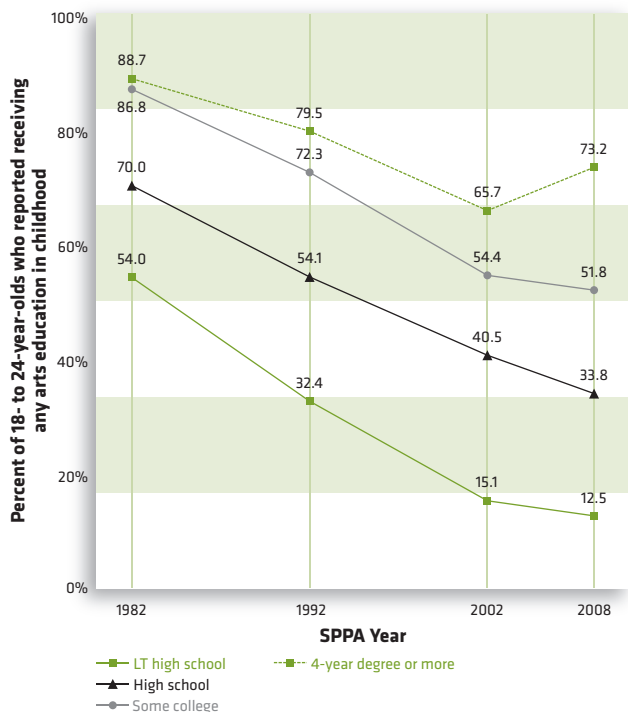
Figure 24, below, shows that white children enjoyed considerably more arts education than did African American or Hispanic children in all four SPPAs. What is more, the decline in the rate of childhood arts education among white children is relatively insignificant from 1982 to 2008, just five percent, while the declines in the rate among African American and Hispanic children are quite substantial — 49 percent for African American and 40 percent for Hispanic children.<sup>54</sup> These statistics support the conclusion that almost the entire decline in childhood arts education between the 1982 and 2008 SPPAs was absorbed by African American and Hispanic children.<sup>55</sup> The findings also lend further credibility to the hypothesis that the declines for those children resulted from declines in arts education in the schools, where African American and Hispanic children were the most likely to have received any arts instruction.<sup>56</sup>

The powerful association of arts education and adult benchmark attendance is confirmed again in Figure 25 (see page 48), which shows that adult benchmark attendance among young whites (18 to 24) was down just slightly from 1982 to 2008, but that benchmark attendance among young African American and Hispanic adults was substantially down, tracking the large decline in childhood arts education in those groups.

**6. Arts education rates among young adults were extremely volatile during this same period.**

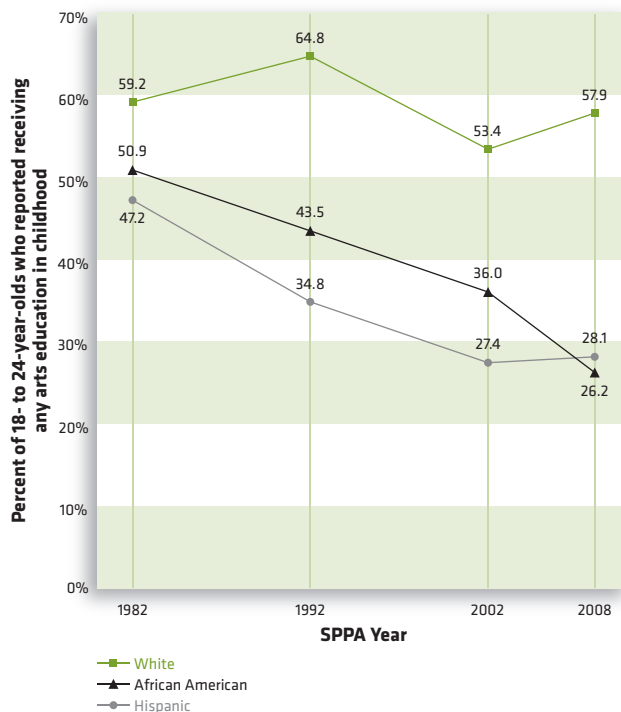
In Figure 26 (see page 46), we see that in the 2002 SPPA about 28 percent of young adults between 18 and 24 reported that they had taken arts classes or lessons in the past year. That rate declined to 22.4 percent in the 2008 SPPA, consistent with the decline in arts education during the childhood of those who turned 18 between 2002 and 2007. The remarkable increase in adult arts education among young adults from 1982 to 1992 is not consistent, however, and seems anomalous. We cannot explain the rise with the data available.

**FIGURE 23**  
Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by parental education and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

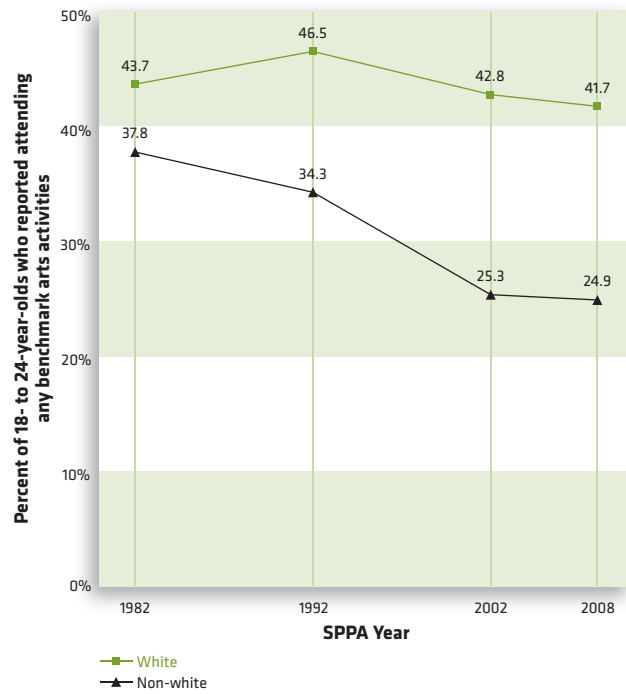
**FIGURE 24**  
Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by race/ethnicity and SPPA year<sup>57</sup>



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 25**

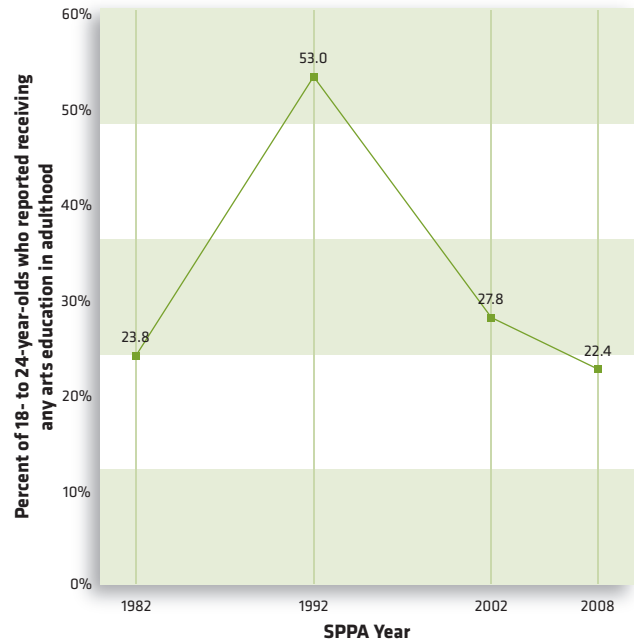
Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who attended any benchmark arts activities, by race/ethnicity and SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

**FIGURE 26**

Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education as an adult, by SPPA year



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.



## NOTES

- 33 Bergonzi and Smith, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation*, 48.
- 34 E. B. Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: Oliver Ditson Company, 1928), 2.
- 35 Calvin Stowe, quoted in Birge, *History of Public School Music*, 64.
- 36 J. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 2.
- 37 N. Carey, B. Kleiner, R. Porch, E. Farris, and S. Burns, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999–2000* (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). This publication is based on NCES' Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) for 1999–2000. A FRSS survey of public schools-based arts education occurred in 2009–2010, but the results were unavailable at the time of this report's publication.
- 38 L. Donaldson and E. Pearsall, *Arts Education in Chicago Public Schools* (Chicago: Chicago Community Trust, 2002).
- 39 Some elementary schools do supplement the formula with funding from other sources to employ more arts teachers, but other elementary schools have no arts faculty despite the budget formula in Chicago.
- 40 Center on Educational Policy, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects* (Washington, DC: Center on Educational Policy, 2008).
- 41 Government Accountability Office, *Access to Arts Education: Inclusion of Additional Questions in Education's Planned Research Would Help Explain Why Instruction Time has Decreased for Some Students* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2009).
- 42 Donaldson and Pearsall, *Arts Education in Chicago*.
- 43 G. Spilka, and S. Watts, *Arts Education Resources Initiative: The State of Arts Education in the State* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Arts Commission, 2005).
- 44 See, for example: G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); R. Root-Bernstein and M. Root-Bernstein, *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001); H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); G. Faconnier and M. Turner, *Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); J. Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (New York: Mariner Books, 2008); D. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music* (New York: Dutton, 2006); and M. Gazzaniga, *Learning, Arts, and the Brain: The Dana Consortium Report on Arts and Cognition* (New York: Dana Press, 2008).
- 45 National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).
- 46 M. Gottdeiner, and R. Hutchison, *The New Urban Sociology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006), 223–25.
- 47 National Center of Education Statistics, *Time Spent Teaching Core Academic Subjects in Elementary Schools*, NCES 97-293 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1997).
- 48 National Center for Educational Statistics, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999–2000*, NCES 2002-131 (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
- 49 A potentially important source of longitudinal data on art and music teachers is the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). This survey collects extensive data on American public and private elementary and secondary schools, including data on characteristics and qualifications of teachers and principals, teacher hiring practices, professional development, class size, and other conditions in schools. The SASS has been administered multiple times between 1987 and 2009.
- 50 L. Mizell, *Arts Education in the U.S.*
- 51 The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) arts assessment of 2008 found that there had been no “statistically significant changes since 1997 in the percentages of students [in eighth grade] attending schools offering instruction in music or visual arts with varying frequency.” This finding might appear contrary to our conclusion that visual arts and music education in schools declined during this period. However, the NAEP did not determine how many students actually took the available classes, nor does it provide data on arts classes in other grades. *The Nation's Report Card: Arts 2008 Music and Visual Art*, NCES 2009-488, S. Keiper, B. A. Sandene, H. R. Persky, and M. Kuang (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
- 52 We statistically tested the downward trend for boys and girls with a logistic regression model that employed an interaction effect between gender and time. The interaction effect was non-significant, indicating the null hypothesis that the effect of time was the same for boys and girls.
- 53 P. Wachtel, “The Effect on Earnings of School and College Investment Expenditures,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 58 (1976): 326–31.
- 54 See note 6 above.
- 55 Findings from other national studies are inconclusive about the relationship between race and access to arts education. Data self-reported by teachers in the U.S. Department of Education's National Longitudinal Study of No Child Left Behind (NLSNCLB), as reported in 2009 by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), suggests a correlation between race and access to arts education. The GAO identified statistically significant differences across school characteristics in the percentage of teachers reporting that the time spent on arts education had decreased. Teachers at schools identified as needing improvement and those with higher percentages of minority students were more likely to report a reduction in time spent on the arts. On the other hand, the U.S. Department of Education, in its *Nation's Report Card: Arts 2008* presenting the results of the 2008 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the arts, reported that there were no statistically significant differences found between the percentages of students in different racial/ethnic or gender groups attending middle schools with varying opportunities for instruction in either music or visual arts in 2008. Keiper, Sandene, Persky, and Kuang, *Nation's Report Card: Arts 2008*; and Government Accountability Office, *Access to Arts Education: Inclusion of Additional Questions*.
- 56 Bergonzi and Smith, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation*.
- 57 See note 6 above.

The future of the arts may not lie in the restoration of higher levels of “benchmark” attendance at traditional performances and exhibitions. Rather, it could lie in new *kinds* of arts experiences and participation which, for some people, hold more personal value than sitting in an audience.

# CONCLUSION

We have tried to make clear in this report that arts education is an essential part of the shifting landscape of American culture. It is itself an important mode of participation in the arts for children and for many adults, and evidence from the SPPAs shows that it is also an engine that drives development and change in that landscape. Perhaps it is more appropriate to think of arts education as a particularly important dimension of the nation's cultural "ecosystem", rather than a landscape. Over much of the 20th century, a rising rate of arts education for American children helped create the necessary conditions for robust development and growth. Progressively greater access to childhood arts education probably helped build a large national audience for the arts. Private philanthropy, public subsidy, and private investment were also essential to building the ecosystem, but, without a growing audience, the development of a cultural infrastructure of producing institutions and venues in cities and towns coast to coast — a dazzling and diverse collection of theaters, orchestras, opera and dance companies, concert halls, festivals, community schools of the arts, and museums of many kinds and sizes — would have been impossible. Those institutions, in turn, provided employment opportunities for a growing number of artists, who, in turn, were educated and trained in the arts, and who produced the works that audiences consumed and appreciated.

Needless to say, the cultural ecosystem is not nearly as simple, neat, and clean as the schematic outlined above. It has been filled with complexity, contradictions, and daunting challenges throughout its developmental history. But there is no doubt that it was robust throughout most of the 20th century. Now, SPPAs from 1982 through 2008 show an undeniable trend: participation in the arts — at least in certain "benchmark" arts events (live theater, classical music and jazz concerts, opera, dance performance, and exhibitions at art museums and galleries) — is declining. Many arts leaders recognized this trend long before the SPPAs documented it, and they have pursued many efforts to reverse it by improving their marketing, management, planning, and fundraising. Despite such efforts, audiences for benchmark arts events have continued to decline, in good economies and now in bad. And now it also appears likely that childhood arts education, which we believe has played such a vital role in energizing the system by developing the potential audience (as well as by putting some young Americans on the pathway to professional arts careers), also has declined over the last quarter-century. If these trends continue, the health of the arts ecosystem will be in jeopardy.

Childhood arts education provides important gateway and formative experiences in the arts. Any serious strategy for mitigating or reversing the decline of arts participation must consider the role that childhood arts education can play in rebuilding and restructuring audiences. School-based arts education is of particular importance because schools are the only institutions that reach vast numbers of children, particularly low-income children, who are unlikely to receive arts education any other way. But the dominant trends in education policy have worked against the arts in schools for some time. While there are some suggestions that those trends might be changing, fundamental misunderstandings and underestimates of the cognitive value of the arts continue to keep the arts on the margins of public education, particularly in schools and systems serving low-income children. Those attitudes will need to change, priorities will have to shift, and new resources will need to be developed before we can expect to see significant new investments in arts education in our public schools. These reforms will occur only because a body of solid research and innovative practice continues to grow and show that arts education has serious benefits to students *as students*, and that arts learning is strongly associated with higher levels of achievement, positive social and emotional development, and successful transitions into adulthood.

This research and practice should look far more closely than is possible with the SPPA surveys into the nature of arts education. We need to know more about what kinds of arts education matter most — about different pedagogical strategies, teaching methods, curricular content, purposes, and goals. We also need to know more about the “dose” of arts education that is necessary to generate the positive outcomes all good educators seek, and more about the subjective responses to arts education that lead individuals toward lifelong participation in and engagement with the arts.

The SPPA can and should play a small and continuing role in this pursuit of knowledge. This survey of a large and representative sample of adult Americans continues to be the best way to follow broad trends in arts education and calculate their effects on adult arts participation. The SPPA could add real value by restoring questions about childhood arts education. The study authors recommend, at the very least, that questions be added to establish if childhood arts classes or lessons were taken in school, elsewhere in the community, or both. Even more value could be added by establishing the intensity or duration of arts classes and lessons — in schools and out — through the SPPA.

It is vital to advocates for the arts and for arts education that data are regularly collected that indicate the penetration of the arts in schools. It would be wise to supplement the SPPA with data that measure partnerships between arts organizations and schools to bring the arts and artists into classrooms.

The arts themselves have changed in many significant ways since the first SPPA in 1982. Some of those changes have been driven by artists who, as artists often do, have rebelled against many of the conventions of the art world. The traditional art forms have been transformed, deconstructed, and integrated. Enormous passion and interest is now directed at media and forms that hardly existed at the time of the first SPPA. Our assumptions about cultural hierarchy — terms like “high” or “fine” art, “pop” and “folk” art — have lost their traditional meanings, or lost their meaning altogether. And new expectations about *how* we participate in culture have developed in the wake of the computer age, the Internet, the do-it-yourself (DIY) phenomenon, the rock concert, and hip hop. The future of the arts may not lie in the restoration of higher levels of “benchmark” attendance at traditional performances and exhibitions, desirable as those ends may be. Rather, it could lie in new *kinds* of arts experiences and participation that are more active, that blur the line between performer and audience, that

make the beholder a part of the creative process and artists the animators of community life — experiences which, for some people, hold more personal value than sitting in an audience. Those kinds of experiences are being developed by artists and arts organizations, often in their education programs, in communities and schools across the country, and we need to know more about them.

The SPPA has a responsibility to collect data that show us broad trends over time, so it must respect its own history and the history of arts participation in America. It also has a responsibility to keep up with the times by identifying and recognizing emerging forms of arts participation that reflect deep changes in the arts and in the American people themselves. What appears today to be an arts ecosystem in jeopardy may turn out to be an arts ecosystem that is restructuring and transforming as a result of the changing practices of artists and the changing interests and dispositions of the American people. The SPPA needs a broad enough perspective and sufficient flexibility to help us recognize the difference and to give us guidance in keeping the arts healthy in America.

# APPENDIX ON METHODOLOGY

Much of the analysis in this study was done using a statistical method called logistic regression. It uses a method called “maximum likelihood” to estimate the effects of independent variables on the chance of the dependent variable having a positive value versus a value of 0. The coefficients of a logistic model are best represented by odds ratios, which are the exponents of the coefficients. Odds ratios give the relative odds of the outcome, comparing those in the coefficient’s category to those in the reference group. For example, having one lesson in the arts as a child is associated with an odds ratio of 1.48, meaning that people who had classes or lessons in one art form as a child have nearly a 50 percent greater chance of attending a benchmark event than someone with zero lessons. Conversely, having less than a high school education has an odds ratio of 0.68, meaning that those with less than a high school education have a 32 percent lower chance of attending a benchmark event than someone with a high school education. The following table of logistic regression coefficients predicts attendance at benchmark events. It served as the basis for many of the graphs presented in figures in this report.

TABLE

Logistic regression coefficients predicting attendance at benchmark activities

| Variable                               |                               | Odds-ratio | Coefficient | Standard Error | t-test | p-value |
|--|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------|--------|---------|
| <b>Year</b>                            | 1992                          | 0.95       | -0.05       | 0.06           | 0.83   | 0.405   |
|  | 2002                          | 0.76       | -0.27       | 0.06           | 4.50   | 0.000   |
|  | 2008                          | 0.68       | -0.39       | 0.07           | 5.57   | 0.000   |
| <b>Age</b>                             | 25-44                         | 1.31       | 0.27        | 0.07           | 3.86   | 0.000   |
|  | 45-54                         | 1.57       | 0.45        | 0.08           | 5.63   | 0.000   |
|  | 55+                           | 1.65       | 0.50        | 0.08           | 6.25   | 0.000   |
| <b>Childhood lessons</b>               | 1                             | 1.48       | 0.39        | 0.04           | 9.75   | 0.000   |
|  | 2                             | 1.92       | 0.65        | 0.06           | 10.83  | 0.000   |
|  | 3                             | 2.59       | 0.95        | 0.09           | 10.56  | 0.000   |
|  | 4                             | 3.22       | 1.17        | 0.14           | 8.36   | 0.000   |
| <b>Adult lessons</b>                   | 1                             | 2.08       | 0.73        | 0.05           | 14.60  | 0.000   |
|  | 2                             | 2.92       | 1.07        | 0.07           | 15.29  | 0.000   |
|  | 3                             | 3.67       | 1.30        | 0.10           | 13.00  | 0.000   |
|  | 4                             | 4.85       | 1.58        | 0.16           | 9.88   | 0.000   |
| <b>Respondent's education</b>          | Less than high school         | 0.68       | -0.38       | 0.07           | 5.43   | 0.000   |
|  | Some college                  | 1.51       | 0.41        | 0.05           | 8.20   | 0.000   |
|  | 4-year degree or more         | 2.32       | 0.84        | 0.05           | 16.80  | 0.000   |
| <b>Respondent's mother's education</b> | Less than high school         | 0.89       | -0.12       | 0.05           | 2.40   | 0.016   |
|  | Some college                  | 1.28       | 0.25        | 0.06           | 4.17   | 0.000   |
|  | 4-year degree or more         | 1.28       | 0.25        | 0.07           | 3.57   | 0.000   |
| <b>Respondent's father's education</b> | Less than high school         | 0.97       | -0.03       | 0.05           | 0.60   | 0.549   |
|  | Some college                  | 1.17       | 0.16        | 0.07           | 2.29   | 0.022   |
|  | 4-year degree or more         | 1.45       | 0.37        | 0.06           | 6.17   | 0.000   |
| <b>Marital status</b>                  | Widowed                       | 1.06       | 0.06        | 0.08           | 0.75   | 0.453   |
|  | Divorced                      | 1.01       | 0.01        | 0.05           | 0.20   | 0.841   |
|  | Never married                 | 1.15       | 0.14        | 0.05           | 2.80   | 0.005   |
| <b>Income quartile</b>                 | 2                             | 1.20       | 0.18        | 0.06           | 3.00   | 0.003   |
|  | 3                             | 1.68       | 0.52        | 0.06           | 8.67   | 0.000   |
|  | 4                             | 2.32       | 0.84        | 0.06           | 14.00  | 0.000   |
| <b>Race</b>                            | Black                         | 0.89       | -0.12       | 0.07           | 1.71   | 0.086   |
|  | Hispanic                      | 1.20       | 0.18        | 0.07           | 2.57   | 0.010   |
|  | Other                         | 0.88       | -0.13       | 0.09           | 1.44   | 0.149   |
| <b>Other demographics</b>              | City's population > 1 million | 1.25       | 0.22        | 0.04           | 5.50   | 0.000   |
|  | Female                        | 1.27       | 0.24        | 0.04           | 6.00   | 0.000   |
|  | Respondent does not work      | 0.88       | -0.13       | 0.04           | 3.25   | 0.001   |
| <b>Intercept</b>                       |                               |            | -1.95       | 0.10           | 19.50  | 0.000   |
| <b>R<sup>2</sup></b>                   |                               |            | 0.21        |                |        |         |
| <b>Model degrees of freedom</b>        |                               |            | 35          |                |        |         |
| <b>Chi-square</b>                      |                               |            | 3519.77     |                |        |         |
| <b>Observations</b>                    |                               |            | 23749       |                |        |         |

Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

# AUTHORS

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