



CLOSING CURTAINS:

ARTS PROGRAMS

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It wasn't real until I was in the wings waiting for my entrance. Although I had been dancing since I was 3-years-old, this was a completely different experience. It was my high school senior showcase and I could feel the presence of the audience and the energy that they were giving me through the curtain. My body trembled with nerves built up over my four years leading to this moment. I let the music engulf my senses, from my head, through my arms, and into my feet. I let myself enter on to the stage, forgetting everything except for the movement. It was just me and the stage. Nothing else mattered.

MANY YOUNG ARTISTS DREAM OF GETTING TO THIS POINT IN THEIR LIVES, THEY DEDICATE BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS TO PERFECTING THEIR CRAFT. SADLY, THERE ARE ART PROGRAMS THAT HAVE BEEN DICED INTO SHREDS BY THE SHARP EDGES OF WHAT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS REFER TO AS BUDGET CUTS.

Art programs are important in everyone's life no matter what age they are. Art programs help build character, self-esteem and allow people to make connections. They are an outlet for youth to express themselves and that is why arts programs across the country should and continue to be funded. Chicago, Ill. is one of the places where over the years public schools have seen immense cuts in their

art programs budgets. Chicago Public Schools have in the past redirected that funding towards STEM related subjects and programs. Although those subjects are very important and help us to compete as a country, arts programs are significant in their own right. "Nationwide this is a problem," said Sarah Ford, Chicago High School for the Arts, ChiArts, Dance Department Head.

"It has often been said that when the budget gets tight, arts is the first thing to go. That's a challenge we face as a nation because there is a lot of data out there about the qualities that'll be needed most in the workplace for the future generations is creativity," Ford continued.

ChiArts, being my alma mater and the first public performing arts high school in Chicago, is helping to unleash those creative minds that will help to generate and improve the workplace as time goes on. "[The arts] is not something that is generally tested and therefore doesn't have a number attached to it," Ford said. "People like to say these are our numbers and this is how smart our kids are."

More recently, Chicago has started to add arts into the school curriculum again and they are starting to truly recognize its significance in public schools, ChiArts has helped to mobilize that. Although Chicago is starting to get on board, other cities across the nation are still struggling. In the past year, there have been cuts for art

programs in the Tallahassee community. Places such as the Tallahassee Museum and the Council on Culture and Arts, have and will receive less funding for the arts due to slashed grants from lawmakers. Although these are not programs in public schools, these are other outlets in the community that students could utilize.

"I THINK THERE IS SOME CULTURAL BELIEF THAT [THE ARTS] IS NOT ECONOMICALLY PRODUCTIVE AND PEOPLE THAT PARTICIPATE IN THESE FIELDS. WE HAVE ENOUGH PEOPLE DOING THAT,"

...said John Warford associate professor for the Department of History and Political Science at Florida A&M University. "It's a particular focus on science, mathematics and technology. I think it's economic and as a cultural impact, because people have always believed that you can get music and art and appreciation from it from outside sources; or the school is not responsible to introduce people to that," Warford added.

How can students get arts from outside sources if the arts funding

is getting cut in both directions? When children experience art programs in high school, it is likely that they will want to continue in college. This is true for Joseph Lay, a sophomore business administration student from Atlanta, Ga. His love for music also led him to receive a band scholarship. "I was in the high school marching band, the section leader," Lay said. "I'm a musician at heart. I can feel the music. You can feel when everything is in tune." Art programs, such as Lay, and his music, provide skills that can be taken from high school and brought to college.

"It works out the creative side of your brain. It makes your hearing better, and it helps you to notice patterns," Lay said.

BEING A PART OF AN ART PROGRAM IS CLEARLY MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY, IT TEACHES SKILLS THAT CONTINUE TO BE USED FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. THE ARTS, NO MATTER WHAT KIND, TEACH CHILDREN A HOST OF SKILLS.

It teaches discipline, time management and confidence. It also allows students to express themselves creatively. The arts help kids socially and psychologically. The arts are important because it helps to create well-rounded individuals. I had a wonderful experience in the arts that I feel others should have. So as I danced on that stage and poured my heart out in movement, I took a deep breath and felt the person that I was to become.