



*“The educational excellence challenge of this century is to organize learning for innovation. The equity challenge is to guarantee that gender, economic status, race, and native language cease to predict who will invent a vaccine, write a prize-winning play, or engineer a major breakthrough in technology. Realizing this vision depends on all children, throughout their education, being cultivated as potential inventors, entrepreneurs, and artists.”*

Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf, 2007

More than Measuring: Program Evaluation as an Opportunity to Build the Capacity of Communities

In the Portland, OR metropolitan region we are meeting this challenge head on through The Right Brain Initiative, an equitable, systemic, and innovative approach to education through an arts integration model for K-8 students. A program of the Regional Arts & Culture Council, Right Brain was launched in 2008 to transform learning for all children through the arts, creativity, and whole brain thinking. By weaving the arts throughout the curriculum, teachers acquire new tools to engage students in a creative process that connects back to other subjects. In this way, students become more active learners, develop their creative and critical thinking skills and increase their academic success, leaving them better prepared for high school, college, and the workplace.

The Right Brain Initiative was designed by the local community in response to current needs of our students and schools. Its sustainable partnership of public schools, local government, foundations, businesses and the cultural community help ensure its continued success. Further supporting this collective impact model, Right Brain has benefited from a long-term relationship with the Kennedy Center when Portland was selected as the third site to participate in the Any Given Child initiative.

Operating via a whole-school model, Right Brain provides creative learning experiences for *every* student at every partner school. We aim to ensure that every child has access to the arts—not just those from affluent neighborhoods and high-performing schools. To effectively address the educational opportunity gap, Right Brain prioritizes sites with high populations of students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and schools in rural communities with limited access to the arts. In the 2017-18 school year we served nearly 30,000 students in 70 schools from eight school districts located in a variety of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Approximately 51 percent of students are eligible for federal free/reduced lunch programs, 24 percent are English language learners, and 39 schools are designated as Title I.

Through an interactive professional development model for educators, we serve approximately 1,500 classroom teachers, arts specialists, principals, and teaching artists, equipping them with instructional strategies needed to ensure effective, on-going arts-based learning for their students. These arts integrated strategies address the expectations of Common Core State Standards, promote students' 21st Century Skills, and create environments where students thrive academically, socially and artistically. In addition, the collaboration of trained teaching artists and teachers provides arts integrated classroom experiences in a variety of art forms

including dance, media arts, music, theatre and visual art, all tied to core subjects. As one teacher described it, “Dance becomes Astronomy. Theater becomes History. And drumming becomes Geography.”

We continually measure our progress and establish best practices for assessing the impact on student learning. A five-year study of more than 18,000 Right Brain students led by market research firm WolfBrown revealed significant impacts in reading and math. Annual gains on Oregon standardized tests for students in both subjects increased more than twice as much once schools partnered with the Initiative. Scores were particularly striking for English language learners’ whose English Language Proficiency scores increased 10 to 20 times more than average once schools were fully engaged with Right Brain.

The arts are intrinsic to teaching, learning, and student achievement and are essential to a well-rounded education. The Right Brain Initiative remains committed to transforming student learning, regardless of neighborhood, language, or learning style. The importance of arts integration is best expressed in the words of a kindergarten teacher, “The arts are another language with which my students can make meaning and share their thinking and ideas. Art isn’t just a subject, it is tool for thinking. This is especially important for those kids that might not have the words yet to express their thinking and so in this sense the materials and the art form allow every child to have a voice and for their ideas to be part of the discussion.”

*[www.TheRightBrainInitiative.org](http://www.TheRightBrainInitiative.org)*