Executive Summary

Arts education – teaching the skills and content of an art form – is broadly considered to be part of a student’s whole education. Additionally, research has shown that arts education can help address many of the education challenges facing the South, improving graduation rates, attendance, academic achievement, and test scores. The research has demonstrated these benefits as well as increased student engagement, brain development, creativity, workforce development, and 21st century skills.

While the potential and importance of arts education is clearly established, to date no one has generated benchmark data on the availability of arts education in southern schools. Some have developed data aggregated at the state level, however, many of these studies are dated, and none of them look at the entire South Arts region in a comprehensive way. This study is a major step toward that goal.

South Arts is a regional arts organization working in partnership with the state arts agencies of the nine southeastern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The agency’s strategic plan adopted in 2009 included a goal to understand the status of arts education in the region. Recognizing the critical role of the school principal in program quality, advocacy, and resource allocation, the study sought to understand their perceptions of arts education as well as collect quantitative data about arts education available in their schools. Surveys distributed in the fall of 2012 to more than 15,000 principals yielded 4,400 responses, a 29% response rate, representing schools with a total enrollment of 2.87 million students. All findings reported represent only those responding schools.

The study’s primary purpose is to create baseline arts education data for the South Arts region on access to arts education, the quality of arts education, arts instructor qualifications, resources and partners, and principal perspectives. The summary report *Arts Education in the South Phase I: Public School Data and Principals’ Perspectives* gives a general overview of the research findings. An online data archive, organized in aggregate for the region and each state, as well as by elementary, middle and high school levels, is available at [www.southarts.org/artseducation](http://www.southarts.org/artseducation) for researchers, policymakers, administrators and educators to look more closely at the survey results and conduct further analyses.

A companion report, *Arts Education in the South Phase II: Profiles of Quality*, comprises a series of case studies of model arts education programs at public schools in the region. Created in partnership with the Southeast Center for Education in the Arts at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, this report is also available at [www.southarts.org/artseducation](http://www.southarts.org/artseducation).

As in the rest of the nation, responding schools in the South in aggregate are more likely to offer visual art (71%) and music (80%) classes than dance (14%) and theatre (22%) classes. While some states in the region meet or exceed the national average of access to visual art and music, in aggregate the South offers less access than the national average. In schools where arts classes are available, a significantly greater percentage of students are enrolled in visual art (61%) and music (62%) than other art forms. However, the time students spend in arts classes each week is higher in dance (155 minutes) and theatre (194 minutes) than in visual art (134) and music (137). In addition to arts classes, 38% of schools in the region utilize arts integration, and 48% offer arts field trips. Twenty-five percent offer after school arts programs, 23% visiting artist programs, and 24% gifted/talented programs in the arts. Five percent of responding schools offer no arts education whatsoever.

Like measures of access, measures of quality arts instruction for responding schools in the region tend to be higher for visual art and music,

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and lower for dance and theatre. This is the case for all four measures of quality—arts instruction following sequential and ongoing curriculum, arts instruction following state standards, arts instruction following national standards, and arts instruction taught by certified specialists. While the vast majority of visual art (91%) and music instruction (94%) is being taught by arts specialists, qualifications among dance and theatre instructors are more diverse, with more instruction provided by classroom teachers, artists, paraprofessionals or volunteers/parents. Some 28% of responding schools receive funding for arts education through the school budget. Other support comes from a variety of sources: the district (42% of schools), the PTA/PTO (31%), arts fund raisers (26%), and state arts agencies (13%). About 69% of responding schools spend arts education funds on arts supplies and equipment, 52% on arts field trips, 36% on arts instructor professional development, and 31% on arts assemblies.

Seventy-seven percent of responding principals identified themselves as the primary decision-maker for arts education at their school. Seventy-three percent of them reported budget constraints as one of their three greatest obstacles to providing arts education, the others being competing priorities (53%) and time in the school day (45%). Thirty-five percent identified insufficient personnel as an obstacle. Fifty-three percent of responding principals identified increased arts education funding for community and state arts organizations as a factor that would be helpful to improve arts learning. Other key factors are the availability of arts supplies and equipment (38%), a certified specialist for teaching the arts (31%), and training in arts integration (30%).

No research methodology can fully illuminate its subject. This report compiles data from voluntarily responding principals. Interested parties may use this and other existing data to identify potential reporting gaps, cross-correlate data to provide more in-depth understanding of the responses, and define additional questions and areas for exploration. A number of suggestions for taking the data further appear in the complete report.

South Arts thanks the state arts agency and state departments of education staff in the region who assisted with this research, and the 4,400 public school principals who took the time to complete the survey. Allen Bell is the primary author of the research report. To read the entire Summary Report, access the data archive, and/or sign up for South Arts’ arts education resource email list, visit www.southarts.org/artseducation. For more information, contact Mollie Quinlan-Hayes, South Arts Deputy Director, at 404-201-7941 or mquinlanhayes@southarts.org.