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Participation in Visual and Performing Arts Courses and High School Graduation Rates in New
Jersey Public High Schools

by

Richard Celebre

Dissertation Committee
Jill Patterson, Ed. D., Mentor
Daniel Gutmore, Ph. D.
Linda Freda, Ed. D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Education, Management, Leadership, and Policy

Seton Hall University

2020

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

We certify that we read this thesis written by _____ in the Fall Semester 2020 and, in our opinion, it is sufficient in scientific scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor in Education.

_____(Date)

Jill Patterson, Ed.D.
Research Mentor

_____(Date)

Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D.
Reader, Member of Dissertation Committee

_____(Date)

Linda Freda, Ed.D.
Reader, Member of Dissertation Committee

Acknowledgments

“Man, kids have different types of intelligences, some arts, some athletics, some academics, but all deserve to be nurtured, all deserve a chance to shine their light,” – Flea, Red Hot Chili Peppers

My lifelong connection to, and affinity for, the arts lead my initial interest in pursuing a study that investigated the impact of art education on students’ academic lives. I started with a broad idea and was guided by the insights, expertise, and collaborative vision of several key contributors, towards a more focused study. I would like to acknowledge and thank those people now.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the members of my dissertation committee. To my mentor, Dr. Jill Patterson, thank you for providing guidance, insights, and positivity throughout this process. Our conversations and collaboration took an idea and transformed it into a study. Without your feedback, confidence, and supervision, none of this would have been possible. To Dr. Daniel Gutmore, thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge and expertise; the insight you provided was invaluable. Dr. Linda Freda, your willingness to join the committee and provide a vision along the way that was guided by real-world administrative experiences was paramount to the completion and value of this study. Thank you.

To my family, thank you for your love, support, and encouragement throughout this process. To simply acknowledge my wife, Caitlin, is not enough. The completion of this program and study would have never been possible without you in my corner. I am eternally grateful to have you by my side and consider this accomplishment as much yours as mine. Through two pregnancies and a pandemic, you never wavered in your support, positivity, understanding, and love. To my children, Tallulah and Beckett: I hope that this accomplishment may serve as a reminder in your own personal journeys that through hard work and determination, nothing is out

of reach. To my parents, Cheryl and Louis, words cannot express the levels of gratitude and admiration I have for you following this and every other experience we have endured together. Finally, I want to thank my siblings, Marlena and Jeffrey. It took 26 years across nine different schools for the three of us to finally share a classroom together as students. I'm sure both of our cohorts, all of our Seton Hall professors, and Dr. Patterson, as well, realized very quickly just how unique, and at times inevitably distracting, an experience it is to complete a Doctoral program with your two best friends. As your younger brother, working to impress the two of you has always been the only motivation I have ever needed. Thank you

Dedication

*To my wife, Caitlin, and my children, Tallulah and Beckett,
for all of your love and support.*

*To my parents, Cheryl and Louis,
for all of your confidence and help along the way.*

Abstract

Emerging issues, including limited financial resources, funding from public sources, and the increasing demand for academic excellence and achievement, are forcing high schools to reassess how current resources are allocated within their institutions. Public schools continue to look to become more efficient and strategic in the allocation of their available resources for promoting academically focused and successful students. The value of programs that are not directly connected to the standardized testing system currently in place, such as arts education, are often overlooked when school districts make their financial decisions. This is problematic because the benefits afforded to students through the participation in visual and performing arts courses are present both inside and outside of the classroom. To those points, the purpose of this study is to examine if an association exists between the types of arts programs available to students, average schoolwide participation rates, and graduation rates. There were three key findings from this study. Those key findings were that a positive relationship exists between average 4-year participation rates in visual and performing arts and average 4-year graduation rates, that socioeconomic status was an indicator of the number of courses and concentrations offered in a district, and that a school's DFG did not impact the depth of courses offered. These findings have implications for future policies, practice, and research studies.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Visual and performing arts courses have exposed many students to positive learning experiences that leave lasting constructive effects on youth development (Davenport, 2010). Participation in visual and performing arts courses has been linked to increased academic performance in classrooms, specifically in subjects such as language arts and mathematics (Eisner, 2002). Skills learned in visual and performing arts courses are oftentimes transferred into the classroom and beyond and have been known to impact students' self-efficacy, as represented by their feelings of self-worth, persistence, and confidence (Bandura, 1994). Similarly, studies have found that students who participate in visual and performing arts courses develop motivational skills through engagement, which helps to foster perseverance and risk-taking in the classroom (Ruppert, 2006).

Standardized testing has been around since the early 1900s, with the majority of schools in the United States engaging in some form of standardized testing by the 1930s (Perrone, 1991). With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 by President George W. Bush, the achievement gap that existed at that time between disadvantaged and advantaged students was targeted (Tanner and Tanner, 2007). As a result, the United States has emphasized student achievement as defined by high test scores in core subject areas such as reading, mathematics, and science on standardized tests. This added emphasis also comes as a result of the Soviet's launch of Sputnik in 1957, which made the United States' students out to be falling behind the rest of the world in these subjects (Tienken, 2013). "The Soviets' launch of Sputnik created an educational crisis in the United States; at least that is what public school critics claimed. Bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., quickly set out to fix our schools" (Tienken, 2013, p. 23). When defining student achievement, the literature often ascertains that measuring

achievement is done by standardized test scores, particularly in Language Arts and Mathematics subject areas (Elpus, 2013). Consequently, National policy and the standardized testing movement places focus on tested subjects, which threatens the importance placed on Visual and performing arts.

Regardless of the well-researched and documented defects of the tests themselves, educational policymakers and school administrators have continued to be reliant on the data they collect from these tests to make decisions. Often, educational policymakers utilize standardized tests to push for political and school reforms (Tanner and Tanner, 2007). The negative aspects of standardized testing were discussed by Madaus and Russell (2010) when they noted:

The negative effects are many. They include narrowing the curriculum, decreasing attention on non- tested subjects, changing preschool and kindergarten curricula, narrow test preparation, corruption of test results, cheating, triaging “bubble” students, retaining students in grade, increased dropout rates, and increasing student stress and anxiety. All of these paradoxical negative consequences of high-stakes testing are chronic, predictable, and well documented over centuries and across continents (2010, p. 28).

As a way to try and combat this, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) worked to pass a resolution in the 1970s which stated, “When cuts in the curriculum become necessary, they should be made across the board rather than categorically” (Mark, 2008, p. 86). Pressures on music education, revolving around funding and time of instruction, have continued to today. As recently as the No Child Left Behind Act, states were required to “Create and implement accountability standards and to determine success by testing students in curricular areas identified as core subjects” (Mark, 2008, p. 174). While art was identified as one of these core academic subjects, the law required testing in only reading, mathematics, and science leading administrators to focus their resources on these subjects rather than on the non-testing subjects (Mark, 2008). With Visual and performing arts linked to positive student outcomes, particularly motivation and perseverance in the classroom, the lack of resources being allocated

in their direction continues to threaten their ability to be as impactful as necessary.

During President Obama's Administration, an initiative was implemented that was designed to purposefully infuse arts education into eight underperforming schools from high poverty areas (Stoelinga et al., 2015). The "Turnaround Arts Initiative" found not only improvements across the board in attendance rates but improvements in reading proficiency in seven of the eight schools, as well as improved math proficiency in six of the eight (Stoelinga et al., 2015). While national policies, like President Obama's Turnaround Arts Initiative, emphasize the importance of visual and performing arts, they continue to not be tested, further threatening the priority school districts place on them when making decisions about funding and course offerings

Statewide Standardized Assessments in New Jersey Public Schools

These challenges are evident in New Jersey. Similar happenings surrounding statewide standardized testing are found within the New Jersey public school systems, with the emphasis placed on Language Arts and Mathematics. According to the New Jersey Department of Education:

State assessments provide a limited but important snapshot of how different groups of students are performing academically. They also provide communities some information about whether districts are utilizing resources in a productive and equitable manner and are used with other measures to identify what schools and districts require additional support from the NJDOE. Most importantly, assessments provide critical information for enhancing curriculum, and improving teaching and learning in all schools (Repollet, 2018, p. 5).

Since 1978, New Jersey has administered statewide standardized assessments in one form or another, and in 1982, the completion of a standardized assessment was added to the requirements for graduation (Repollet, 2018). As recently as 2018, New Jersey's Department of Education looked into further developing their statewide standardized assessment plan that is still rooted in

the standards-based instruction that has been adopted within the state. In accordance with federally mandated assessment requirements, New Jersey implements the following statewide standardized assessment in their public schools; (a) Grade-level assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics must be given to all students in grades 3 through 8, and once in high school. New Jersey's current assessment program to meet this requirement is the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), (b) Science assessments must be delivered to all students at least once in elementary, middle, and high school. New Jersey administers the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment-Science (NJSLA-S) to meet this requirement, (c) English language learners must be assessed to demonstrate progress toward English language development. New Jersey's current assessment program to meet this requirement is Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs 2.0), and (d) Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom general state assessments are not appropriate, even with accommodations, must also take a statewide assessment. New Jersey's current assessment to meet this requirement is the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) (Repollet, 2018).

At the national level, this has caused a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on tested content areas (Elpus, 2013). In response to this, New Jersey recognizes the importance of the arts on student learning as evidenced in the Administrative Code that mandates that the arts (music, visual art, drama, and dance) be a part of the core curriculum with graduation requirements attached to them (NJ Administrative Code 6A 8-1.1). While Visual and performing arts is a graduation requirement, it remains an untested subject.

Yet, even with these Administrative requirements, arts education is still fighting for prominence. Limited state and district level funding is an area of major concern with, "Fourteen

percent of all New Jersey schools report using outside funding to offset budget decreases. This outside funding supports direct instruction, not optional activities” (NJ Arts Census, 2017, p. 14). This is equally as concerning as the reality that “Thirty-nine percent of New Jersey schools received funding from non-district sources, such as Parent/Teacher groups and district foundations” (NJ Arts Census, 2017, p. 14). With resources being finite, districts are forced to make decisions on how to allocate, and at times reallocate, resources such as time, money, and staffing so as to best prepare students for success as measured by these statewide standardized assessments. Randall Reback (2011) writes about this when he says,

Schools have various resources they can use to improve student skills (e.g., school staff, curriculum, facilities, parental involvement, etc.), and all resources have associated costs. Subject to a budget constraint, schools choose an allocation based on preferences about the relative importance of helping students improve different types of skills and the relative importance of helping different types of students make improvements. There are also competing demands that constrain the amount and allocation of school resources; school staff members care about their own leisure time, and local taxpayers care about their consumption of other goods and services (p. 2).

This creates a potential problem for the equality of funding for arts education programs in lower economic districts, as compared to the potential parental input in wealthier districts.

Consequently, because of the accountability movement, districts may not be prioritizing Visual and performing arts courses when making decisions about funding and course offerings.

Thus, emerging issues, including limited financial resources, funding from public sources, and the increasing demand for academic excellence and achievement, are forcing high schools to reassess how current resources are allocated within their institutions. Public schools continue to look to become more efficient and strategic in the allocation of their available resources for promoting academically focused and successful students. The value of programs that are not directly connected to the standardized testing system currently in place, such as arts education, are often overlooked when school districts make their financial decisions. This is

problematic because the benefits afforded to students through the participation in visual and performing arts courses are present both inside and outside of the classroom. Based on this context, the major threats to students' access to quality arts educational opportunities are district, state, and sometimes even nation-wide initiatives that emphasize the core academic subjects and standardized testing preparation. To address these issues, deeper understandings are needed about student motivation and how it is fostered and grown, specifically through the lens of non-core academic subjects. These understandings may then be used for decisions related to providing extended opportunities for equitable access to visual and performing arts courses in hopes of developing stronger feelings of self-efficacy in our students.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe any trends that may exist between the types of arts programs available to students, average schoolwide participation rates, and graduation rates.

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How can we describe trends between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates?
 - 1a. How do these associations compare/contrast when considering socio-economic status as defined by a school's District Factor Group?
2. How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?
 - 2a. How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings that are observable among schools with higher and lower graduation rates?

2b. How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings that are observable among schools with higher and lower participation rates?

2c. How do these trends compare/contrast when considering socio-economic status, as defined by the school's District Factor Group?

The results of this study will provide policymakers and administrators with information and data that can be utilized to (a) create an effective policy regarding the inclusion of visual and performing arts courses in High School graduation requirements, (b) more effectively allocate state and district resources, and (c) alter the structure of schools to increase student achievement. Similarly, the results of this study will inform further research as it will lend other researchers the opportunity to possibly look at other factors that may impact student motivation and learning as participation in visual and performing arts does. With the model of this study as the framework for future studies, developing a better understanding of how student motivation is fostered and developed could lead to changes in educational practice within classrooms across the country.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the presentation of this study.

Graduation Rates – 4-year Graduation Rates

As determined by the New Jersey Department of Education website, 4-year graduation rates are, “Using the adjusted cohort methodology, the percentage of students who graduate within 4 years of entering ninth grade” (2017, p. 4). In this study, graduation rates are identified as a measure of student persistence.

SES— Socioeconomic Status

According to the American Psychological Association, Socioeconomic Status is “The social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control” (“Socioeconomic Status,” 2020).

Visual and Performing Arts — Made up of the performance disciplines of Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Drama, as defined by the NJ Core Curriculum. The four disciplines of Music, Visual Arts, Dance, and Drama enable students to develop their creative, perceptive, and expressive skills (Eisner, 2002).

Assumptions, Limitation, and Delimitations

While careful attention was given to understanding the context, identifying a problem, and designing research questions that would yield insight into addressing the problem, all decisions have implications for how findings may be interpreted and applied in other settings and contexts. This section will identify some of the study’s underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations in order to promote appropriate, fair, and ethical use of its findings.

Assumptions made during this study are that the courses offered within the sample are aligned with NJSLs and are of equal quality across the state. Also, it is assumed that the same types of visual and performing arts courses have been offered over a 4-year period, as graduation rates are being looked at. Finally, it is being assumed that all students within the studied sample have equitable access to the visual and performing arts courses offered.

Limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. Limitations in this study pertain to what the collected data directly presents and, at the same time, omits. For example, collecting

and analyzing archival records, such as course listings, course descriptions, district-specific graduation requirements, and graduation rates, will present overall trends that can be studied. These data will not, however, be able to link particular student by student cases of participation in visual and performing arts courses to graduation.

Delimitations of this study focus on the case study approach being used, the sample selected, and how those factors impact the trends present within the findings. The use of a case study approach for this research will strengthen the findings and affords several opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable through a different approach. One such example of this is the case study's ability to focus on a snapshot moment of a single year in the selected sample of New Jersey high schools. Such focus is beneficial as it generates a set of data that is not being collected over time, and as such, is not subject to changes of policy, administrative turnover, or other potential outside influencers that cannot be controlled for.

Similarly, narrowing the sample to only public, non-charter, or academy based high schools should be considered a delimitation in this study. Identifying and sampling only public, non-charter, or academy-based high schools allows the researcher to focus the study away from selective, private institutions. As selective, private institutions have the ability to generate their own curriculum maps, establish different graduation requirements, and they do not rely on public funding, their information could possibly skew the data and the analysis done.

Another delimitation to the study is the possible influence of additional programs/policies and how they reflect upon graduation rates. While this study is looking at the trends that exist between visual and performing arts and graduation rates, whether or not a causal relationship exists will not be determined as the schools' other programs are not being looked at. For example, if two schools in different District Factor Groups (DFG) offer the same arts programs,

however, one school has in place an afterschool mentorship program that is stronger than the others, perhaps that is also influencing their graduation rates. While this study does not specifically focus on these outside program offerings, they are undeniably present and may offer further understanding of the overall picture.

Finally, the theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory warrants discussion as well. This theoretical framework is appropriate for this study as it focuses on students' developmental process towards motivation and persistence. Understanding how students get from simply staying enrolled in high school to find the drive to complete their requirements and graduate is imperative in developing long term effective programs and policy. While this is beneficial, it does come with its own limitations as well. The most present limitation is that while the theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory looks at student development towards motivation, persistence, and confidence, it does not take into account factors outside of school that may also impact this development. For example, this study will not be directly investigating an individual students' family socio-economic status, involvement in other extra-curricular activities, or even special education classification, all of which represent potential influencers on their levels of self-efficacy. Instead, the strength of this study is that it will observe and analyze the overall trends that are present.

Implications

For district and state-level policy changes to be implemented, it is necessary to better understand the connection between student participation in non-tested activities, such as visual and performing arts programs and how this participation relates to student growth. This study will identify not only whether or not a connection between student motivation, as defined by student persistence through high school graduation, and participation in visual and performing

arts courses exists but also what types of programs are better suited to fit students' needs across the state of New Jersey. By identifying the similarities and differences between visual and performing arts programs that are currently in place, policies can be developed that reflect the necessary changes to assure all students are afforded an equal opportunity to receive the same level of exposure to a program that may be impacting their development and learning. The data from this study could be used in future research to help develop a more complete picture of how a school district should be structured in terms of program offerings to more effectively motivate their learners and develop student buy-in and success. Connecting this research with other district-specific factors allows future researchers an opportunity to dive deeper into the big picture of student learning and motivation.

With much of current research focusing on how visual and performing arts programs impact student growth in tested, core subject areas such as math and language arts, this study goes further by connecting participation with graduation rates as a way to measure student persistence, growth, and motivation. Similarly, this study looks to take steps beyond simply connecting participation in visual and performing arts programs to persistence, growth, and motivation by looking directly at several current programs and analyzing how these programs are developed and what impact they have on their student bodies. This gathered information can serve as a model for future program development across the state of New Jersey.

CHAPTER II: Review of Literature

This literature review documents previous research regarding student outcomes, as defined by academic and motivational outcomes, and the connection between these concepts and visual and performing arts education. Literature was reviewed regarding the history of art education and curriculum in America. Literature also considers both the academic and social sides of learning and their impact on both the learning process and student persistence through High School to graduation. Literature was also reviewed that assists in developing a better understanding of the underlying theoretical framework of self-efficacy and the role it plays in student motivation, resilience, and persistence. Existing literature that surrounds the idea of student outcomes will also be reviewed in this chapter.

This chapter looks to analyze the vast array of existing studies and research that have been done connecting visual and performing arts education to academic and motivational outcomes. This chapter also seeks to identify and highlight certain areas of the literature that may be absent in the discussion of the impact student participation in visual and performing arts courses has on student academic performance and motivation to persevere through high school to graduation. Literature that has been excluded involves studies and research focused on private high school institutions, as they do not fit the sample selected for this study based on their selective admission practices. Literature investigating the influence of other extra-curricular activities, such as athletics, were excluded as they do not have specific graduation requirements similar to Visual and Performing Arts.

Background

Over time, there have been changes in educational policies' focus and emphasis on visual and performing arts. As early as the mid-1600s, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed laws that

“Required towns to have schools. The *Massachusetts School Law of 1648* even specified what was to be taught” (Mark, 2008, p. 12). Music education, at this time, was not specifically targeted. It was through their religious beliefs and the importance of the music utilized within their church services that the need for music education gained traction. A perceived decline in the quality of music performed at church services leads to a belief that “Congregations needed to be educated in music” (Mark, 2008, p. 13).

It wasn’t until the mid-1800s when the American public-school curriculum would discuss adding music education regularly. In 1830, William Channing Woodbridge delivered a speech in Boston to the American Institute of Instruction where he “Arranged for a group of boys to demonstrate the effectiveness of music instruction by singing three songs” (Mark, 2008, p. 32). It was from here that music instruction spread to several major cities in America prior to the start of the Civil War. Following the war, music instruction seemed to have cemented its place in the classroom. Classroom teachers were responsible for the daily teaching of music content and developing their students’ skills; therefore, supervisory music specialists also began to play a role in the school building (Mark, 2008).

By the 1900s, music education had been worked into the public-school curriculum all the way up to the high school level. Even John Dewey spoke favorably about music education and the role it played in schools fitting, “Comfortably into the new education because it required physical demonstrations of what students learned” (Mark, 2008, p. 75). Following the Industrial Revolution, a focus on science and scientific methods began to take precedence within the American school systems and resulted in an organization of our schools that continues to the present day. With a focus on increasing worker productivity and decreasing production costs in factories, American engineers like Frederick Taylor developed management models like the top-

down model of efficiency, which inevitably rolled over to the school systems. As Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig writes of this time period on his blog *Cloaking Inequity*, “On one side were the administrative reformers who argued that the primary goal of schooling was a uniform structure in the mold of Frederick Taylor industrialism that solely prepared individuals for an efficient placement in the workforce and factories” (Heilig, 2013).

On the other side, educational leaders like Horace Mann and John Dewey believed, however, that school systems should move away from the efficiency model of the factories and be more child-centered places where student growth was the focus. Mann was best known for fighting for publicly funded schools in America as well as a curriculum that:

Fostered a well-rounded person—prepared for the world that would be, not focused solely on the world the way it is now. Thus, Mann fought for the inclusion of music, physical education, and the study of social issues; subjects that help to develop creative thinking and innovation (Tienken & Orlich, 2013, p. 3).

Even today, educational leaders and policymakers continue to clash on whether the factory model or the student-centered mindset better suits the needs of our public education system.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) believed that the presence of visual and performing arts courses is so important that they developed curriculum standards for the subject. Within these New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJ SLS), and for this study, the visual and performing arts subjects are defined by, and made up of, a series of courses focused on dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts that are present in schools from preschool through senior year of high school (NCCAS, 2014). With a mission statement to “Enable personal, intellectual, social, economic, and human growth by fostering creativity and providing opportunities for expression beyond the limits of language” (NJ DOE, 2014), visual and

performing arts courses seek to provide all learners with opportunities to grow within and contribute to, the world around them beyond the classroom.

The inclusion of the visual and performing arts standards puts in place an outline of expectations that school districts have for their students' learning within this subject. The overall expectations of the visual and performing arts standards are for all students to be able to "Communicate at a basic level in each of the four arts disciplines by the end of fifth grade, using the vocabulary, materials, tools, techniques, and intellectual methods of each arts discipline in a developmentally appropriate manner" (NJ DOE, 2014). The P-12 curriculum has been developed in a sequential nature that allows for growth across the four disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and visual art early on and specialization later in the students' education journey. The New Jersey Department of Education validates the necessity of these standards because, "Experience with, and knowledge of, the arts are essential components of the P-12 curriculum in the 21st century. As the state of New Jersey works to transform public education to meet the needs of a changing world and the 21st-century workforce, capitalizing on the unique ability of the arts to unleash creativity and innovation in our students is critical for success" (NJ DOE, 2014). The established standards in the state of New Jersey are not unique to just this one state. These standards build upon the National Standards for Arts Education that were developed in 1994 as well as the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards National Arts Standards, which were finalized in 2014 (NJ DOE, 2014). In the way they were developed, the state NJ SLS promotes equitable access to arts instruction within the four main arts disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory is the theoretical framework that guides this study's inquiry. Bandura defined perceived self-efficacy as "People's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). A person's level of self-efficacy is developed and exercised throughout their life by four main influencers. According to Bandura (1994, p. 3), "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to them." The four main sources of influence are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models, social persuasion, and reducing stress reactions so as to alter negative emotional proclivities (Bandura, 1994). While all four of the main sources of influence impact student performance in schools, the idea of creating a strong sense of efficacy through mastery experiences connects to student academic achievement. As noted by Bandura (1994, p. 2):

A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity.

Understanding that a student is more likely to continue to take risks, persevere in the face of challenges, and rebound from setbacks promotes the idea that schoolwide experiences should be focused on developing opportunities where students feel successful in their endeavors.

Furthering this point, Frank Pajares (1997, p. 6) writes:

Beliefs of personal competence also help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations--the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience.

This idea of experiencing accomplishments and feeling successful leads a student on a lifelong journey of believing that even in the face of adversity, they can overcome and rebound when needed. “To increase student achievement in school, educational efforts should focus on altering students’ beliefs of their self-worth or competence. This is usually accomplished through programs that emphasize enhancing self-beliefs” (Pajares, 1997, p. 21). Student participation in visual and performing arts courses oftentimes represents an opportunity for a student to develop this increased sense of self-worth or competence based on the individualistic and creative nature that makes up the arts. For example, Elliott Eisner (2002, p. 3) states:

Education, in turn, is the process of learning to create ourselves, and it is what the arts, both as a process and as the fruits of that process, promote. Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture.

Furthermore, self-efficacy theory identifies four major psychological processes through which self-beliefs of efficacy affect a person’s functioning; cognitive processes, motivational processes, affective processes, and selection processes. In schools, the cognitive and motivational processes play large roles as students are still developing their senses of self and efficacy every day. The cognitive processing of information that goes on in students is a major contributor to their perceived levels of attainable success within the school environment, especially in the face of the ambiguities and uncertainties that exist daily in classrooms. Bandura (1994, p. 4) writes:

Those who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Those who doubt their efficacy visualize failure scenarios and dwell on the many things that can go wrong. It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt.

Believing in ones' self, and their ability to accomplish the personal goals that they set forth is an invaluable skill that schools and educators must continue to develop in their students.

When looking for ways to motivate students to continue their educations through graduation, with all of the outside factors that make that goal difficult, schools must first look towards generating opportunities for students to feel confident and worthy. For some, these motivators may exist outside of the core curriculum subject areas and manifest through participation in visual and performing arts courses. According to Bandura (1994, p. 4):

Most human motivation is cognitively generated. People motivate themselves and guide their actions anticipatorily by the exercise of forethought. They form beliefs about what they can do. They anticipate likely outcomes of prospective actions. They set goals for themselves and plan courses of action designed to realize valued futures.

Motivation is determined by a persons' self-efficacy as it determines the goals they will set for themselves, how much effort they will expend, how long they are willing to persevere when challenges arise, and how resilient they will be in the face of failures (Bandura, 1994). A person with strong self-efficacy understands that, even in the face of adversity, they have the skills needed to continue to work hard and face the challenges.

This idea transfers directly to the student bodies that make up our schools. As discussed by Pajares (1997, p. 20):

In school, for example, the beliefs that students develop about their academic capabilities help determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they have learned. Consequently, their academic performances are, in part, the result of what they come to believe that they have accomplished and can accomplish.

For educators and educational policymakers, it is imperative to understand that developing this strong sense of self-efficacy is what leads students towards self-motivation and growing confidence. As documented in their study titled *Cultivating Competence, Self-Efficacy, and*

Intrinsic Interest Through Proximal Self-Motivation (1981, p. 11), Albert Bandura and Dale

Schunk found that:

Skills cultivated through proximal standards of competency build interest in disvalued activities. When progress is gauged against distal goals, similar accomplishments may prove disappointing because of wide disparities between current performance and lofty future standards. Consequently, interest fails to develop, even though skills are being acquired in the process.

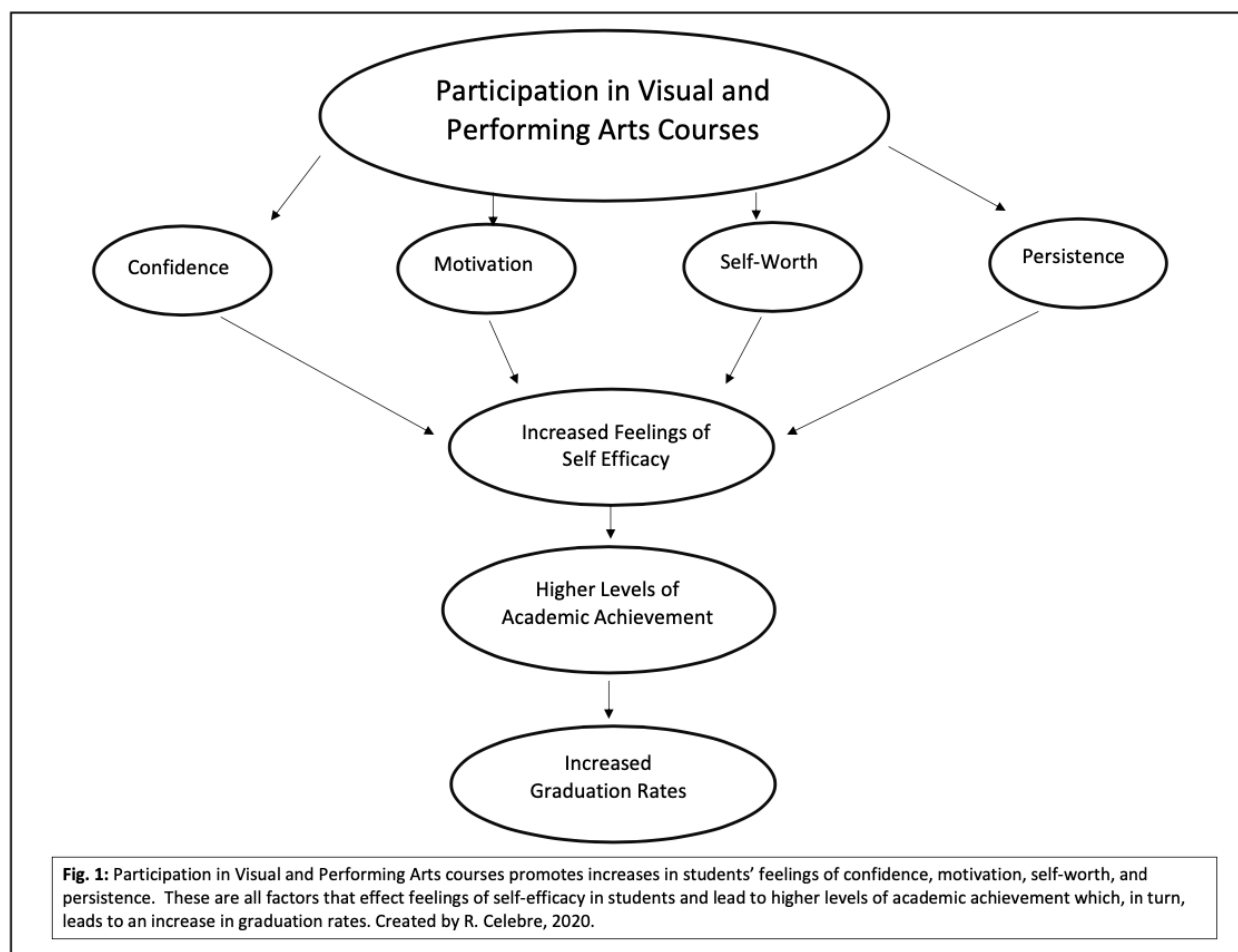
Equally as important, however, is understanding that every student arrives at, and further develops, this internal sense of self-worth and determination to be a resilient student that perseveres in the face of adversity through different means. For some, courses that take place outside of the context of the core curriculum subject areas of language arts and mathematics and promote creativity, expression, and imagination are where this self-efficacy is fostered and grows. This is often present within the visual and performing arts courses as students develop:

Strength of perception, ability to coordinate work towards production and performance, and commitment to understanding contemporary circumstances while creating new ways of seeing. These and other aspects of learning in the arts help shape motivation, intense self-discipline, confidence, and perseverance because artists must develop these capacities in order to excel in their chosen domain (Heath, 1998, p. 4).

See Figure 1, which illustrates this theory in the context of this study.

Figure 1

Visual and Performing Arts Participation and Self-Efficacy



Drawing from this theoretical perspective, this study aims to gain insight into trends observed between students' participation in visual and performing arts and graduation rates. In this study, graduation rates are defined as an indicator of persistence, which, according to this theory, is an anticipated outcome of higher levels of students' self-efficacy.

Literature Review

For this study, existing research has been examined, which relates to three main overarching topics. The first three subsections were chosen to be reviewed in the context of visual and performing arts participation as they relate to factors that should increase self-

efficacy. First, the benefits of visual and performing arts education of academic achievement are discussed. Possible associations with subjects such as reading, mathematics, and standardized tests were investigated. Next, the motivational outcomes of visual and performing arts courses are studied and discussed. Finally, there is a section on the phenomenon of transferability, which is explained and placed into the context of this study.

Benefits of Visual and Performing Arts Education on Academic Achievement

The importance of visual and performing arts education and the impact that it has on student academic achievement has been well researched and documented in recent years. Several studies have investigated ways that different avenues of the visual and performing arts have directly impacted learning. Beginning with the passive nature of classroom-based instruction, where learners typically just watch instructors, visual and performing arts education innately creates a learning environment where the present learners are active learners. Eisner suggested, “Work in the arts contributes to the development of complex and subtle forms of thinking” (Eisner, 2002, p. 35). It has been reported that arts programs also offer opportunities to “Motivate children through creative activities. They can also be true learning experiences for all children, combining language and social skills and allowing them to fulfill themselves – a need that is basic to us all” (Surace, 1992, p. 612). Visual and performing arts education has been found to impact student achievement within the emphasized core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics directly. With such strong emphasis placed on these core subject areas, it would behoove educators and educational leaders to find ways to continue to integrate visual and performing arts education into their school’s learning environments.

When it comes to literacy and early reading skills, “Dance has been employed to develop reading readiness in very young children, and the study of music has provided a context for

teaching language skills” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 11). The strong connection between the use of drama and reading comprehension is also well documented. Finding ways to get deeper into the characters in the stories being read leads students to better understand the feelings and motivations being discussed within the text. As noted, “When students had an opportunity to engage in a dramatic enactment of a story, their overall understanding of the story improved” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 12). Beyond the language arts skills, the positive impact of music education on mathematics skills has also been studied extensively. One place where the connection between visual and performing arts and academic achievement is highlighted is on student SAT scores, which are known to assess students’ verbal and math skills as a way to determine a student’s college readiness. An increased exposure to arts education has been connected to higher SAT scores. “Notably, students who took four years of arts coursework outperformed their peers who had one half-year or less of arts coursework by 58 points on the verbal portion and 38 points on the math portion of the SAT” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 9). Research conducted by Gerard Babo (2004, p. 15) further identifies the impact of music instruction on mathematics SAT scores. His research notes, “The College Boards Association reports that students involved in musical performance ensembles outscore their classmates on the SAT; 49 points on the verbal section, and 36 points on the math section.” Increases in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests such as the SAT places the importance of participation in visual and performing arts courses within the current test-centric mindset of public education. Knowing such a connection exists is beneficial to educational policymakers and school officials as they look for continued ways to generate positive educational results in their school districts, as well as increasing student persistence through graduation. Similarly, if previous research has indicated a positive connection between a student’s feeling of self-efficacy or how his/her

increased levels of self-efficacy lead to increased levels of confidence and academic achievement, then providing a wide range of opportunities for students to grow their efficacy is essential to schools. As has been well documented, visual and performing arts courses provide the kind of individualized opportunities that not only help in growing students' imaginations and creativity but also the self-efficacy that is necessary to take risks and persevere in the classroom.

Motivational Outcomes of Visual and Performing Arts

Based on prior literature, the major common findings suggest the presence of a relationship between arts education and student academic achievement, as measured by student success on standardized tests. Similarly, there have been studies that find connections between student participation in visual and performing arts courses and student motivation to learn.

Within this previous research, motivation has been commonly defined as the students' sense of belonging in school and engagement within the classroom. The connection between participation in visual and performing arts courses and students' strong sense of belonging is beneficial to the overall climate of the school workplace. Elizabeth Surace's case study *Everyone Wants to Join the Chorus* depicts a scenario where student participation in a school chorus had beneficial social outcomes as well. Surace (1992, p. 612) wrote,

The media are constantly full of reports of delinquency, drugs, and dropouts. Arts programs can offer a way not only of solving some of these problems but of avoiding them by motivating children through creative activities. They can also be true learning experiences for all children, combining language and social skills and allowing them to fulfill themselves - a need that is basic to us all.

Elliott Eisner pointed out that, "In school, children learn how to think about the world in new ways" (Eisner, 2002, p. 9). It is the arts and their imaginative, experiential way of learning and thinking that offer their own distinctive contributions to learning, which carry over into the language arts, mathematics, and science classrooms (Eisner, 2002). Generating ways to motivate

student learning while developing key lifelong social skills are only a few of the benefits visual and performing arts courses offer.

Other studies have reiterated this positive relationship between student motivation and participation in visual and performing arts courses due in large part to the way that these courses promote engagement, risk-taking, and strategy skills. “The arts nurture a motivation to learn by emphasizing active engagement, disciplined and sustained attention, persistence and risk-taking, among other competencies” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 14). Beyond simply identifying skills that foster motivation, the ways in which visual and performing arts participation impacts students at risk of dropping out of high school have also been studied. Sandra Ruppert (2006, p. 14) writes,

Students at risk of not successfully completing their high school educations cite their participation in the arts as reasons for staying in school. Factors related to the arts that positively affected the motivation of these students included a supportive environment that promotes constructive acceptance of criticism and one where it is safe to take risks.

Based on the present research, there is evidence of a positive impact of participation in visual and performing arts courses on various student motivational outcomes. As Bandura (1994, p. 5) discussed, “Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to motivation in several ways: They determine the goals people set for themselves; how much effort they expend; how long they persevere in the face of difficulties; and their resilience to failures.” Knowing that students develop their own goals based on their perceived competencies and self-worth, it is imperative to continue to find ways to present multiple learning environments where those feelings are positive ones. For many students, participation in visual and performing arts courses offers a release from stress and an opportunity to grow confidence.

Transferability

One reason why visual and performing arts education has been a valued member of the educational world is due to the way skills learned through the arts transfer into the classroom. If visual and performing arts are exposing students to new ways of thinking about or seeing the world around them, then this value is ongoing even in today's assessment centered world. More specifically, in the field of music education, Marci Major's Case Study research echoed the belief that "Music education facilitates excellent camaraderie, contributes to the school's image, allows students to learn a lifelong skill, and develops abilities transferrable to other subjects" (2013, p. 19). Transferring these skills allows students to excel in the classroom and beyond. With the goal in most classrooms being that of developing well-rounded students with skills and knowledge that go beyond the textbook, the transferability of skills developed through visual and performing arts education are significant. For example, "Imagination, recognition of multiple perspectives, and exploration would transfer to a student's academic performance to some extent" (Gullatt, 2007, p. 215).

While research on the transferability of skills learned in visual and performing arts courses is a popular take for those seeking to justify the place of art education in schools, there are other views that also exist on the topic. For some, visual and performing arts education is valuable simply because creativity and creation are important. Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Project Zero argues,

To avoid this trap, educators should not justify the arts in terms of what they can do for other subjects but should rather stress the intrinsic importance of the arts (just as we believe in the intrinsic importance of maths and science). After all, no one ever demands that maths be justified for its effects on learning music or history. Demanding evidence of transfer of learning from the arts places an unfair burden on the arts, as psychologists have long shown that transfer is notoriously difficult to prove (Winner, 2004, p. 20).

Regardless of your view on the topic of transferability, the reality that educators are always seeking ways to foster student interest and growth through engaging means makes visual and

performing arts courses represent a bountiful resource. The concept of transferability in schools takes on an especially pertinent role when looking at how it relates to the self-efficacy theory that is also at work in this inquiry. As noted by Pajares (1997, p. 22),

Judgments of competence can generalize across activities, for example - the extent to which they relate to or transfer across different performance tasks or domains. For example, when differing tasks require similar subskills, judgments of capability to demonstrate the requisite subskills should predict the differing outcomes.

Knowing that students view their ability in one domain based on their relative level of competence in other related domains provides further insight into the importance of providing opportunities within the school environment for success to be attained for all learning types. To this point, skills attained naturally within the world of visual and performing arts such as imagination, creativity, and risk-taking can be afforded the chance to come out and be utilized in the core curriculum subject areas as well.

Summary of Literature

The documented outcomes of student participation in visual and performing arts courses are varied, measurable, and significant. As has been noted, research looking at ways that participation in the different disciplines of visual and performing arts impacts student achievement as measured by standardized test scores is known. Due to the documented higher test scores on SATs, transferability of academic skills to the classroom, and the acquisition of confidence and motivation related to participation in visual and performing arts (Babo, 2004; Bandura, 1994; Major, 2013), the participation in visual and performing arts courses in relation to graduation rates deserves a deeper look. Similarly, students' motivational outcomes, such as their sense of belonging in school and engagement in the classroom environment, are known to be positively impacted through participation in visual and performing arts courses (Major, 2013). Some research even shows the immense benefits that transferability of skills from the visual and

performing arts world has on student learning in the core content areas covered in the classroom (Gullatt, 2007), while other studies believe the conversation on transferability overshadows the innate benefits that visual and performing arts courses provide (Winner, 2004).

While the present literature consistently demonstrates that participation in visual and performing arts positively impacts students' academic achievement and motivational outcomes, it fails to address how these positive improvements impact student persistence through high school. Being cognizant of the possible ways in which participation influences student motivational outcomes, both socially and academically, will broaden current research on the topic of visual and performing arts. While there have been studies that look at the connection to motivation, a gap in the literature exists when discussing student persistence. This study seeks to look at trends between visual and performing arts participation and high school graduation rates in a new way, from a theoretical perspective that a students' self-efficacy influences their motivation to stay in school through graduation. Moreover, considering the broader context of funding inequalities and pressures schools face with accountability and standardized testing, this study pays careful attention to the types of courses offered and school socio-economic status designations to further interpret observed trends.

CHAPTER III: Methods

Emerging issues, including limited financial resources, funding from public sources, and the increasing demand for academic excellence and achievement, are forcing high schools to reassess how current resources are allocated within their institutions. Public schools continue to look to become more efficient and strategic in the allocation of their available resources for promoting academically focused and successful students. The value of programs that are not directly connected to the standardized testing system currently in place, such as arts education, are often overlooked when school districts make their financial decisions.

The purpose of the study, then, is to describe the school's percentage of participation and course offerings in relation to graduation rates in New Jersey high schools. Additionally, the study aims to explain the association between high school graduation rates accounted for by participation in visual and performing arts courses when controlling for other factors that influence achievement, such as student socioeconomic status. The results of this study provide policymakers and administrators with information and data that can be utilized to (a) create an effective policy regarding the inclusion of visual and performing arts courses in high school graduation requirements, (b) save on state and district resources, and (c) alter the structure of schools to increase student achievement.

Research Questions

1. How can we describe trends between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates?
 - 1a. How do these associations compare/contrast when considering socioeconomic status, as defined by a school's District Factor Group?

2. How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?

2a. How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower graduation rates?

2b. How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower participation rates?

2c. How do these trends compare/contrast when considering Socio Economic Status, as defined by the school's District Factor Group?

Based on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two, a proposition for this study is that schools in higher district factor groups will have higher participation rates in visual and performing arts courses and will, in turn, have higher graduation rates.

In this chapter, provided is an outline of the research design and methodology, including the population and sample, how the data is collected, the analysis procedures, as well as any present limitations of the study. First, an overview of the research design and a specific rationale for choosing this research design will be provided. Next, the data sources used in the study, including a description of the sample and population, will be identified and rationalized. Finally, the variables in the model will be defined, as well as the limitations and boundaries of the study.

Methodology

The study is a mixed-methods case study. The case study approach is appropriate as the researcher is looking to study the phenomenon of the present trends of the range of visual and performing arts courses offered and graduation rates through a series of public high schools within the state of New Jersey. This is a single case study of New Jersey, and the findings will be

transferable to other states due to federal expectations and standards that lead to decisions in public education across the country.

Research Design

The proposed study is a sequential, exploratory, mixed-methods study that will have two parts in its research design. The decision to use a mixed-methods approach was made for a number of reasons. Mixed methods studies provide an opportunity for “Words, pictures, and narratives to be used to add meaning to numbers” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2017, p. 21). The fundamental principle and value of using a mixed research approach are summed up in the following: “According to this principle, researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies, approaches, and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2017, p. 18).

The first part of the study will be quantitative in nature and describes what trends exist between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates, related to Research Question one as well as its sub-question. The second phase of the study will be qualitative in nature and addresses how we can describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates, related to Research Question two and the sub-questions that follow. The findings from both phases will be analyzed to develop the next steps and possible implications (Figure 2). The subsequent subsections describe and explain the procedures, methods, and purposes of each of these phases.

Mixed Methods Approach



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From here, the 169 schools will be selected. The 169 schools that will be selected will represent the top 85 schools and the bottom 84 schools from this data set as defined by graduation rates. 4-year graduation rates, percentage of student participation rates in Visual and Performing Arts courses, and district factor groups will be collected.

This data set is reliable as it is firsthand data which is “Available for schools and districts and provide parents, educators, and communities highlights from the district, along with a high-level summary of how well a school or district is performing” (Mezzino, 2019, p. 3). This data set is relevant as it is demographically representative of the state as a whole. However, taking into consideration public high schools that fit very specific criteria for enrollment and funding, however, are from across the state geographically and depict the various demographics present. The use of a statewide database for data collection is valuable as it can provide a larger scale understanding of what the present trends across the state are at the time of research. This benefits the research as, “One can develop and access relevant databases that go beyond any particular institution in order to gain a global measure of program effectiveness as well as to examine specific trends and factors in student progress” (Taraban, 1997, p. 120).

In order to address proposed research question number one, which relates to identifying trends between visual and performing arts courses and graduation rates, an analysis will be conducted using the SPSS software. Data analysis will begin once the detailed data has been downloaded from the NJ DOE website and uploaded into the SPSS data analysis system. Descriptive analysis of the survey data will be conducted and presented as frequencies and means. Watkins & Gioia (2015, p. 91) point out that, “With descriptive statistics, researchers have the potential to acquire information about measures of central tendency, variability, position, and the distributional shape of the data.”

Quantitative Phase: Data Analysis

This will be a correlational, explanatory study. The study will be a correlational, non-experimental design as it is interested in looking at the relationship that exists between the dependent variable of High School 4-year graduation rates and the independent variable of student participation in Visual and Performing Arts courses. The study is non-experimental, indicating that it will not manipulate the existing data but instead evaluate the information within its current context (Price, 2016). In order to analyze this, the collected data will undergo a correlational analysis as well as a regression analysis. Regression analysis is a predictive form of modeling technique that involves investigating a relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Price, 2016). As a result, the relationship discovered may be used to predict future outcomes. The use of simultaneous multiple regression will seek to explain the effects that participation in visual and performing arts courses have on 4-year graduation rates. The use of multiple regression helps in this study as variables including free and reduced lunch, students receiving special education services, and English language learners will be controlled for.

Next, a Pearson correlation matrix will be developed to look at the presence of any statistical significance in the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The analysis will evaluate the free and reduced lunch and English language learner data from the sample of New Jersey high schools against participation in visual and performing arts courses. These variables will be assessed to determine whether or not a positive or negative relationship exists or if no correlation exists at all. The strength of the correlation by a -1 to +1 scale will be determined, with the proximity to $-/+1$ determining the strength.

A simultaneous multiple regression will allow the researcher to look at relationships between variables independent of each other. By controlling for certain variables, the differences that their presence may cause will be accounted for. The threshold for determination of statistical significance in the regression model is evaluated at a p -value of $< .05$. A Pearson correlation score will be used to determine the strength of the present relationships by a -1 to +1 scale, with the proximity to ± 1 determining the strength.

Qualitative Phase: Participants, Sampling, and Data Collection

The qualitative phase has the purpose of responding to Research Question number two, which is interested in identifying what types of Visual and performing arts programs have the strongest trends with graduation rates and how do Visual and performing arts Course offerings vary between public New Jersey high schools. For this section of the study, purposeful sampling will be used. Purposeful sampling strategies have “The ability to compare and contrast, to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 3). For this study, the stratified purposeful sampling strategy is being utilized. Stratified purposeful sampling is “Useful for examining the variations in the manifestation of a phenomenon as any key factor associated with the phenomenon is varied” (Suri, 2011, p. 7). This sampling strategy is appropriate for this stage of the research as it has been used to study different models of implementation relating to particular teaching and learning strategies (Suri, 2011).

First, two samples will be developed, which will be selected from the original 169 high school sample used during the first phase of the research to investigate further. The top five and bottom five schools from the highest present district factor group will be selected. Then the top 5 and bottom 5 of schools from the lowest present district factor group will be selected. By doing this, two separate samples of ten schools each, for a total of 20 schools, will be determined.

Based on the research conducted by Bryan Marshall et al. in their article *Does Sample Size Matter in Qualitative Research?* (2013, p. 20), this sample size is appropriate:

Single case studies should generally contain 15 to 30 interviews. The extreme variation in practices for single case studies makes a recommendation challenging. What is clear is that 69% of all qualitative IS studies sampled for this study employed fewer than 30 interviews.

While not using interviews, it would follow that the same quantity would be applicable to this study's methods to achieve saturation. Saturation is described as:

A conceptual and theoretical activity in which you shuttle back and forth between first-level data and more general categories that evolve and develop through successive iterations until the category is "saturated," or that new data do not add to the meaning of the general category (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 286).

Thus, a sample size of 20 high schools will allow for a valid representation of the current state of being within the selected population of high schools.

First, these two samples will be analyzed separately to identify trends within the categories of higher or lower socioeconomic status and, then, compare the two sets of analyses with one another to see if there are any present similarities or differences. Data that will be pulled from the identified schools will be publicly available from their school district websites. The different data that will be collected will include documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts from the selected school districts' public webpages. The rationale for using multiple sources of evidence "Relates to the basic motive for doing a case study in the first place: to do an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 127). From these evidence sources, data including the different range of visual and performing arts disciplines offered, specific courses offered, depth of courses offered (Advanced Proficiency (AP), honors, etc.), as well as minimum graduation requirements outlined by the district will be collected.

Qualitative Phase: Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed through pattern matching. Data will be collected by reviewing the selected school district's webpages and navigating to the curriculum pages that house the Visual and Performing Arts programs. In order to complete this step, a two-cycle coding approach will be used. First, the data will be coded using the descriptive coding strategy. Descriptive coding "Leads primarily to a categorized inventory, tabular account, summary, or index of the data's contents. It is essential groundwork for Second Cycle coding and further analysis and interpretation" (Saldana, 2009, p. 72). After reading and rereading through the different programs, patterns of recurring course titles, as well as different depths of leveling options that exist from introductory courses through advanced proficiency will be identified. Similarly, recurring disciplines that are offered within the field of Visual and Performing Arts will be looked for, which would represent a program's range of opportunities offered to students. The next round of coding will be done inductively, based on the patterns that emerge from the data collected, as, "The general inductive approach provides a convenient and efficient way of analyzing qualitative data for many research purposes" (Thomas, 2003, p. 1). This system of inductive coding is appropriate and beneficial for this type of data as it will look "To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research)" (Thomas, 2003, p. 1).

Then, the second cycle of coding, utilizing pattern coding, will be undertaken. Pattern codes are, "Explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis" (Saldana, 2009, p. 152). Once the pattern codes are established, pattern matching

can occur. According to Yin, “For case study analysis, one of the most desirable techniques is to use a pattern-matching logic” (2018, p. 175). Pattern matching is a valuable mode of evidence analysis for this study as it seeks ways to respond to the initially presented research question “How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?” Pattern matching, through coding, is accomplished when, “Several to many of the same codes will be used repeatedly throughout” (Saldana, 2013, p. 212). These patterns will occur within the data naturally and identified by the researcher deliberately. This will occur, “Naturally because there are mostly repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs, and deliberately because one of the coder’s primary goals is to find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 212).

The use of triangulation of data collected will be a key aspect of this phase of the study. Triangulation refers to the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Maanen, 1983). By providing the researcher with varied viewpoints on the same topic, we are afforded the opportunity to have a complete understanding of what the data we are collecting is representing. In order to be effective, triangulation rests on the premise that weaknesses in one method will be balanced by the strengths of another (Maanen, 1983).

Table 1 provides a summary of the research question, data collection, and data analysis that will be performed for this study.

Table 1

Data Collection Summary

Research Question	Data to be Collected	Data Analysis Strategy
RQ 1: How can we describe trends between the average four-year student participation rates and graduation rates?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation rates - Four-year Graduation rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correlational analysis - Simultaneous multiple regression analysis
RQ 1a: How do these associations compare/contrast when considering Socio Economic Status, as defined by a school's District Factor Group?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation rates - Four-year Graduation rates - School District Factor Group - Free and Reduces Lunch percentage - Special education enrollment percentage - English Language Learner enrollment percentage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correlational analysis - Simultaneous multiple regression analysis <p>* Data set will be divided with higher Socio-Economic Status and lower Socio-Economic Status separated.</p>
RQ 2: How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation percentages - Four-Year Graduation rates - School District Factor Group Qualitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course Offerings from School District Websites 	<p>Quantitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive statistics <p>Qualitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Cycle coding - Descriptive coding - Pattern coding - Pattern matching - Triangulation
RQ 2a: How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings are observable among schools with higher and lower graduation rates?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation percentages - Four-Year Graduation rates - School District Factor Group Qualitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course Offerings from School District Websites 	<p>Quantitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive statistics <p>Qualitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Cycle coding - Descriptive coding - Pattern coding - Pattern matching - Triangulation
RQ 2b: How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings are observable among schools with higher and lower participation rates?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation percentages - Four-Year Graduation rates - School District Factor Group Qualitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course Offerings from School District Websites 	<p>Quantitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive statistics <p>Qualitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Cycle coding - Descriptive coding - Pattern coding - Pattern matching - Triangulation
RQ 2c: How do these trends compare/contrast when considering Socio Economic Status, as defined by the school's District Factor Group?	Quantitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NJ DOE Performance Reports - Visual and Performing Arts participation percentages - Four-Year Graduation rates - School District Factor Group Qualitative data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course Offerings from School District Websites 	<p>Quantitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive statistics <p>Qualitative Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Cycle coding - Descriptive coding - Pattern coding - Pattern matching - Triangulation

Ensuring Rigor

Mixed methods research offers several innate opportunities to ensure legitimation or the rigor of the findings. One such opportunity is through the use of paradigmatic mixing legitimation will ensure validity and rigor in the study. Paradigmatic mixing is accomplished by having both separate quantitative and qualitative phases of your study that yield separate results. At the end of both phases, the researcher must “Attempt to make meaning from consideration of the two pure components of the study” (Onwuegbuzie, 2006, p. 59). This approach to ensuring validity and rigor is appropriate as the study has been planned with separate quantitative and qualitative research phases. Similarly, weakness minimization legitimation, which occurs as a result of the researcher systematically and consciously assessing the extent to which the potential weakness from one approach can be compensated by the other approach (Onwuegbuzie, 2006).

Onwuegbuzie goes on to explain:

The greater the extent that the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from the other approach, the more likely that combining a weak inference with a strong inference will lead to a superior or high-quality meta-inference (2006, p. 58).

Within the study, weakness minimization legitimation occurs by moving beyond simply quantifying possible associations found towards developing stronger understandings of what may be making these associations possible by looking at the visual and performing arts programs themselves.

As is often the case with quantitative research, the study is one that can be repeated and/or recreated by anyone, which is also known as external validity. Similarly, based on the fact that the data being used is readily available to the public through a public website (NJ DOE), not only the structure of the study but also gaining access to the data pulled is easily repeated and/or recreated to check reliability and validity. The Test/Retest strategy is the more conservative

method to estimate reliability during the quantitative phase of the study. Simply put, the idea behind test/retest is that you should get the same score on test 1 as you do on test 2.

To ensure transferability, Yin discusses the importance of identifying multiple possible audiences with case study research. As Yin explains:

In sharing the results of research based on other methods, such as experiments, the second audience is not typically relevant, as few would expect the findings from a laboratory experiment to be directed at non-specialists. In contrast, for case study research and its potentially practical implications, this second audience may be a frequent target for case study research (Yin, 2018, p. 222).

Due to this, identifying other potential audiences is important so as to ensure that the results of the case study research are applicable to those other potential audiences. Beyond simply identifying potential audiences that must be addressed, the case study approach affords transferability due to the fact that it is focusing on “underlying issues which are nationally important—either in theoretical terms or in policy or practical terms” (Yin, 2018, p. 243). Within this research study, the fact that all states face similar financial restraints as well as similar national curriculum requirements, the findings of this case study would be transferable across the country.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe any trends that may exist between the types of arts programs available to students, average schoolwide participation rates, and graduation rates. In order to do this, the following methods were utilized. The study was a sequential, exploratory, mixed-methods study and had two parts to the research design. The first part of the study was quantitative in nature and sought to describe what trends exist between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates, related to the first research question as well as its sub-question. The second phase of the study was qualitative in nature and addressed how we can describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates, related to the second research question and its sub-questions.

Within this chapter, findings from both phases of the study will be shared. First, a presentation of quantitative data collected from the New Jersey Department of Education website will be put forth. An analysis of this data, which was generated through the SPSS Statistics program, will follow. Then, the findings from the qualitative phase of the study will be presented from the data collected from the school district webpages and course catalog documents. Interpretations from both phases were then merged to look for patterns and further refinement of initial interpretations. This chapter will conclude with a summary of findings and related interpretations.

Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase sought to address the first research question and its sub-questions:

1. How can we describe trends between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates?; and 1a. How do these associations compare/contrast when considering Socio Economic Status, as defined by a school's District Factor Group?

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

In order to respond to the first research question and the sub-question, data were collected from the New Jersey Department of Education website. Data that were collected were downloaded from the school district performance reports. In order to pull the relevant data for this study, performance report information was sorted through by school type so as to identify the specific public high schools that fit the description of our population. These schools needed to be public high schools that serve only grades 9 – 12. Once the data were sorted, 295 schools emerged. The data were sorted in descending order by 4-year graduation rates, and a representative sample of 169 schools was then pulled based on the top 85 and bottom 84 schools, as defined by 4-year graduation rates.

For these schools, information was pulled from the performance report data including 4-year graduation rate, the percentage of visual and performing arts participation, the percentage of music course participation, the percentage of dance course participation, the percentage of drama course participation, the percentage of visual arts participation, the percentage of free and reduced lunch, the percentage of special education students, and the percentage of English language learner students. District factor group information was also pulled from the New Jersey Department of Education website and added to the data set. The data set was then entered into the SPSS Statistics program for data analysis. A frequency analysis was run to determine how often certain district factor groups were represented across the sample (Figure 3). Descriptive statistics were run for 4-year graduation rates and the visual and performing arts participation rates (Figure 4). Descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, were collected on the data set as a way to develop an understanding of the tendencies of the sample.

Figure 3

DFG Frequency Analysis

DFG					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A	30	17.8	17.8	17.8
	B	26	15.4	15.4	33.1
	CD	13	7.7	7.7	40.8
	DE	19	11.2	11.2	52.1
	FG	13	7.7	7.7	59.8
	GH	21	12.4	12.4	72.2
	I	35	20.7	20.7	92.9
	J	12	7.1	7.1	100.0
	Total	169	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4

Descriptive Statistics

Statistics			
		2019 4YR GR	% V&P Part
N	Valid	169	169
	Missing	0	0
Mean		90.5018	54.2396
Median		96.5000	53.8000
Mode		96.80 ^a	47.40 ^a
Std. Deviation		9.15656	13.13679

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The frequencies represented in the district factor group (DFG) data indicate a majority of our sample being identified as low DFG schools. With DFG representing, “An approximate measure of a community’s relative socioeconomic status” (NJ DOE, 2004, p. 1), which indicates that the majority of the schools represented in our sample are categorized as having lower socioeconomic status. The most common DFG represented within our sample was DFG I, with a percentage of 20.7%, followed by DFG A at 17.8%. Of note, 52.1% of the sample exists in the lower DFGs of A through DE. With DFGs FG through J, making up the remaining 47.9%.

Quantitative Preliminary Findings

4-year graduation rates have a mean value of 90.50 and a standard deviation of 9.16. This standard deviation of 9.16 is the measure in variability between each collected data point from the mean value of 90.50. The percentage of students participating in Visual and Performing Arts Courses in 2019 has a mean value of 54.24 and a standard deviation of 13.14. This standard deviation of 13.14 is the measure in variability between each collected data point from the mean value of 54.24. From here, a correlational analysis, as well as a multiple regression analysis, was run. The multiple regression analysis was run to seek any potential associations that may exist between 4-year graduation rates and participation in visual and performing arts. The multiple regression analysis aids in the interpretation of possible associations (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Multiple Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	107.948	2.605		.000
	% V&P Part	.035	.032	.050	.279
	% F&R Lunch	-.166	.019	-.500	.000
	% SPED	-.780	.095	-.383	.000
	% ELL	-.308	.072	-.248	.000

a. Dependent Variable: 2019 4YR GR

The simultaneous multiple regression used in this study, which included the free and reduced lunch rates, percentage special education, and the percentage free and reduced lunch, was employed to control for any variables that may otherwise impact our dependent and independent variables.

A 1% increase in visual and performing arts participation rate is associated with a .04% increase in the 4-year graduation rate, on average. A 1% increase in students receiving free and reduced lunch is associated with a .17% decrease in the 4-year graduation rate, on average. A 1%

increase in students eligible for special education services is associated with a .78% decrease in the 4-year graduation rate, on average. A 1% increase in students identified as English language learners is associated with a .31% decrease in the 4-year graduation rate, on average.

The use of a correlational analysis was used to determine the statistical significance of the emergent relationships between the dependent and independent variables (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Correlational Analysis

		Correlations			
		% V&P Part	% F&R Lunch	% SPED	% ELL
% V&P Part	Pearson Correlation	1	-.135	-.182*	-.160*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.079	.018	.038
	N	169	169	169	169
% F&R Lunch	Pearson Correlation	-.135	1	.136	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.079		.078	.000
	N	169	169	169	169
% SPED	Pearson Correlation	-.182*	.136	1	-.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.078		.474
	N	169	169	169	169
% ELL	Pearson Correlation	-.160*	.607**	-.055	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.000	.474	
	N	169	169	169	169

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

By controlling for these variables, the differences that their presence may have caused was able to be accounted for. The results of the statistical significance of the findings are summarized in Table 2. There is not a statistically significant relationship between the percent of participation in visual and performing arts courses and the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in a high school because the *p*-value of 0.08 is greater than 0.05. This means that we can reasonably conclude that the relationship between the percentage of participation in visual and performing arts courses and being eligible for free and reduced lunch is not representative of the population. There is a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of participation in visual and performing arts courses and the percentage of students eligible to receive special

education services in a high school because the p -value of 0.02 is less than 0.05, with a small, negative effect size of -0.18. This means that we can reasonably conclude that the relationship between the percentage of participation in visual and performing arts courses and the percentage of students eligible to receive special education services in a high school is representative of the population but that the strength of the relationship is minimal. There is a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of participation in visual and performing arts courses and the percentage of students identified as English language learners in a high school because the p -value of 0.04 is less than 0.05, with a small negative effect size of -.16. This means that we can reasonably conclude that the relationship between the percentage of participation in visual and performing arts courses and the percentage of students identified as English language learners in a high school is representative in the population but that the strength of the relationship is minimal.

Table 2

Statistical Significance

Variable	Statistically Significant or Not
Eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch	Not Statistically Significant
Eligibility to Receive Special Education Services	Statistically Significant
English Language Learner	Statistically Significant

The presence of a statistically significant relationship indicates that, with respect to the sample researched, the findings are representative of what is seen across the larger population. Gathering this information provided the groundwork for the next steps of the study, which looked deeper into the individual programs and courses offered in different districts in New Jersey.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase of the study focused on responding to the second research question—"How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?"—and its sub-questions: "How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower graduation rates?," "How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower participation rates?," and "How do these trends compare/contrast when considering socioeconomic status as defined by the school's District Factor Group?"

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

In order to address the second research question and the sub-questions, qualitative data were collected. The original data set of the 169-school sample was put in descending order of 4-year graduation rate. The data set was split into two groups, representing the top 85 and bottom 84 schools. The two groups were pulled into two separate data sets and then resorted by the District Factor Group. An original group of 20 schools was chosen, representing 10 schools from the top 85 and 10 schools from the bottom 84. Data were then collected from the schools' course catalogs, programs of study, and guidance department webpages. Data that was collected included the graduation credit requirement for visual and performing arts at the school, the number of visual and performing arts courses offered, the range of courses offered, and the depth of courses offered.

Data collected were coded along the way as each course catalog was reviewed. First, the graduation requirements were identified for the school district, with the visual and performing arts requirements specifically sought out and documented. Then, visual and performing arts course offerings were coded based on the concentration type. The concentration types that

emerged were music, fine arts, theatre, dance, graphic design, photography, film, wood, and culinary art. Within each of these concentrations, course depth and number of courses were investigated. The number of courses offered that fell within those concentrations was counted and documents. Course depths ranged from introductory level to College credit. Other levels of courses that existed across the data set were performance, standard, intermediate, honors, advanced, advanced placement, foundational, and exploratory. Coding for courses took on two rounds, with the first round consisting of identifying course types with exact titles identifying the level in the name and the second round, including keywords that were categorized accordingly. For example, in the first round of coding, courses that were categorized as introductory were labeled as “Introduction to Painting.” In the second round of coding, a course title, “Beginner Painting,” was also added to the introductory category. This was done as a result of identifying common language across multiple course catalogs and school districts.

Emerging trends from this initial round of data collection were interpreted and documented (Figure 7). An initial, unanticipated finding from this round of data collection was that schools from higher DFGs had information more readily available on their school websites.

Figure 7

Emerging Trends Interpretations

# of Schools	Interpretation
20	<p>While the higher DFG HS's have their information more readily available and put on display, there is not much of a difference in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graduation requirements (19/20 - 5 credits) - Emerging difference in Number of courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs range - 20-35 o Lower DFGs range – Inconsistent* (8, 16 31) (*School District A Public Schools outlier with listing of 178 programs across all public High Schools) - Emerging difference range of courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs more likely to offer Graphic Design, Film, Photography, & Dance courses as well as music, art & theatre. o Lower DFGs more likely to offer only music, art & theatre courses. (*School District A Public Schools the consistent outlier again, as they're large course catalog includes Graphic Design, Film, Photography & Dance courses as well) - Consistent range of course offerings based on depth of courses regardless of DFG (Intro – AP offered).

However, there was no difference within the data in regard to graduation requirements as 19 of the 20 schools all required the state-mandated minimum of 5 credits. There was the beginning of an emerging trend in the difference in the number of courses offered, with the schools from higher DFGs offering a range of 20-35 courses and schools from lower DFGs offering an inconsistent number of courses. Adding to the inconsistency during this initial round of data collection was the presence of School District A, which appeared to be an outlier as it offered 178 courses across numerous schools. Keeping this outlier in mind, the other schools researched at this time offered 8, 16, or 31 courses. Another emerging difference at this time was the range of course concentrations available. Schools from higher DFGs were more likely to offer graphic design, film, photography, and dance courses as well as music, art, and theatre. Lower DFG schools were more likely to offer only music, art, and theatre courses. School District A public schools again being the consistent outlier, as they're large course catalog included graphic design, film, photography, and dance courses as well. Across both levels of DFG, a similar, consistent range of course offerings based on depth of courses existed, with classes ranging from introductory through advanced proficiency (AP).

With the goal of attaining saturation, an organized method of adding additional schools to my original 20 was established. Ten schools would be added at a time, with five coming from the top 85 and five from the bottom 84, and data would be collected and findings interpreted. This was done to keep equal amounts of schools coming into the data set and allowed for consistent and repetitive interpretation opportunities so as to get a true representation of emerging trends. Three more rounds of this method of data collection occurred; saturation was attained when the same trends were present multiple times (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Emerging Trends Later Rounds

20 + 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No difference in graduation requirements (27/30 – 5 credits) - Difference in number of courses offered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs range – 21-49 (<i>*School District B outlier of 70</i>) o Lower DFGs range – 8-31 (<i>*School District A Public Schools outlier with listing of 178 programs across all public High Schools</i>) - Difference range of courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs more likely to offer Graphic Design, Film, Photography, & Dance courses as well as music, art & theatre. o Lower DFGs more likely to offer only music, art & theatre courses. (<i>*School District A Public Schools the consistent outlier again, as they're large course catalog includes Graphic Design, Film, Photography & Dance courses as well</i>) - Consistent range of course offerings based on depth of courses regardless of DFG (Intro – AP offered).
20 + 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No difference in graduation requirements (37/40 – 5 credits) - Difference in number of courses offered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs range – 21-49 (<i>*School District B outlier of 70</i>) o Lower DFGs range – 8-31 (<i>*School District A Public Schools outlier with listing of 178 programs across all public High Schools</i>) - Difference range of courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs more likely to offer Graphic Design, Film, Photography, & Dance courses as well as music, art & theatre. o Lower DFGs more likely to offer only music, art & theatre courses. (<i>*School District A Public Schools the consistent outlier again, as they're large course catalog includes Graphic Design, Film, Photography & Dance courses as well</i>) - Consistent range of course offerings based on depth of courses regardless of DFG (Intro – AP offered).
20 + 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Difference in graduation requirements (47/50 – 5 credits) - Difference in number of courses offered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs range – 21-49 (<i>*School District B outlier of 70</i>) o Lower DFGs range – 8-31 (<i>*School District A Public Schools outlier with listing of 178 programs across all public High Schools, Atlantic City 53 Programs</i>) - Difference range of courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Higher DFGs more likely to offer Graphic Design, Film, Photography, & Dance courses as well as music, art & theatre. o Lower DFGs more likely to offer only music, art & theatre courses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other courses offered - Graphic Design (7/17), dance, (6/17), photography (5/17) Non-School District A Schools - Consistent range of course offerings based on depth of courses regardless of DFG (Intro – AP offered).

Trends from the multiple rounds of data collection were reviewed and interpreted to begin to develop an understanding of how visual and performing arts programs are developed dependent upon district type. By reviewing the different programs, a view of importance on the development of the different course offerings begins to come into view.

Qualitative Preliminary Findings

In response to the second research question, and the subsequent sub-questions, the observable trends represented in this study conclude that a range of similarities and differences exist. A summary of the findings is available in Table 3.

Table 3***Summary of Findings***

Observable Trend	Similarity or Difference across DFGs	Indicated by...
Graduation Credit Requirement	Similarity	47/50 schools requiring 5 credits to graduate
Number of Courses Offered	Difference	Higher DFG schools offered a range of 21 – 49 courses Lower DFG schools offered a range of 8 – 31 courses
Range of Concentrations Offered	Difference	Higher DFG schools offered a wider range of concentrations on top of music, art, and theatre courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 20 schools offered graphic design ○ 6 offered film ○ 17 offered photography ○ 9 offered dance Lower DFG schools offered a smaller range of concentrations on top of music, art, and theatre courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 offered graphic design ○ 6 offered dance ○ 3 offered film ○ 5 offered photography
Depth of Courses Offered	Similarity	Schools in DFG A were just as likely to offer introductory through advanced placement courses as DFG J. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 of the 25 schools offered this depth range in DFG A ○ 14 of 25 schools offered the same depth range in DFG J.

Findings from the study conclude that no difference exists, based on DFG, regarding the number of visual and performing arts credits required to graduate as 47 of the 50 schools utilize the same 5-credit requirements. There was an apparent difference between the number of courses offered based on DFG. The higher DFG schools offered a range of 21 to 49 courses, while the lower

DFG schools offered a range of 8 to 31 courses. Similarly, there was a difference in the range of concentrations that were offered, depending on the DFG. The 25 Higher DFG schools were consistently more likely to offer a wider range of concentrations, including 20 of the schools offering graphic design, 6 offering film, 17 offering photography, and 9 offering dance as well as music, art, and theatre courses. Aside from School District A's 8 schools, which were a consistent outlier within the lower DFG schools, of the remaining 17 schools, only 7 offered graphic design courses, 6 offered dance, 3 offered film, and 5 offered photography. Regardless of the DFG, the range of course depths offered was consistent across schools. Schools in DFG A were just as likely to offer a depth range of introductory through advanced placement courses, with 11 of the 25 schools offering this depth range, as DFG J schools, which offered the same depth range in 14 of 25 schools.

Merging Findings

Based on the findings, there were no consistent, observable trends between the number of courses, depth of courses, and concentrations offered within the different schools in relation to graduation rates. Course offerings, depth of courses, and concentrations offered varied across the range of graduation rates studied from this sample. Considering the positive impacts of participation rates on graduation rates, developing further understandings of what drives increased participation is needed.

Conclusion

In summary, the results from the quantitative data collected show a positive relationship between average students' participation in visual and performing arts courses and graduation rates. As the percentage of students participating in visual and performing arts courses increases, so do graduation rates. When looking at the course catalogs and available visual and performing

arts courses from a range of public New Jersey high schools of varying DFGs, several similarities and differences exist. School districts with lower DFGs, and lower graduation rates, offered fewer courses within this academic field of study. While a similar range and depth of courses offered existed, regardless of DFG, a difference in available concentrations and number of courses was apparent. Chapter 5 will present how these conclusions are situated in the broader theoretical framework and related scholarship on student self-efficacy and the documented benefits of participation in arts education on academic achievement and motivation. It will conclude with a summary of implications for policy, practice, research.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe any trends that may exist between the types of arts programs available to students, average schoolwide participation rates, and graduation rates. The study was a sequential, exploratory, mixed-methods study and had two phases to the research design. The first phase of the study was quantitative in nature and sought to describe what trends exist between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates, related to the first research question as well as its sub-question. The second phase of the study was qualitative in nature and addressed how we can describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates, related to the second research question and its sub-questions.

Within this chapter, the findings from Chapter 4 will be reviewed, and each research question will be briefly answered. An explanation of the findings will be discussed, and recommendations for future policy and practice will be addressed. Finally, recommendations for future research will be suggested based on further questions that arose from this study. Finally, concluding thoughts will be made regarding the study results.

Summary of Quantitative Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The study first asked, “How can we describe trends between the average 4-year student participation rates and graduation rates?” More specifically, “How do these associations compare/contrast when considering Socio Economic Status, as defined by a school’s District Factor Group?” A multiple regression analysis was run to seek any potential associations that may exist between 4-year graduation rates and 4-year average participation in visual and performing arts. The simultaneous multiple regression used in this study, which included the free and reduced lunch rates, the percentage of special education, and the percentage of free and

reduced lunch, was employed to control for any variables that may otherwise impact our dependent and independent variables. A 1% increase in visual and performing arts participation rate is associated with a .04% increase in 4-year graduation rates, on average. A 1% increase in students receiving free and reduced lunch is associated with a .17% decrease in the 4-year graduation rate, on average. A 1% increase in students eligible for special education services is associated with a .78% decrease in 4-year graduation rates, on average. A 1% increase in students identified as English language learners is associated with a .31% decrease in 4-year graduation rates, on average.

A frequency analysis was run to determine how often certain district factor groups were represented across the sample. The frequencies represented in the district factor group (DFG) data indicate a majority of our sample being identified as low DFG schools. 52.1% of the sample exists in the lower DFGs of A through DE. With DFGs FG through J, making up the remaining 47.9%.

Summary of Qualitative Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The study then asked, “How can we describe course offerings and participation trends in light of graduation rates?” More specifically, “How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower graduation rates?,” “How can we describe the similarities/differences in course offerings observable among schools with higher and lower participation rates?,” and “How do these trends compare/contrast when considering socioeconomic status, as defined by the school’s District Factor Group?”

The observable trends represented in this study conclude that a range of similarities and differences exist. Findings from the study conclude that no difference exists, based on graduation rates, visual and performing arts participation rates, or DFG regarding the number of visual and

performing arts credits required to graduate as 47 of the 50 schools utilize the same 5 credit requirement.

In respect to course offering trends that were observed based on a school's graduation rate, there were inconsistencies across the sample. For example, when excluding the schools from our outlier School District A, the school in this sample that had the highest graduation rate of 99.6% offered 35 courses across six concentrations and had courses that ranged in depth from introductory to advanced but did not offer AP courses. Similarly, the school with the lowest graduation rate of 60.4% offered only eight courses across two concentrations and only had courses at the standard level. It would appear that a trend was forming of lower graduation rates leading to fewer courses, fewer concentrations, and few depth options offered. However, in direct contrast to this emerging trend, the school with the median graduation rate of 96.8% offered the highest number of courses with 70, had seven different concentrations available to students, and offered a range in depth of courses from introductory to AP.

The trends observed within this sample when sorted by visual and performing arts 4-year participation rates were again inconsistent when looking at the schools outside of the outlier School District A. Of note, the school with the highest percentage of 4-year participation came from DFG A and did not have any information on courses offered available on their school website. The school with the highest 4-year average participation rate, with course information listed, had a percentage of 83%, offered 34 courses across six concentrations, and ranged in depth from introductory to advanced, and did not offer AP courses. The school with the lowest 4-year average participation rate 37.8% offered 53 courses across nine concentrations and only offered courses at four different levels. This school only offered performance, standard, intermediate, and AP level courses. Finally, the school with the median 4-year average

participation percentage of 56.2% offered the highest number of courses with 70, had seven different concentrations available to students, and offered a range in depth of courses from introductory to AP.

There was an apparent difference between the number of courses offered based on DFG. The higher DFG schools offered a range of 21 to 49 courses, while the lower DFG schools offered a range of 8 to 31 courses. Similarly, there was a difference in the range of concentrations that were offered, depending on the DFG. The 25 Higher DFG schools were consistently more likely to offer a wider range of concentrations, including 20 of the schools offering graphic design, 6 offering film, 17 offering photography, and 9 offering dance as well as music, art, and theatre courses. Aside from School District A's 8 schools, which were a consistent outlier within the lower DFG schools, of the remaining 17 schools, only 7 offered graphic design courses, 6 offered dance, 3 offered film, and 5 offered photography. Regardless of the DFG, the range of course depths offered was consistent across schools. Schools in DFG A were just as likely to offer a depth range of introductory through advanced placement courses, with 11 of the 25 schools offering this depth range, as DFG J schools, which offered the same depth range in 14 of 25 schools.

Discussion

Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory is the theoretical framework that guided this study's inquiry. Bandura defined perceived self-efficacy as "People's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). A person's level of self-efficacy is developed and exercised throughout their life by four main influencers. According to Bandura (1994, p. 3), "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and

the firmer is their commitment to them.” This study looked at the potential impact participation in non-core subject area classes, such as visual and performing arts courses, had on developing student self-efficacy and persistence as defined by graduation rates. The study analyzed the relationship between graduation rates and 4-year average participation in visual and performing arts courses. The data analysis indicated that a positive relationship exists between 4-year average participation in visual and performing arts courses and graduation rates. This positive relationship may mean that student involvement in visual and performing arts courses does, in fact, positively impact students’ feelings of motivation and persistence with respect to staying in school through graduation based on this theory.

Next, the study looked deeper into the course offerings across a range of district factor groups, graduation rates, and average participation rates. The data analysis indicated that the most consistent influencer on course offerings was socioeconomic status, as defined by the school’s district factor group. Trends indicate that schools from lower DFGs offered fewer courses, which is problematic as previous research has indicated a strong positive relationship between student academic achievement and participation in visual and performing arts courses. Similarly, this study has added to the conversation as trends from this study show a positive relationship between student involvement in visual and performing arts courses and student motivation and persistence. As has been well documented, visual and performing arts courses provide the kind of individualized opportunities that not only help in growing students’ imaginations and creativity but also the self-efficacy that is necessary to take risks and persevere in the classroom. Based on prior literature, the major common findings suggest the presence of a relationship between arts education and student academic achievement, as measured by student success on standardized tests. Similarly, there have been studies that find connections between

student participation in visual and performing arts courses and student motivation to learn. Within this previous research, motivation has been commonly defined as the students' sense of belonging in school and engagement within the classroom. For many students, participation in visual and performing arts courses offers a release from stress and an opportunity to grow confidence. With respect to previous research on the benefits of visual and performing arts education on academic achievement, the findings of this study further confirm the positive relationship that exists between participation in visual and performing arts courses and academic achievement. Findings from this study also add to the conversation by connecting participation to student motivation in the form of student persistence, as defined by graduation.

The study found that schools in higher DFGs offered a wider range of courses, exposing students to more course type options across a wider range of concentrations. Exposure to different avenues of the arts and art education may afford students with an increased opportunity for discovery and creativity, which has previously been documented as having a positive impact on the way students see and interact with the world around them. This may complement previous research findings that participation in visual and performing arts courses has the opportunity for transferability to other aspects of the students' school life. With respect to the previously researched idea that participation in the arts leads to new ways of thinking about or seeing the world around them, the findings of this study indicate the importance of making participation opportunities available to all students across district factor groups.

Assumptions, Limitation, and Delimitations

While careful attention was given to understanding the context, identifying a problem, and designing research questions that would yield insight into addressing the problem, all decisions have implications for how findings may be interpreted and applied in other settings and

contexts. This section will identify some of the study's underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations in order to promote appropriate, fair, and ethical use of its findings.

Assumptions made during this study were that the courses offered within the sample were aligned with NJSLS and were of equal quality across the state. Also, it was assumed that the same types of visual and performing arts courses have been offered over a 4-year period, as graduation rates were being looked at. Finally, it was being assumed that all students within the studied sample have equitable access to the visual and performing arts courses offered.

Limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. Limitations in this study pertain to what the collected data directly presents and, at the same time, omits. For example, collecting and analyzing archival records, such as course listings, course descriptions, district-specific graduation requirements, and graduation rates, will present overall trends that can be studied. These data will not, however, be able to link particular student by student cases of participation in visual and performing arts courses to graduation.

Delimitations of this study focus on the case study approach being used, the sample selected, and how those factors impact the trends present within the findings. The use of a case study approach for this research will strengthen the findings and affords several opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable through a different approach. One such example of this was the case study's ability to focus on a snapshot moment of a single year in the selected sample of New Jersey high schools. This was beneficial as it generates a set of data that was not being collected over time, and as such, was not subject to changes of policy, administrative turnover, or other potential outside influencers that cannot be controlled for.

Similarly, narrowing the sample to the use of only public, non-charter, or academy based high schools should be considered a delimitation in this study. By identifying and sampling only

public, non-charter, or academy-based high schools, it allows the researcher to keep the focus of the study away from selective, private institutions. As selective, private institutions have the ability to generate their own curriculum maps, establish different graduation requirements, and they do not rely on public funding, their information could possibly skew the data and the analysis done.

Another delimitation to the study was the possible influence of additional programs/policies and how they reflect upon graduation rates. While this study was looking at the trends that exist between visual and performing arts and graduation rates, whether or not a causal relationship exists will not be determined as the schools' other programs were not being looked at. For example, if two schools, in different District Factor Groups (DFG) offer the same arts programs. However, one school has in place an afterschool mentorship program that was stronger than the others; perhaps that program was also influencing their graduation rates. While this study does not specifically focus on these outside program offerings, they were undeniably present and may offer further understanding of the overall picture.

Finally, the theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory warrants discussion as well. This theoretical framework was appropriate for this study as it focuses on students' developmental process towards motivation and persistence. Understanding how students get from simply staying enrolled in high school to finding the drive to complete their requirements and graduate was imperative to developing long term effective programs and policy. While this was beneficial, it does come with its own limitations as well. The most present limitation was that while the theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory looks at student development towards motivation, persistence, and confidence, it does not take into account factors outside of school that may also impact this development. For example, this study will not be directly

investigating an individual students' family socio-economic status, involvement in other extra-curricular activities, or even special education classification, all of which represent potential influencers on their levels of self-efficacy. Instead, the strength of this study was that it will observe and analyze the overall trends that were present.

Policy and Practice Implications

The results of this study show that the most consistent influencer on the number of courses and concentrations offered within a school's visual and performing arts program is the students' socioeconomic status, as defined by the district factor group. The question becomes, what does this mean for educational policy, practice, and future research?

Policy and Practice

Based on the research conducted in this study, there are several implications for policy at the federal, state, and following local recommendations for federal, state, and school levels. These policy recommendations have implications for practice related to curriculum and program development at the district and school levels. Policy changes are appropriate. On the federal level, alternative avenues to fund an increased number of arts-based programs in lower socioeconomic districts should be provided. As research shows the benefits and impact of participation on student persistence through graduation with trends indicating lower socioeconomic school districts lack the ability to offer a wide range of course offerings, it is reasonable to believe that alternative sources of funding would be beneficial. With further nationwide emphasis placed on the need for providing funding to these districts, expanded opportunities for students to benefit will become available.

Second, at the state level, an increase in the state-mandated minimum graduation requirements in visual and performing arts education from 5 credits. As the overwhelming

majority of schools researched in this study only required the minimum, increasing the requirement would continue to expose more students to the benefits and further develop their feelings of self-efficacy and persistence. With the ongoing accountability movement, which has school districts hyper-focused on developing academic excellence as measured by high standardized test scores, increasing the minimum graduation requirements for these non-core subject areas would mandate time in every students' schedule to participate in a creative endeavor.

Third, on the school level, in conjunction with previous research on the benefits of arts education and student self-efficacy, a recommendation for lower DFG schools is to seek opportunities to infuse art education in other core subject area classes. There is the potential for tremendous benefits for student development in motivation and persistence if they develop integrated arts education activities into other subject areas. This may help cultivate enriched and engaging opportunities for learning while also infusing the benefits of the arts. For districts with low participation rates, this infusion into the core curriculum areas affords increased exposure to a wider range of students. By opening up more opportunities for participation, more opportunities to develop new ways of thinking and interacting with the world around our students become available to students in lower socioeconomic districts that may otherwise not have access comparable to students learning in higher socioeconomic districts.

Research

Future research using this study could look in a variety of directions. As has been noted in this study, a positive relationship exists between participation in visual and performing arts courses and student persistence, as defined by graduation rates. One avenue for future research would be to investigate how participation in other non-core subject area courses and activities

impact student persistence, as defined by graduation rates. For example, the impact of participation in after school clubs, activities, or school sports on student persistence could be similarly researched. This research would be valuable in the ongoing discussion of helping foster student motivation, persistence, and self-efficacy and developing appropriate policy in public high schools. Similarly, future research could also look at the compounding impact that participation in these outside activities, such as clubs, sports, private visual and performing arts lessons, and other activities, has in conjunction with participation in visual and performing arts courses on student motivation and persistence. Another avenue for future research would be to look at the impact of participation in visual and performing arts courses on college acceptance. While this study investigated the observable trends between participation in visual and performing arts and persistence through graduation, there is still an opportunity to go further and investigate what comes next for those students. Having an understanding of how participation not only leads to graduation but also to pursuing higher education may similarly impact statewide policy changes that further benefit the infusion of the arts into daily instruction in public high schools. Similarly, as there were no consistent, observable trends between the number of courses, depth of courses, and concentrations offered within the different schools in relation to graduation rates, future research could investigate what is driving the increased participation that is occurring in different school districts. Knowing that participation in visual and performing arts courses positively impacts graduation rates, while also observing that increased offerings of courses, depth of courses, and concentrations appear not to be impactful, it is imperative to develop further knowledge of what is triggering this relationship.

Limitations of this study should also be acknowledged as opportunities for future research. For example, the data collected in this study focused on a snapshot moment in the

schools' curricular history. Further research could focus on collecting and analyzing archival records at other points in time, such as following the reopening of schools after the COVID-19 national school shutdowns. With pressing financial strains and difficult budgetary decisions needing to be made, the impact on visual and performing arts courses would be apparent

Similarly, these data were focused on averages and not individual student experiences. Future research could move beyond the average, school-wide trends and focus directly on student experiences within the arts and how participation impacted their experiences in relation to motivation and persistence through graduation. Finally, as this study used a selective sampling strategy of only utilizing public, non-charter high schools, future research could look beyond this sample. By investigating non-public high schools as well, future research could potentially determine the value and impact of visual and performing arts education on a wider range of students coming from different backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study looked to take steps beyond simply connecting participation in visual and performing arts programs to persistence, growth, and motivation by looking directly at several current programs and analyzing how these programs were developed and what impact those programs have on their student bodies. While there have been studies that look at the connection to motivation, a gap in the literature exists when discussing student persistence. This study sought to look at trends between visual and performing arts participation and high school graduation rates in a new way, from a theoretical perspective that students' self-efficacy influences the motivation to stay in school through graduation. Moreover, considering the broader context of funding inequalities and pressures schools face with accountability and

standardized testing, this study paid careful attention to the types of courses offered and school socio-economic status designations to further interpret observed trends.

The purpose of this sequential, exploratory mixed methods study, then, was to describe the school's percentage of participation and visual and performing arts course offerings in relation to graduation rates in New Jersey high schools. Additionally, the study aimed to describe (your methodology does not allow explanation) observable trends between high school graduation rates when controlling for other factors that influence achievement, such as student socioeconomic status.

This study looked to take steps beyond simply connecting participation in visual and performing arts programs to persistence, growth, and motivation by looking directly at several current programs and analyzing how these programs were developed and what impact they have on their student bodies. While there have been studies that look at the connection to motivation, a gap in the literature exists when discussing student persistence. This study sought to look at trends between visual and performing arts participation and high school graduation rates in a new way, from the theoretical perspective that students' self-efficacy influences their motivation to stay in school through graduation. Moreover, considering the broader context of funding inequalities and pressures schools face with accountability and standardized testing, this study paid careful attention to the types of courses offered and school socio-economic status designations to further interpret observed trends.

There were three key findings from this study. Those key findings were that a positive relationship exists between average 4-year participation rates in visual and performing arts and average 4-year graduation rates, that socioeconomic status was an indicator of the number of courses and concentrations offered in a district, and that a school's DFG did not

impact the depth of courses offered. In light of theory or reviewed literature, these key findings complement previous research that identified the positive impact art education has on academic achievement because they also determined the importance of exposure to the arts and the impact it has on students' academic lives. These findings indicate that participation in visual and performing arts courses not only aids in student academic achievement in the classroom but also in persistence and motivation as defined by graduation from high school.

In light of theory or reviewed literature, these key findings contradict the notion that the benefits of participation in art education end with the transferability of skills into the academic classroom and towards academic success. This is apparent because they show that the benefits go beyond academic achievement and impact self-efficacy, motivation, and persistence. Knowing that these benefits exist, it becomes even more pressing that funding becomes available so as to develop equality of access across DFGs for all students.

In light of theory or reviewed literature, these key findings expanded the importance that is to be put upon the arts and art education in discussions with resources and funding because they further the dialogue on the positive impact art education has on students. Knowing that art education positively impacts student persistence through graduation aids in the importance and necessity for funding to be provided on a federal level for public high schools. Similarly, since socioeconomic status impacted the availability of courses and range of concentrations, it must be directly addressed that additional outside resources are needed.

These findings have implications for policy, practice, and research related to increased funding, availability of courses, and advanced knowledge on the direct impact that visual and performing arts have on students. As arts education continues to be viewed as an expendable

content area throughout discussions on resource allocation, these findings are potentially more valuable now than ever.

These suggestions, among others, may help us better address the emerging issues caused by limited financial resources, funding from public sources and the increasing demand for academic excellence and achievement are forcing high schools to reassess how current resources are allocated within their institutions. These suggestions may help, as they offer potential courses of action across the federal, state, and school level.

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