
Understanding the Parental Perspective on Arts Education in Alabama

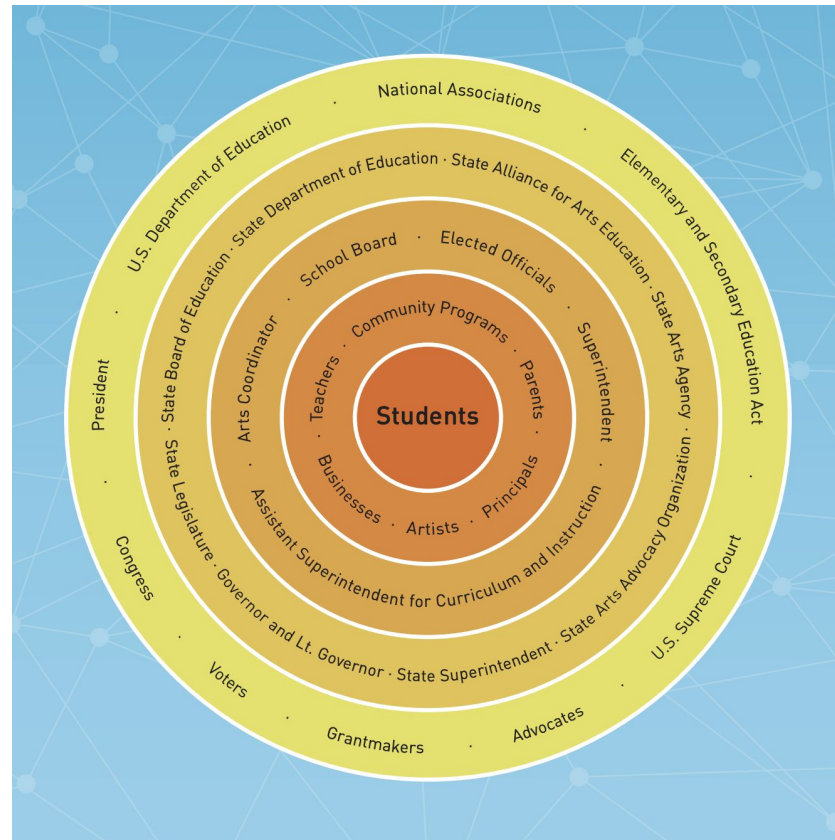
Ami Dave, Emon Collazo, Nadia Anabtawi

Background

- We spent two semesters learning about arts education in Alabama
- In our research and discussions, we learned that parents are seldom asked what they think about their child's arts education
- Parents have one of the greatest impacts on their child's development (cognitive, socio-cultural, mental and physical). Their opinions and priorities directly impact their child's school and extracurricular involvement.

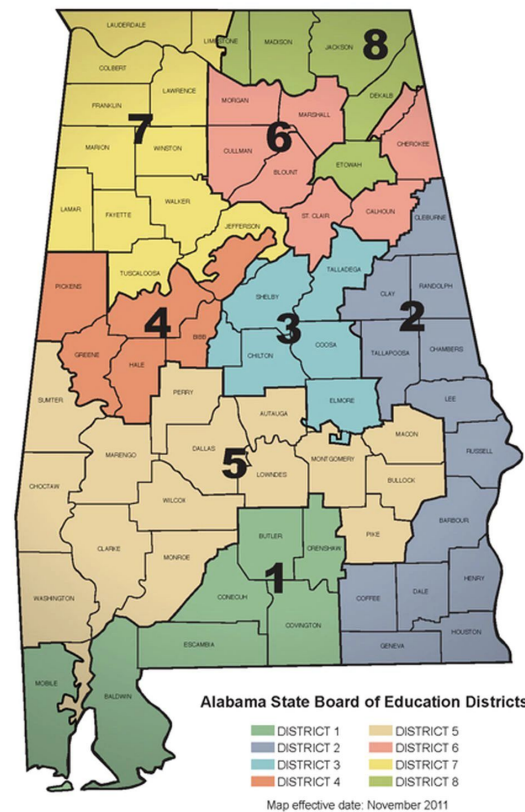
Selecting a stakeholder

- To narrow down our investigation, we aimed to focus on one constituent to connect with at the local/district level
- We considered superintendents, teachers, parents, and students
 - Pros and cons of each group



Selecting our population

- We considered the geographical/racial/cultural/financial obstacles that impacted parents' priorities and students' access to opportunities
- We wanted to hear from parents from across all Alabama school districts to gain an accurate, honest representation

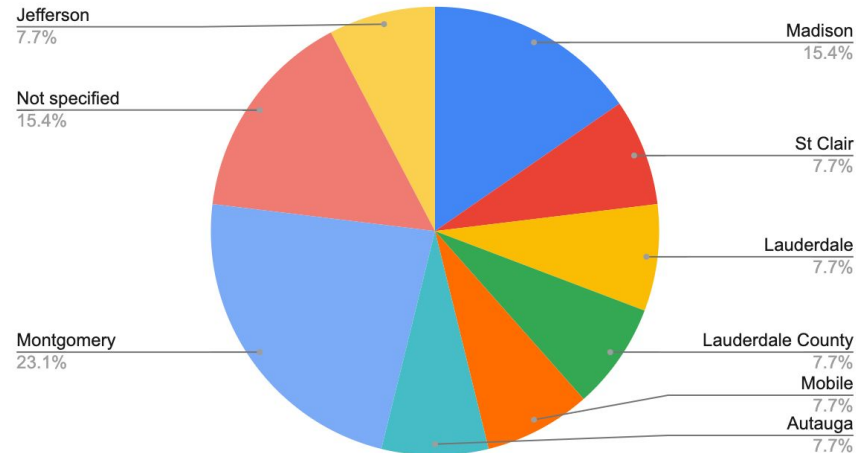


Methods

- We created a questionnaire that asked parents a series of questions about their children's education and extra-curricular involvement. We asked parents how they felt about the importance of arts education in relation to other school programs
 - Answers were anonymous unless parents volunteer to provide their email address for a phone interview
 - All questions were optional, so parents could choose what to answer or skip
- We distributed the survey through Alabama PTA's email list, GBAEC's monthly newsletter, faculty, and our own personal contacts

Preliminary Results

- 13 respondents so far
- Respondents were parents of 1, 2, or 3 children (33% each)
- Majority (80%) of children enrolled in public school rather than private or homeschool
- Counties represented:



Preliminary Results

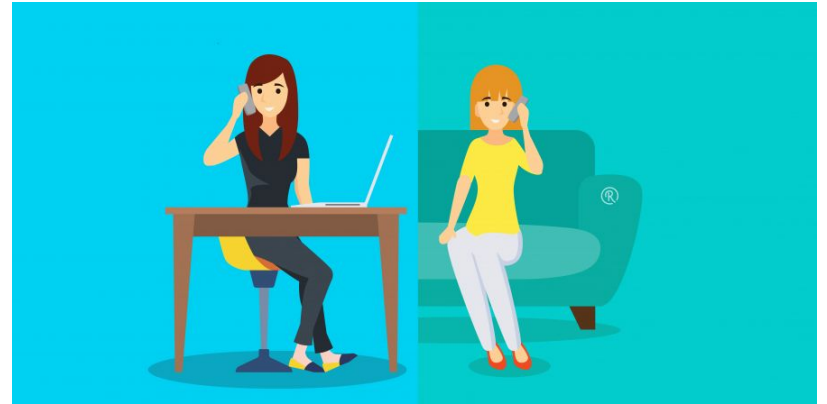
- 100% of parents participated in the arts themselves as students
- Non-arts extracurricular involvement: 61.5% of children involved in sports
- **Teamwork, socialization, and leadership** were the top reasons for the appeal of non-arts extracurriculars
 - Other reasons: **resiliency, activism, diversity**
- Arts involvement: 73% of children involved in music or visual arts; the rest were involved in theatre, dance, and media arts
- **Creativity** was the top reason for being involved in arts programs
 - Other reasons: **therapeutic outlet, freedom to be themselves, discipline, critical thinking, learning something new, sense of community**

Preliminary Results

- **78-85%** of parents feel
 - That arts education is often dismissed in schools
 - That arts and sports are equally important extracurriculars
 - Arts should be integrated within other subjects
 - That arts education is necessary for a well-rounded education
 - That arts should receive more funding
 - That they want their children to go to a school hosted field trip (e.g., play, museum)
 - That they want their children to be involved in art activities in school even if art will not be a part of their future career choice
- **Satisfaction** with the arts programs/opportunities at their children's school was **evenly divided** among parents
- Overall, **satisfaction of parent opportunity for discussion** on their children's school arts opportunities is **fairly even**, but leaning towards **more opportunities for involvement**.

Phone Interviews

- Clear discrepancies between sports and arts education
 - Educators
 - Salary
 - Types of arts offered
- Verbal conversations versus just the questionnaire



Limitations/lessons learned

- Our parent population is still quite small (n=13) and we have not yet heard from each Alabama school district
 - Solution: Keep the questionnaire open for longer; distribute more broadly
- Acquiescence response bias aka “agreement bias” - the tendency for survey respondents to agree with statements because they want to be likable and socially accepted
 - Solution: Reformulate the questions to prevent “straight-lining;” encourage more short answer responses

Recommendations

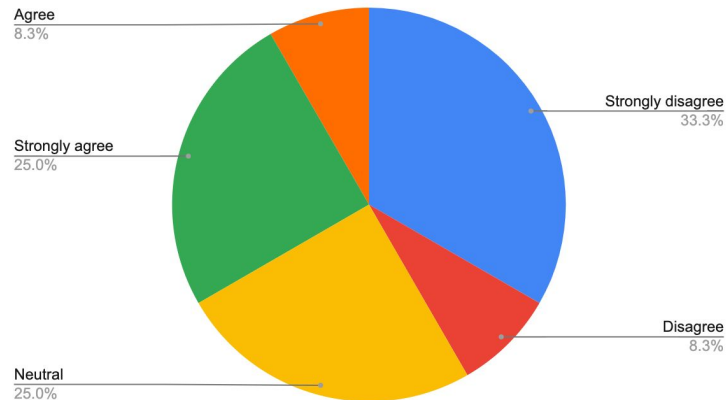
1. Hearing from parents is valuable, but a one-time opinion is not sufficient on its own. It is important to know how their feelings change over the school year, and what they think of changes that are discussed and implemented.
 - a. **We recommend to keep this questionnaire (or a similar one) open indefinitely/permanently and send it out regularly (semesterly quarterly) with PTA or school newsletters.**
 - i. Include options for parents to voice their opinions/concerns or suggest ideas throughout the school year (like an anonymous virtual suggestion box)
2. While most parents in the survey expressed attributing the same level of value to arts education as other subjects, there are a handful of parents who would be interested in more directly being involved with this discussion.
 - a. We recommend utilizing this survey system to identify which parents/PTAs are interested in contributing to arts education efforts; if we can connect with these parents, they could serve as liaisons to assist with communication/cooperation between the school, GBAEC, and other parents

Recommendations cont.

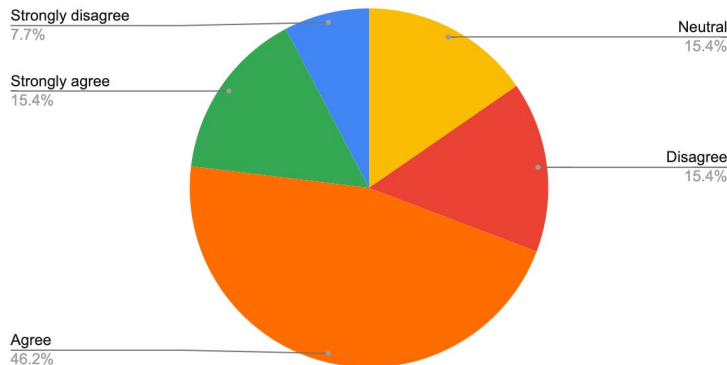
Potential arts education quality indicators focusing on parents:

- 1. Does the school have a mechanism for parents to be informed and get involved in arts education programming and planning at their child's school?**
 - Parent-teacher meetings
 - Documentation of arts events
 - School supplies
- 2. Does a clear partnership exist between the school's PTA and the art teachers?**
 - Are arts teachers able to depend on their PTA for raising funds, finding volunteers?

I have had opportunities to have conversations and be involved in the school's discussions with other parents about our children's arts education



I feel well-informed about the extent of arts education my child receives at school



Areas for further probing

- Most respondents agreed that arts and STEM are equally important. Is this an accurate representation of the actual parental perspective?
 - Emotional/moral support versus financial support from parent
 - Americans for the Arts research on music education funding
- Parents listed leadership, socialization, and teamwork as the main appealing reasons for non-arts programs, but these reasons were not commonly listed for the arts ECs - why?
 - Misconception that sports are for teamwork and arts are for individual growth

“How do you personally define arts education?”

Art Education is learning about all types of art through different **cultures, ethnicities, and traditions** around the world. Art is something that we cannot live without. It is all around us and is a part of everything we do on a daily basis.

Any fine arts curriculum and opportunities that explore **culture** and creativity that give hands on opportunities to develop skills and appreciation for a richer life experience.

Anything that lets them create something. And the **history** of it.

Arts education should be more than just an obligatory semester art class. That is what it has been reduced to. We should have classes where fine arts, performing arts are appreciated.

Thank you!