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**ArtsinStark**

ArtsinStark.com -- *Kids, Jobs, Communities*

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## **Research Shows Arts Improve Learning (ArtsinStark Releases SmArts "Report Card")**

The free family arts festival *ArtSplash* this Saturday (January 23) will be a celebration of schools using the arts to supercharge learning. From 11 am to 3 pm at the Cultural Center, hands-on arts-making workshops and performances will all be tied to academic learning. In addition, ArtsinStark will release its first "report card" on the impact **SmArts** has had on the 10,000 kids in 55 Stark County schools reached to date. "We wanted to prove that integrating arts into schools supercharges learning," says ArtsinStark CEO Robb Hankins, "and the results so far are amazing." Those results include dramatically higher state test scores for students involved in the arts. "The initial findings for SmArts are impressive," says Adrienne O'Neill, President of the Stark Education Partnership, whose organization has worked for 20 years at improving education here, and is evaluating all the data. "We are really looking forward to the research that comes next." For more information on *ArtSplash*, please go to ArtsinStark.com or 330-453-1075.

In the last four years the County Arts Council has awarded \$200,000 in **SmArts** grants to 55 Stark County schools which have reached 10,000 kids. Most **SmArts** grants are given out for short projects of one or two months in duration. "We are doing this so that any school in Stark County can try out **SmArts** in their classrooms," says Sarah Shumaker, ArtsinStark's Outreach Coordinator, who oversees the **SmArts** Program. But in order to be able to collect the data necessary to see if results are statistically significant, ArtsinStark awarded special 36-month grants to three Stark County School systems. "These school systems were chosen because of their commitment to the arts and their consistent, strong leadership," says ArtsinStark board president Bob Timken. They are: 1) Canton Local Schools, 2) Jackson Local School District, and 3) Massillon City Schools. Typically, one school building in each school system set up **SmArts** learning objectives and measurable goals, and built a 36-month project to improve

learning. That project consisted of artists-in-residence team teaching both basic curriculum and their art form.

The research for the first 12 months was analyzed by Joe Rochford, Vice-President of the Stark Educational Partnership, who says: "I think everyone can be proud of the advances made so far." Here are some of those results.

In Jackson Local School District, a test group of 6th graders was involved in a **SmArts** project called "The Fabric of Our Culture" which involved arts activities and artists in residence with an emphasis on reading. On state tests at the end of the first 12 months, those 6<sup>th</sup> grade students involved in the arts totally outperformed a control group of other students who were not, and they did so at a statistically significant level of 95%. "What this means for us," says Jackson Local Schools District Superintendent Cheryl Haschak, "is that our on-going commitment to the arts makes good educational sense."

In Canton Local Schools, Faircrest Memorial Middle School hosted a project called "Dream Reading and Writing." The 36-month goal was to increase state reading test scores for a group of 6th graders by 15%. At the end of the first 12 months, test scores had improved a solid 4% towards the achievement of that goal. It's important to note that the same group of students is being followed as they proceed through 6th and 7th and 8th grades. "We are pleased with the year one results," says Canton Local Schools Superintendent Teresa Purses. "We want to educate the whole child, and this is a partnership that really supports student learning."

At Gorrell Elementary in Massillon City Schools the goal of "Live Happily Ever After with a Good Book" was to increase 4th grade reading scores by 5% over the first 12 months. Reading scores actually went up by 11%. "We think those are pretty dramatic results," says Massillon City Schools Superintendent Lisa Carmichael, "plus this was such a positive and exciting experience for the teachers and students involved." The Stark Educational Partnership decided to compare the results at Gorrell with other elementary schools in Massillon across a range of subjects, not just those for which students were originally being tested. "What totally surprised us," says Hankins, "is that while 4th grade writing scores in Massillon public schools in general improved by 2%

last year --- at Gorrell they jumped by 23%. That's more than a 1,000 percent difference!"

Another 24 months still remain in completing the **SmArts** experiment, and that much more data must be collected and analyzed before any conclusive findings can be reached. "But the results to date are so very promising," says Mel Lioi, Assistant Superintendent at Stark County Educational Service Center and head of ArtsinStark's Education Committee. "All the national research demonstrates the arts can dramatically impact learning and now we're trying it right here in Stark County."

As part of the first 12 months of research, teachers voiced their opinions as well. Half of the teachers responding to a survey indicated that, because of SmArts, they now have higher expectations for the learning that can take place with their students. Teachers also believe that art integration has positively increased the effectiveness of their teaching, and that **SmArts** has not increased their workload. "We thought it was very significant," adds Hankins, "that teachers are nearly unanimous in their belief that learning becomes more effective when supplemented by the arts."

## Background

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### ArtsinStark.com -- *Kids, Jobs, Communities*

We began **41 years** ago in **1968**, with the dream of building a **Cultural Center for the Arts** along side the Canton Civic Center. In 1972, that dream came true. We are a non profit organization that gives out grants, manages the Cultural Center, and runs the Annual Arts Campaign. Our annual budget is \$2.6 million --- and **99%** of it comes from the private sector. What we don't earn, we raise from individuals, companies, and foundations. Every spring ArtsinStark conducts the **Annual Arts Campaign**. In the last 4 years we've increased giving to the arts by **50%**. In May 2009, in the middle of a recession, we raised the largest amount in 41 years: **\$1,450,000**. Out of every dollar raised --- 91 cents goes directly to support programs that "create smarter kids, new jobs, and healthier communities."