

To: EdVestors, Inc.

January 23, 2014

From: Steve Koczela
President, The MassINC Polling Group

Re: Survey of public school parents in Boston on arts programming

To better understand public school parents' opinion on the role of the arts in public schools, EdVestors sponsored a survey of public school parents in the city of Boston. The survey was conducted for EdVestors by The MassINC Polling Group. Full methodological details and topline results are available in the appendices of this document.

Parents understand the value of arts programming and feel it is an important factor in choosing and evaluating a school.

Majorities of public school parents in Boston believe students who participate in the arts do better academically (62 percent) and are happier at school (70 percent) compared to students who do not participate in the arts. Perhaps for this reason, parents value the arts when evaluating the overall quality of a school. Sixty percent said that the arts are a “very important” component of a good school. This was lower than the finding in favor of strong academics (89 percent) but still a majority, underscoring the importance of arts programming in the perception of school quality.

Parents don't just view arts as important in the abstract, they also consider arts programming when choosing schools (Figure 1). About half (51 percent) of parents said that arts programming was very important to them when selecting the school where their child would attend; another third said the arts were somewhat important in that decision.

Arts programming was a more important factor to non-white parents than white parents; 53 percent of Black parents and 54 percent of other races (mostly Hispanic) said the arts were very important, compared to only 40 percent of white parents. Likewise, lower income parents are more likely to say the arts mattered in their school selection and to say arts programming is an essential component of a good school.

Parents of children who participate in the arts at school are more engaged with their children's schools and perceive the schools more positively.

Engagement with the arts also appears to positively impact school engagement. Parents of children participating in the arts at school were more likely than parents whose children did not participate in each activity to agree with a range of statements designed to measure satisfaction and engagement with their child's school (Figure 2). When children participate in activities at school such as dance, visual arts, theater, creative writing, or media arts, parents are more likely to perceive an excellent learning environment at school, are more likely to be involved with the school, and are more likely to say that their child enjoys attending school.

Figure 1: Arts matter to parents in choosing a school
% who said arts important in school selection

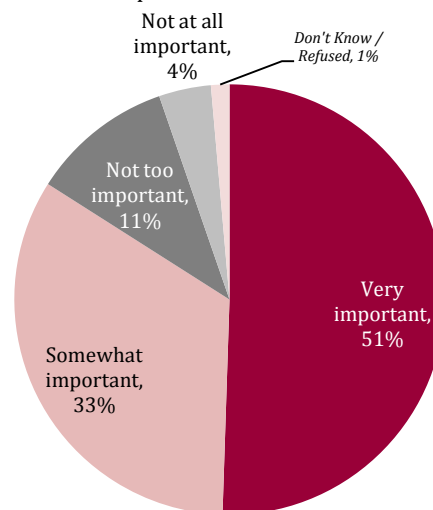


Figure 2: Music participation and attendance at arts productions tied to positive perceptions of school
 % who “strongly agree” with each statement

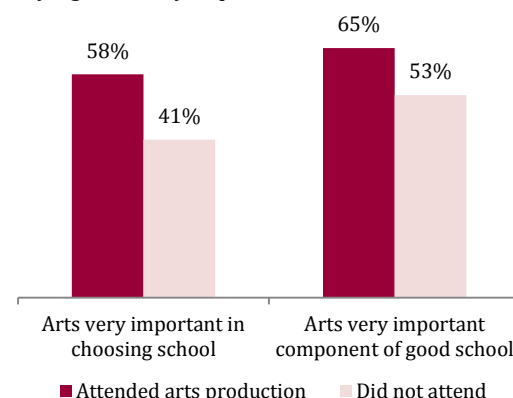
	Child participates in music?		Attended arts production in past 3 years?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I feel welcome at my child’s school	81%	77%	81%	75%
My child feels safe at school	79%	72%	79%	71%
My child’s school tries to get family members to take part in school activities	76%	63%	77%	63%
I know what is going on in my child’s school	74%	55%	74%	60%
My child enjoys attending school	73%	73%	82%	60%
Overall, I am satisfied with this school	72%	62%	71%	64%
The learning environment at this school is excellent	70%	64%	70%	64%
I am actively involved with the school	51%	35%	53%	35%
Students at my child’s school are well behaved	44%	40%	48%	35%

Parents’ attendance at arts events also relates closely to their engagement with and positive impressions of their child’s school. Across the board, parents who had attended an arts production at their child’s school in the last three years were more likely to strongly agree with positive statements about their child’s school. For instance, 82 percent of arts program attendees very strongly agreed with the statement “My child enjoys attending school,” compared to only 60 percent among parents who had not attended any arts productions. Parents who have attended events are also more likely to see arts as an important component of a good school and more likely to say that arts programming played an important role in their choice of school than those who hadn’t (Figure 3).

This dynamic suggests a potential engagement strategy for EdVestors and BPS to pursue. Increasing parents’ attendance at arts productions may increase parents’ belief in the value of arts programming, given the clear relationship among current attendees. For the school, increasing attendance will likely have the added benefits of increasing parents’ positive impressions of the school and their level of engagement with it. This relationship has appeared in [other work](#) we have done, where attendance at municipal arts events is closely tied to positive perceptions of quality of life.

Figure 3: Parents attending arts productions more likely to value arts

% saying arts “very important”



Most parents are happy with current arts offerings, but would support added programming if offered.

A majority of parents (61 percent) felt that “about the right amount” of arts programming is currently being offered during the school day. A third (33 percent) thought there was too little. Despite a majority seemingly content with the current level, fourth-fifths of parents (82 percent) would support expanding arts programming during the school day, if possible. And if the school day were extended, nearly as many (79 percent) would like to see either a “great deal” or a “fair amount” of that time dedicated to arts programming. This is roughly on par with the percentage who would like to see the added time used for academics (79 percent) and sports / PE programming (82 percent).

The percentage of parents who felt too little arts are being offered was marginally higher among those whose children were *not* participating in arts programs, compared to those whose kids were participating. It was

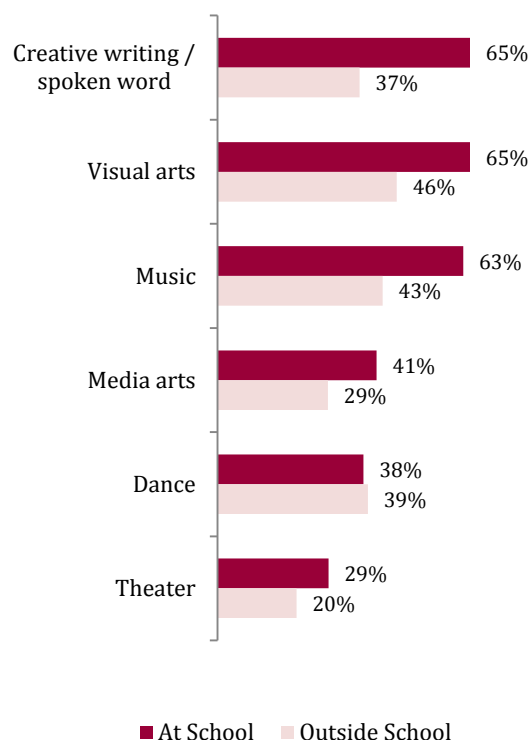
also higher among parents who had not attended an arts performance in the past three years. This suggests a possible latent demand for arts programming among parents whose kids are not currently participating.

For one in five students, school is their only source of arts programming.

Overall, 96 percent of parents report their child participated in at least one form of art at school, compared to only 77 percent participating outside of school. So for about 20 percent of students, the arts programming offered at their school is their only exposure to arts programming of any kind. This suggests a potential argument for maintaining and expanding arts programming in the public schools: that, given the positive effects of the arts, making sure students can access the arts in school is a matter of social equity.

Looking specifically at the six groupings of arts disciplines reveals which activities are experienced disproportionately in the school environment (Figure 4). With the exception of dance, more parents said their child participated in each art form at school than outside of school. Many more parents said their children participate in music at school (63 percent) than outside of school (43 percent), with similar gaps present in most of the other art forms. Thus, children's exposure to a variety of art forms relies on robust, school-based arts programming.

Figure 4: School main source of most forms of art
% whose kids participate at school and outside school



Parents are largely unaware of the recent expansion of arts programming. Communicating these expansions could improve parental engagement and views of BPS.

Despite their enthusiasm for and willingness to expand arts programming, parents are largely unaware that there has already been an expansion of the arts in the Boston Public Schools in recent years (Figure 5). Just 17 percent are aware of an increase in arts programming in BPS over the last three years. More think the level has stayed the same (44 percent) or decreased (19 percent). Parents were slightly more likely to think arts programming at their child's specific school had either stayed steady (55 percent) or increased (19 percent). We cannot say for sure whether specific parents are right or wrong about their own specific school, since we do not know which school each respondent was referring to. We can conclude, however, that it is not possible that only 19 percent of parents have children in schools where an increase has taken place. As such, it is clear that recent increases arts programming in Boston Public Schools are not widely known.

Figure 5: Low awareness of arts programming increase
% who believe arts programming has increased, decreased, or stayed the same

	In BPS	In Specific School
Increased	17%	19%
Decreased	19%	11%
Stayed about the same	44%	55%
Don't Know / Refused	21%	15%

Responses to these questions are very likely related to consistent concerns about education that permeate public opinion in general and specifically in Boston. Education was cited as the top issue of concern in both polls we conducted in this year's Boston Mayoral campaign, and in other polls we have conducted both statewide and elsewhere. In our Mayoral [preliminary election poll](#) for WBUR, a majority of Boston voters (57 percent) gave the public schools a grade of C or lower. Voters graded the public schools in Boston more harshly than voters in national surveys. In light of these prevailing attitudes about the schools, it is possible parents simply default to the position that BPS is treading water on arts funding in the absence of clearly visible evidence of an increase.

Nevertheless, the positive relationship between the arts and perceived school quality suggest that more outreach and communications to parents about initiatives to expand arts education may be warranted. Given very high levels of support for expanding arts education and the benefits of participation on parental engagement, it is likely to the benefit of both BPS and EdVestors to more clearly communicate the expansions that have taken place. As discussed above, arts programming is seen as a key component of a good school, and important to student achievement. It follows, then, that expanding parents' awareness of the expansion in arts programming may positively affect the perception of BPS overall and of individual schools.

Appendix A - About the Survey

In order to better understand parental attitudes towards and awareness of arts programming in the Boston Public Schools, EdVestors engaged The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) to conduct a public opinion poll of Boston public school parents. Interview questions were crafted by MPG with input from EdVestors. The survey was administered in both English and Spanish using a combination of listed sample and RDD. Both landline and cellphone numbers were called. The survey was fielded Nov. 19- 30, 2013 and interviewed 497 parents of school children in Boston.

The responses were weighted by age, race and educational attainment to approximate the demographic composition of Boston public school parents, using data from the U.S. Census, previous polls of Boston school parents, demographic data on BPS students, and other sources. The margin of error for the survey is 4.4 percent. The full survey questionnaire, with topline responses from all respondents is included below. We examines the results to see whether there were systematic differences between parents of non-charter BPS students and the entire sample and found differences to be negligible. Full cross-tabulated results showing figures for each grouping are available as a separate document.

Appendix B - EdVestors survey of public school parents in Boston

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. First, **READ FIRST STATEMENT. IF AGREE OR DISAGREE, PROBE WITH** And do you strongly (agree/disagree) with this statement, or just somewhat?

<i>Order randomized</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know / Refused
The learning environment at this school is excellent	67%	24%	4%	3%	1%
I am actively involved with the school	45%	34%	15%	5%	1%
Overall, I am satisfied with this school	68%	24%	2%	5%	1%
I know what is going on in my child's school	68%	25%	4%	2%	1%
My child feels safe at school	76%	18%	2%	3%	<1%
Students at my child's school are well behaved	42%	35%	10%	6%	6%
My child's school tries to get family members to take part in school activities	71%	21%	4%	2%	1%
I feel welcome at my child's school	79%	16%	3%	1%	1%
My child enjoys attending school	72%	22%	2%	3%	1%

How important was arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music when selecting the school your child would attend—very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Very important	51%
Somewhat important	33%
Not too important	11%
Not at all important	4%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

In your view, how important is each of the following as a component of a good school? First, **READ FIRST ITEM.** Is that very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?

<i>Order randomized</i>	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Don't Know / Refused
Arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music	60%	34%	3%	2%	<1%
Sports and physical education programs	70%	26%	3%	1%	<1%
Strong academics	89%	11%	0%	0%	<1%

Do you think the amount of arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music offered during the school day at your child's school is too much, too little, or about the right amount?

Too much	4%
Too little	33%
About the right amount	61%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

Would you support or oppose expanding arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music your child's school during the school day?

Support	82%
Oppose	11%
Both/neither/depends (not read)	4%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

If the school day were lengthened to add more instructional time, how much of the additional time would you like to see used for **READ FIRST ITEM**. A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all? How about **READ NEXT ITEM**?

<i>Order randomized</i>	A great deal	A fair amount	Not too much	None at all	Don't Know / Refused
Arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music	28%	51%	15%	5%	1%
Sports and physical education programs	29%	53%	12%	5%	1%
Additional class time for academic subjects.	40%	39%	12%	7%	2%

In your view, do kids who participate in arts or music during the school day or as part of an after school program do better or worse academically than kids who do not, or does it make no difference?

Do better academically	62%
Do worse academically	1%
Makes no difference	31%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

In your view, do kids who participate in arts or music during the school day or as part of an after school program tend to be happier at school, less happy, or does it make no difference?

Happier	70%
Less happy	1%
Makes no difference	24%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

Have you attended any artistic productions like concerts, art shows, dance recitals, or plays at your child's school this year, whether or not your child was involved?

Yes	57%
No	42%
Refused	2%

To the best of your knowledge, has the amount of arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music in the Boston Public Schools as a whole increased, decreased, or stayed about the same over the last 3 years?

Increased	17%
Decreased	19%
Stayed about the same	44%
Don't Know / Refused	21%

How about at your child's specific school? Has the amount arts programming such as theater, dance, visual arts, and music at your child's school increased, decreased, or stayed about the same over the last 3 years?

Increased	19%
Decreased	11%
Stayed about the same	55%
Don't Know / Refused	15%

I would now like to ask about the arts activities your child does during the school day in a typical week. During the average week, does your child take a class focused on either learning about or doing **READ FIRST ITEM**? How about **READ NEXT ITEM**?

<i>Order randomized</i>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Refused
Visual arts such as drawing, painting, sculpture	65%	32%	3%
Music such as singing or playing an instrument	63%	33%	3%
Dance	38%	61%	2%
Theater	29%	69%	3%
Creative writing or spoken word	65%	32%	3%
Media arts such as film, video, computer animation or design	41%	56%	3%

I would now like to ask about the arts activities your child does outside of school hours, whether on their own, as a part of a club, after school program, or community group in a typical week. During the average week, does your child take a class focused on either learning about or doing **READ FIRST ITEM**? How about **READ NEXT ITEM**?

<i>Order randomized</i>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Refused
Visual arts such as drawing, painting, sculpture	46%	53%	1%
Music such as singing or playing an instrument	43%	57%	1%
Dance	39%	61%	1%
Theater	20%	78%	1%
Creative writing or spoken word	37%	63%	1%
Media arts such as film, video, computer animation or design	29%	71%	1%

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

Male	37%
Female	63%

Age

18 to 29	10%
30 to 44	49%
45 to 59	35%
60+	4%
Don't know / Refused	2%

Education

High School or less	46%
Some college, no degree	23%
College graduate (BA/BS)	17%
Advanced degree	12%
Don't know / Refused	2%

Household Income

Below \$25,000 dollars	22%
\$25,000 to less than \$50,000	26%
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	13%
\$75,000 or more	20%
Don't Know / Refused	19%

Race

White, not Hispanic	22%
Black, not Hispanic	34%
Hispanic	31%
Other	9%
Don't Know / Refused	4%