



Enriching Minds.  
Growing our future.



BigThought  
**ARTSPARTNERS**

## Imagine if a city invested in raising the next generation of active and creative young people — just like it invests in streets or parks or good government — what that could mean for every child’s learning and development.

ArtsPartners is a remarkably effective program that lets the City of Dallas do exactly that, not just for the fortunate few, but for every child in every elementary school across the district. By 2013, ArtsPartners has grown to serve all 156 Dallas Independent School District (DISD) elementary schools, who now use the ArtsPartners program to support the academic and social development of Dallas children. Thanks to the collaboration of the DISD, the Office of Cultural Affairs and the city’s arts and culture organizations through the ArtsPartners program, the students’ enthusiasm for learning, inventiveness and literacy skills has risen.

Dallas ArtsPartners was founded on the principle that all children have both minds and imaginations that need and deserve the best opportunities to learn right from the very start. To that end, ArtsPartners brings together the unique talents and perspectives of the community’s artists, writers, performers, scientists and educators on behalf of the city’s children.

The results of the program are outstanding. According to a long-term study conducted in partnership with the Research and Evaluation Department of the DISD and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR), ArtsPartners adds great value to the education of our children. The study followed two groups of Dallas students. The first group (a.k.a Focus) participated in intensive ArtsPartners programs for up to four years. The second group (a.k.a. Control) received only a modest level of ArtsPartners services

Reviewing the findings of this study, it is clear that ArtsPartners has ignited, enriched and fueled student learning throughout the community.

## Igniting the learning process.

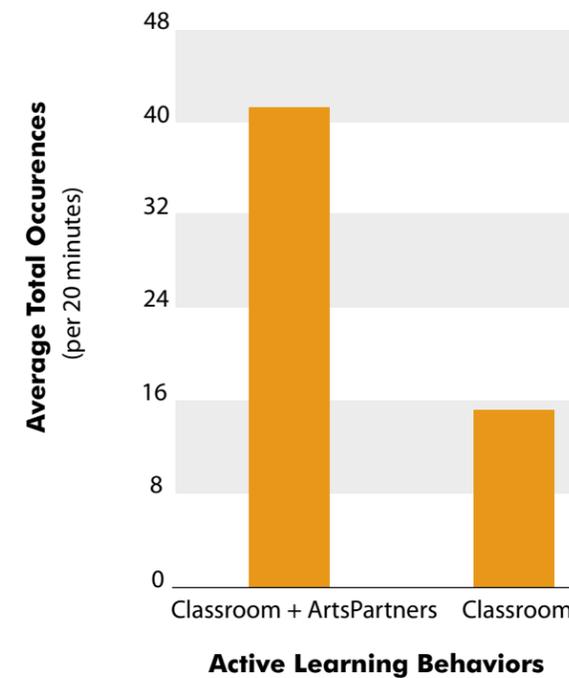
The scientific topics of extinction and habitat are important issues but can be difficult for second-graders to understand. However, something amazing happens when a theater performer helps a child play the role of a certain animal, living in a specific place. Dressed in costume, recreating animals’ movements and sounds, kids can relate to animals and their surroundings. The abstract becomes concrete. Actively learning, children ask questions about fins, wings, beaks, food and sleep. They ask, **“What would happen if...?”**

After working with a theater artist, one English language learner, often shy and quiet because of her struggle with a new language, uses every bit of her new knowledge and emerging vocabulary to portray the experience of a small bat trying to survive in a harsh world:

**“I am the last Black bat. I eat each insects I eat a insects. I have my family but they gone the bats fight with my family. then the sun came I close my eyes. Then night I open my eyes my family is gone. Then I look everywhere I feel sad I don’t have family. Then the sun came I don’t close my eyes. I burn my eyes I move my body. I burn up my body.”**

While her writing skills are still developing, her theater experience gives this second-grader the information, the motivation and the courage to attempt to write more — and more vividly — than ever before.

Regardless of a child’s grade-level, test scores or English language fluency, active involvement like this can ignite the learning process. The research shows, in fact, a widespread effect.

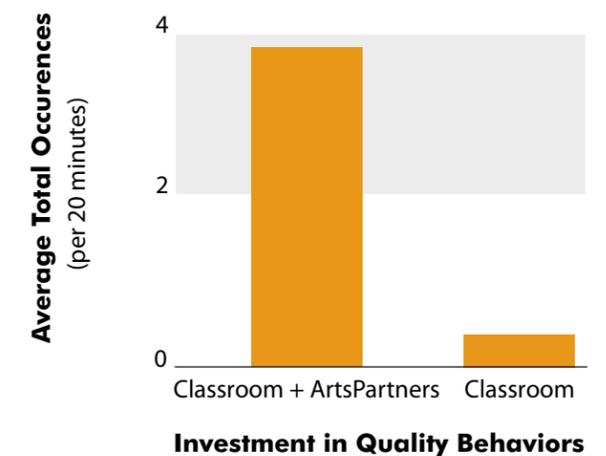


### According to the study, ArtsPartners programs immediately help students become active learners.

When teachers work with an artist, scientist or writer, innovative curricula and strategies draw from creative work and children become active learners — they volunteer to answer questions, contribute to discussions and work hard to review and revise their work.

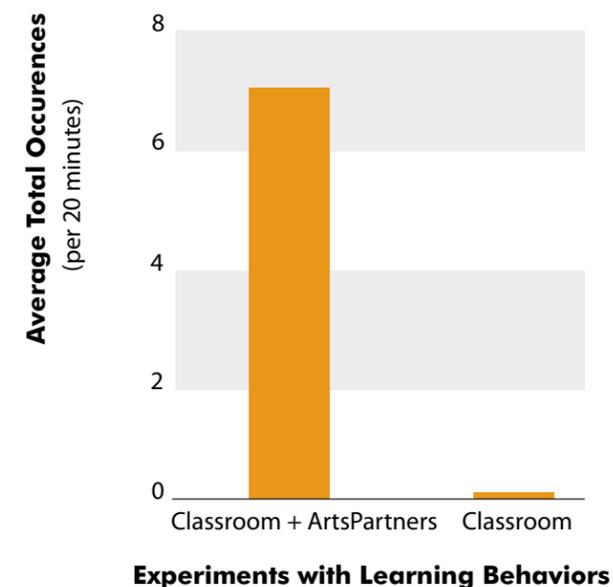
### Students involved in ArtsPartners invest themselves in their work.

That means that they discuss and evaluate it and show it to their classmates, as well as their classroom and ArtsPartners teachers.



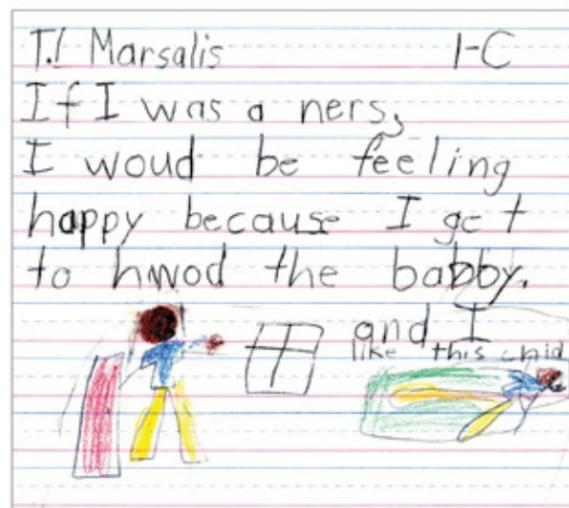
### ArtsPartners students are also eager to experiment with different learning methods.

They explore new possibilities for expressing themselves and actively choose the best results.



Most people would doubt whether a class of first-graders could grasp the complicated works housed in a fine art museum. Those that think this way could not be farther from the truth. With some thoughtful questions and helpful observations from their teacher and a museum guide, children can use their imaginations to enter the worlds that painters invent. These educators urge them to stretch their vocabularies and describe what they are imagining. Without even realizing that they are learning, children expand their communication skills as they mentally connect visual images, verbal descriptions, writing and their own artistic expressions.

## Enriching the learning process.

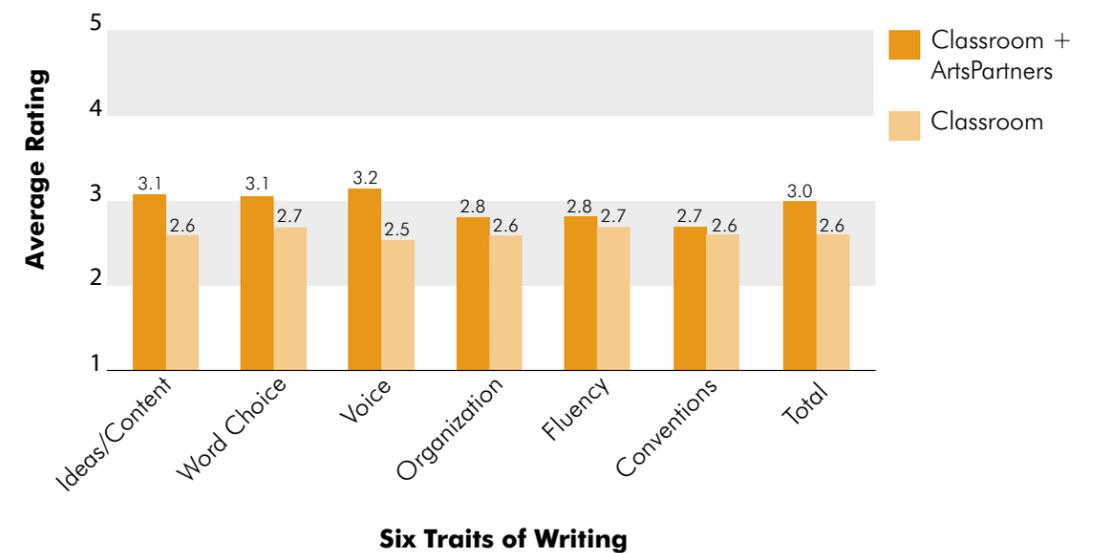


Being playful makes me feel like going to the park. The way I look, being happy makes me feel like I'm all different kind of colors on the inside.

**Before:** This image shows one first-grader's writings before an ArtsPartners unit of study.

**After:** This image shows the same first-grader's writings after an ArtsPartners unit of study that included a trip to the Dallas Museum of Art, a hands-on arts experience in the classroom and teacher-led lessons discussing how art conveys emotion. Notice how much richer the student's expression of ideas and words are.

Similar improvements are obvious when students build on their ArtsPartners experience to express their ideas through language. In their classroom writings, students and teachers often concentrate on the fundamentals — the rules of grammar, conventions (punctuation and capitalization) and organization. But, when students and teachers experience ArtsPartners programs, they learn to express themselves in new ways. They include more new content and ideas; they write using their own unique style or voice, and their word choice is more varied and unusual.



**Research shows that ArtsPartners students, in addition to understanding the rules of grammar, place great emphasis on the power of ideas, word choice and personal expression.**

Students learn these skills thanks to the varied perspectives that come from a collaboration of traditional educators, artists, writers and performers.

Perhaps the most exciting findings from the study show that the ArtsPartners program fuels the learning process not just initially, but even after the program ends. Here, one student comments on how the ArtsPartners program built her enthusiasm and investment year after year.

“... writing songs ... makes me feel good about myself and it reminds me [to] keep on. Telling me that I know who I am and stuff that I can do.”  
 – Student in fourth grade

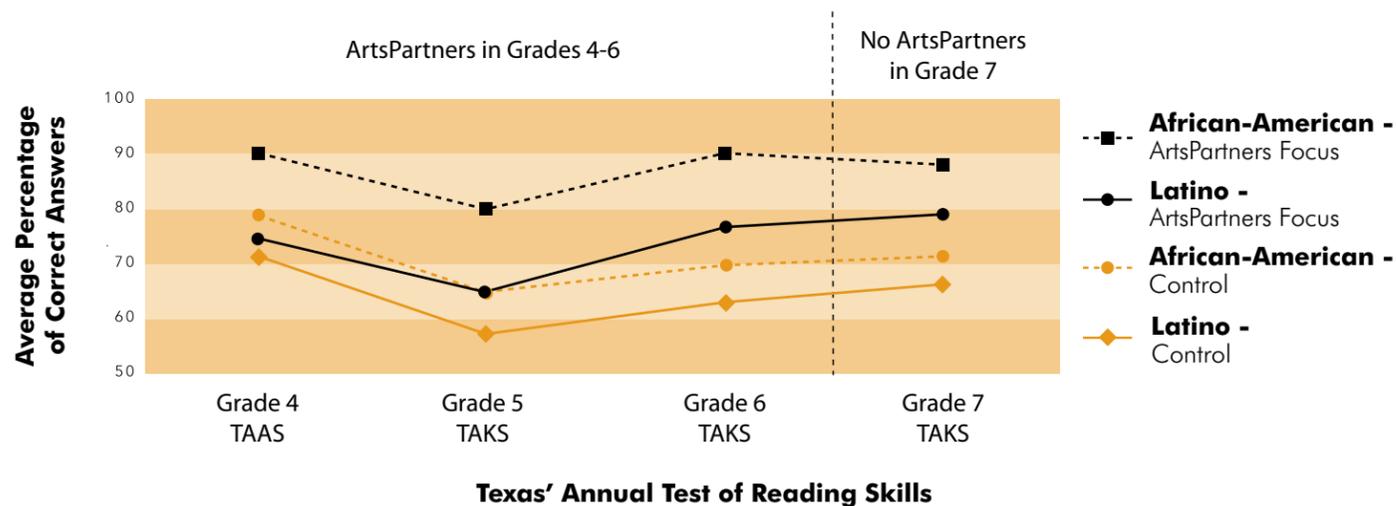
“I was surprised! ... I didn’t know I could write such a good portrait.”  
 – Same student in fifth grade

“I had notes. I had books ... And I was, like, ‘I can do this. I know how to do this ... I can do it.’”  
 – Same student in sixth grade

Serving all 101,000 elementary students and 6,000 elementary educators in the DISD, Dallas ArtsPartners is changing the lives of our children and ultimately brightening the future of our community. As shown in the research conducted by the Dallas Independent School District and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Dallas ArtsPartners is making a difference right now. Across all ethnicities. In schools throughout the district.

In this way, the combination of strong classroom instruction and ArtsPartners programs ensures that throughout Dallas all students learn both the fundamentals and equally important forms of imagination and invention that come from the innovative worlds of the arts, humanities and sciences. This means that Dallas, with the help of ArtsPartners, is becoming a national model of a city where an entire community works to ignite and fuel children’s learning.

## Fueling the learning process.



**African-American and Latino students who participated in ArtsPartners and discussed their work with an interviewer twice per year outperformed their peers on the state standardized reading test during each year of the program.**

But most exciting is the fact that their strong performance continues in seventh grade, even when they are no longer engaged in the ArtsPartners program.

## Igniting, enriching & fueling the learning process.

The Dallas ArtsPartners program is a community collaboration among the DISD, the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs and more than 60 professional arts and cultural organizations. Big Thought serves as the managing partner of the program with responsibilities including curriculum development, professional development and implementation, private sector fundraising, governance and fiscal management.

Big Thought is one of the leading nonprofit learning partnerships in the nation, inspiring, empowering and uniting children and communities through education, arts and culture. Formed in 1987, the Dallas, Texas-based organization offers a diverse array of arts and culture-based performances, workshops, cultural excursions and multi-visit residencies for children and teens, and provides professional development and training to help adults use these programs. Big Thought’s programs reach an average of 200,000 students, teachers and family members each year in schools, libraries, museums, juvenile facilities and community centers. More information on Big Thought can be found at [www.bigthought.org](http://www.bigthought.org).

In 2001, Big Thought formed an unusual and innovative partnership with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR). Among national school reform organizations, AISR has always championed the role of the arts and culture in enriching the lives of all learners. Through its concept of “Local Education Support Networks (LESN’s)” AISR has championed the idea that if a city wants to raise generations of thoughtful, innovative and culturally diverse and aware young people, then every learning institution in that city has to contribute to creating pre-k — 16 pathways for learning — in and outside of school. As a part of its work on LESN’s, AISR staff, led by Dennie Palmer Wolf, designed the evaluation study, not only as research, but as a shared learning experience that involved classroom teachers, principals, the staff of arts and cultural organizations, and students at Dallas area colleges and universities in learning how city-wide partnerships can contribute to the learning and the lives of children in every neighborhood.



Office of Cultural Affairs  
CITY OF DALLAS

