



*Arts Learning in Dallas*

*Executive Summary  
of  
Report on the Parent Survey Research  
for the  
Dallas Arts Learning Initiative*

*A Collaboration  
among*

*Wolf, Keens & Company  
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Big Thought*

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# Dallas Parent Survey

## *Executive Summary*

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### **Background**

A total of 1,347 parents and guardians of school-age children who live in the City of Dallas completed the survey. Overall, results indicate a high level of parent interest in their children's arts education and arts activities. Although the primary purpose of the survey was to pre-recruit parents for the depth interviewing exercise (reported separately), a good deal of information was generated on parents' attitudes about arts learning.

### **Key Themes and Observations**

Key themes and observations from the survey include:

- Overall, the data suggests that parents prioritize arts learning resources in three strata:
  1. in-school and after-school arts programs (prioritized equally, on average), followed by arts integration
  2. programs that help children awaken their artistic interests (subsidized musical instruments, discovery programs that might lead children to the most satisfying arts activities)
  3. community-based arts activities and informational/awareness programs.
- Two-thirds of parents say that their child is “very interested” in doing arts activities, and eight in ten parents believe that their child has artistic talent that s/he has yet to discover. Overall, these results point to a strong belief

among respondents that all children are innately gifted with an artistic voice of some sort.

- Compared to African-American and Hispanic parents, White parents reported higher levels of interest in arts activities (in reference to themselves, not their children), and were more likely to say that arts activities play a major role in family life. They were also more likely to report that their children do various arts activities. The reasons for these disparities are not clear from the survey data, and require further investigation.
- Drawing and painting is the dominant arts activity for the youngest school-age child, by a wide margin, and across ethnic groups, suggesting the critical importance of this (non-verbal) activity for many young children.
- The home and the school, equally, are the most common settings for the youngest child’s arts activities. Results suggest that home-based activities are an essential part of the arts learning system.
- Overall, 32% of parents indicated that their youngest school-age child receives music instruction “at least weekly” and 29% said that the child receives art classes “at least weekly.” The figures for dance and theater instruction were much lower (13% and 5%, respectively). The figures for White parents were significantly higher than those for African-American and Hispanic parents, except for dance.
- Seven in ten African-American parents said that their youngest child had participated in an arts education experience offered by a Dallas area arts organization (such as a field trip), which was slightly higher than the figure for White parents. Results indicate that these programs have a broad reach.
- With respect to barriers preventing their children from doing more or different arts activities, cost and lack of awareness were cited most frequently by a wide margin. On average, the “child’s lack of interest” was the least important barrier. White respondents cited different barriers than African-American and Hispanic respondents:
  - Hispanic parents were most likely to cite lack of awareness as a barrier (47%), while White parents were least likely (36%).
  - White parents were significantly more likely than African-American and Hispanic parents to cite “other commitments prevent me from getting involved” as a barrier.

- White parents were somewhat less likely to cite lack of transportation as a barrier.
- “Disinterested” parents, who report low levels of interest in doing arts activities, are more likely to be satisfied with current levels of arts education in their children’s school, although they are equally likely as other parents to believe that their child has artistic talent. This finding illustrates the “satisfaction conundrum” – parents with low interest levels are more likely to be satisfied with current programs because they are less concerned about what programs their children are not getting.

Generally, respondents to the survey are favorably inclined towards the arts and do not represent the larger population of parents who are less interested in the arts. This may be attributed, in part, to bias from respondent self-selection. Further research is needed on a random cross-section of parents, in order to determine the true range of attitudes about arts learning, especially at the low end of the interest spectrum.

## Implications

- *To be most effective, the design of arts programs in schools and in neighborhood settings should build on activities, interests, and enthusiasms that have been nurtured in home settings where many parents help children explore what is perceived as their natural artistic gifts.*
- *Drawing and painting are activities that most children engage in at an early age and may provide the most effective bridge to a continuing interest in the arts.*
- *Affordability will be an important part of program design.*
- *Getting information to parents about program availability will also be important. Utilizing neighborhood social networks may be more effective than traditional advertising and promotion.*
- *Addressing family transportation challenges will be essential to allow some children to participate.*
- *Finding ways to break family cycles of disinterest in the arts is essential to reach more deeply into communities. This suggests the identification and training of mentors who can be effective not only in school settings but in neighborhoods.*