

## Elementary String Instruction Shows Benefits Beyond Making Music

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Music education may provide more far-reaching benefits to students than the more obvious proficiency of playing an instrument, according to the Center for Arts Education Research (CAER) at Columbia University Teachers College, New York City.

An evaluation of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's (NJSO) Newark Early Strings Program, conducted by the CAER, found that principals and teachers perceived that Newark Early Strings has had a positive effect on participating students' self-confidence, discipline, socialization and ability to focus.

"Our young musicians are benefiting from a remarkable program in which they and their teachers receive direct regular instruction by top professional musicians of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra," said Maria Araujo, Vice President, Education and Community Programs for the NJSO. "Besides teaching them how to play a string instrument and exposing them to the joy and disciplines of classical music, the program is very quickly demonstrating strong positive impact on their behavioral patterns, their academic experience and their feelings of self-worth."

According to NJSO president Lawrence J. Tamburri, results of the Standards Proficiency Assessment subtests in Mathematics and Language Arts were quite impressive, with Newark Early Strings Program participants in the third grade scoring in the 95th percentile in math, and in the 71st percentile for language arts.

"We are delighted to see how well these students have done in standardized tests," said Tamburri. "We are aware that differences in proficiency, however, warrant further study."

Begun in the fall of 2000, Newark Early Strings is a pilot program created as a partnership between the NJSO and five Newark Public Schools, designed to provide sequential, Suzuki-based string instruction to students in the elementary schools, beginning in the second grade. This year, 275 second-, third- and fourth-graders and their music teachers have received violin training from members of the string section of the NJSO and a noted instructor in the Suzuki methodology.

Araujo said, "We are pleased and proud that the Columbia University study has identified the program's significant contribution, bringing the public a better understanding of how music is essential to stimulate our youngsters' potential in all fields."

The CAER report focused on the Early Strings Program's impact on students in terms of vocational interest, academic success and personal and social development; its impact on the schools and the community; and the "fit" of the program with the participating schools.

The findings of the assessment project included:

- Preliminary evidence that teachers and principals believe that Newark Early Strings has had a positive influence on the students' academic work
- Higher-than-average school attendance on days when the NJSO instructor was scheduled to visit
- Increased involvement of Newark Early Strings Program parents in participating schools
- Consensus among participating school principals that Newark Early Strings fits well with their schools, integrating music into the classroom without pulling the children away from studies and classroom activities

-- Statistical analysis of the results showing that Early Strings participants selected "musician" as a vocation more frequently than students not involved with the program

The CAER report concluded that NJSO's Newark Early Strings Program "has encouraged and nurtured the talents of students in the second and third grades. ... The program has been able to establish and strengthen collaborations between the NJSO and in-school music teachers. ... The program has also positively affected school/community relations by increasing parental involvement in the schools."

Educators at Newark Early Strings Program schools also praise the program.

"Music education, specifically playing the violin, has helped our students to read through the decoding of musical symbols, to serve as a team player, to develop the brain, to follow directions, to express their feelings and to understand cause and effect by learning how to coax sound out of a violin string, for example," said Carmen Salgueiro, Vice Principal, Ann Street School.

Thomas Beebe, Ann Street School's music teacher, declared, "The students come away more mature and self-confident from this program."

Elliott Street School music teacher Lawrence Liggins stated, "The difference I see in the children who participate is that they are excited and eager to learn how to play the violin. They look forward to the weekly lessons, going to programs and getting dressed up to perform in programs themselves."

Principal Susan Taylor of Benjamin Franklin School sees an improvement in the social skills of her participating youngsters, and said, "the children listen more attentively and critically" now that they have been exposed to this type of learning and performance. "The program has had a positive impact," she said.

According to Araujo, "I am not surprised that a string performance has a positive effect on students' self-confidence, discipline, socialization and ability to focus. Ours is a rigorous program that not only inspires, but also requires fine motor skills, prolonged concentration and ensemble skills, summing up to a highly complex process. Music training also enhances children's individual learning styles, giving them ways to express their uniqueness and promoting strong inner confidence.

"We are particularly pleased with this study, as it shows a significant influence after only two years of implementation -- a very short period of time in which to turn around the education of a child," Araujo concluded. "We look forward to the ongoing partnership between our Orchestra and the Newark Public Schools, along with the important partnership between music and personal achievement."

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