

SOLVERS, **CONNECTORS,** + CONTRIBUTORS

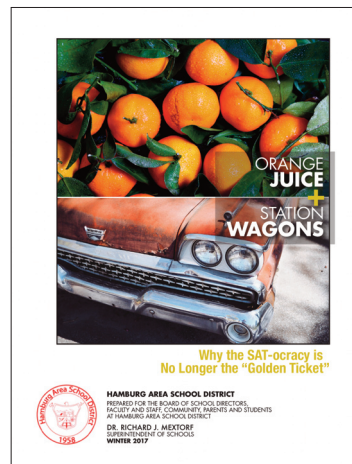
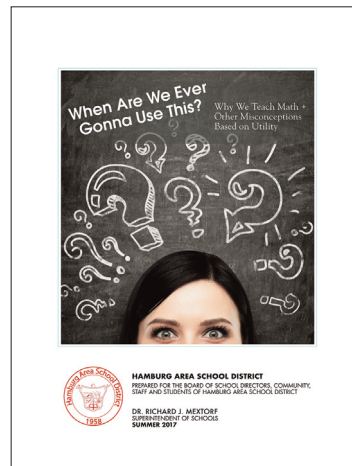
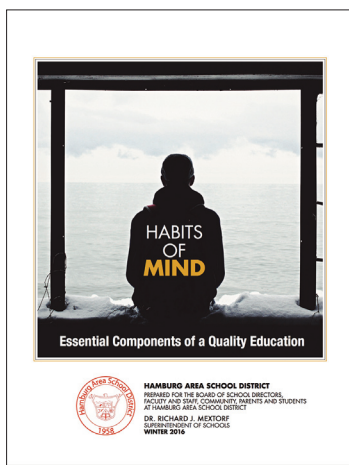
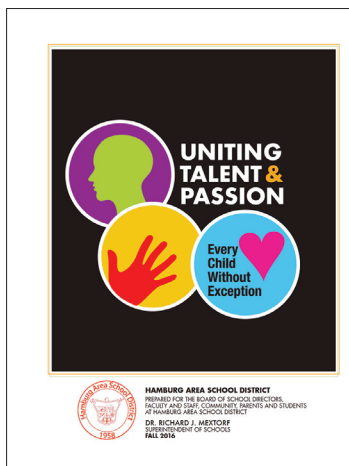
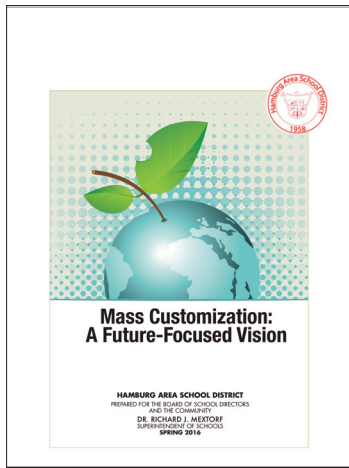
Why
We
Need
the Arts
Now
More
Than
Ever



HAMBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

PREPARED FOR THE BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS,
FACULTY AND STAFF, COMMUNITY, PARENTS AND STUDENTS
AT HAMBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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WINTER 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the new fiscal reality, school leaders must make tough choices regarding the impact of educational programs on student achievement. Educational programs in the arts that teach higher-order thinking (21st Century) skills are often the most difficult to measure. Because of this, it is tempting for school leaders to reduce or eliminate programs that teach kids to become solvers, connectors, and contributors in the real world.

Teaching students to become solvers means teaching them how to add value as thinkers and solution providers. Connectors add value by building relationships, developing empathic connections, and understanding how to design for differentiation. Contributors add value by choosing to do something of significance that makes a difference in the world.

In an age where both blue-collar and white-collar work is becoming increasingly digitized, outsourced, and automated, the arts are uniquely qualified to teach learners to become solvers, connectors, and contributors, helping them to become “untouchable” by adding value in an increasingly commoditized world.

By educating the heads, hearts, and souls of young people, a comprehensive arts education program will provide our kids the tools to add value in work and in life by becoming excellent thinkers, empathic connectors, and passionate contributors in the modern world.

Now, more than ever, our kids need quality arts education.

Richard J. Mextorf, D.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools
Hamburg Area School District

A photograph of various art supplies including pencils, paintbrushes, and a watercolor palette arranged on a rustic wooden surface. The palette is white with numerous small circular wells containing different colored paints. The pencils are of various colors and brands, some with visible text like 'Metoro'. The paintbrushes have different sized bristles and handles.

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INTRODUCTION

In the new age of accountability, tightening budgets, and increased public scrutiny, school leaders must make tough choices. In an environment where every educational program, extra-curricular activity, and club is a “sacred cow” to someone or some group, school leaders must use a stringent set of lenses through which to measure the impact of all educational programs and experiences on learners.

Traditionally, educational programs have been measured by student success on assessments. Along with traditional tests, familiar forms of standardized assessments are the SAT, ACT, and PSSA. While summative assessments such as the PSSA are useful tools to measure student achievement in basic skills, educational programs that teach higher-order thinking (21st Century) skills are often the most difficult to measure. Because their impact is difficult to measure, it is tempting for school leaders to reduce or eliminate programs that teach kids to become solvers, connectors, and contributors in the real world.

Teaching students to become solvers means teaching them how to add value as thinkers. Connectors add value by building relationships and developing empathic connections. Contributors add value by choosing to do something of significance that makes a difference in the world. The common thread among 21st century skills is adding value. In the age of abundance, outsourcing, off-shoring, automation, and digitization, where work is increasingly becoming commoditized, adding value as

solvers, connectors, and contributors is the only way future workers will emerge as what Tom Friedman calls “untouchables,” whose work is not easily outsourced, automated, or digitized.

In this hyper-connected, technology-driven, small, flat world, the arts are, now more than ever, an essential component of a comprehensive educational program. Seth Godin, author of *Linchpin*, writes:

The competitive advantage the marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy, capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities as she makes useful decisions without angst. Flexible in the face of change, resilient in the face of confusion.

Although difficult to measure through traditional assessments, the arts are uniquely qualified to teach learners to become solvers, connectors, and contributors, helping them to become “untouchable” by adding value in an increasingly commoditized world.



SOLVERS

Our son, Brian, took piano lessons when he was little. Part of being “piano parents” was attending the marathon piano recitals presented by several piano teachers. Hosted at the local college, these recitals would feature youngsters performing selections that were developmentally appropriate for their age and skill level.

The age range was from about five to eighteen, with the younger students playing first, and the literature becoming more challenging as the recital progressed. During one particular recital, Brian performed early on. As I read through the program, I noticed Ben, a high school student at the district where I was superintendent, was scheduled to perform last. Ben was one of our outstanding math students. I remember being excited to see him perform.

Ben took the stage with confidence, took a bow, and sat at the piano. He was playing a difficult concerto, and I remember being slightly nervous for him. As he began to play, I realized that I had no need to be nervous for

Ben. His performance was technically flawless, and the subtlety and nuance he demonstrated were the stuff of artistry. As we took our seats following the standing ovation, I remember thinking how great it was that Ben was so proficient at two different things -- math and music.

Over time, I thought more and more about Ben’s performance. As a musician, he had taken a series of abstract signs and symbols, internalized them, interpreted them, and processed them to create a beautiful work of art. In order to be successful as an artist, Ben had to demonstrate mastery at thinking abstractly and conceptually.

For Ben to be successful in higher-level math such as algebra, trigonometry, and calculus, he needs to exercise the exact same mental process. As a mathematician, Ben works with abstract signs and symbols, internalizes them, interprets them, and uses them to solve problems or provide solutions. In fact, I’ll bet some hard-core mathematicians would suggest that high level math is as much about

solve

| sālṽ |
verb [with object]

find an answer to, explanation for, or means of effectively dealing with (a problem or mystery)

solvers

those who take seemingly disparate bits of information, process them, internalize them, interpret them, and use them to provide solutions to problems.

“
Good design is a
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Paola Antonelli |
curator of architecture
and design |
Museum of Modern Art



artistry as it is about the solutions!

To be excellent solvers, learners need to use abstract thoughts and concepts. They need to take seemingly disparate bits of information, process them, internalize them, interpret them, and use them to provide solutions to problems. The best solvers provide solutions that we didn't even know we needed, but now we can't live without. The mobile phone industry is a great example of this, but there are many, many more examples of this throughout history (the printing press comes to mind).

When students study the arts, they are steeped in abstract and conceptual thinking. I'm not saying that the arts should replace math. I am saying that the arts should not be relegated as a frill, to be studied only when the "serious" subjects have been addressed. The arts are serious study, and are just as important as math for the way they help learners develop as abstract and

conceptual thinkers, enabling them to become the solvers of tomorrow.

CONNECTORS

The time had come. I had held off for as long as possible, but the crackling sounds emerging from the one functioning ear bud left no doubt. I needed to purchase new workout headphones.

I am the typical male shopper. I don't want to browse or comparison-shop. I want to go to the store, pick-up what I need and get on with it. I have enough trouble finding where to go in the store; I want the rest of the process to be as simple and stress-free as possible.

When I finally found the headphone section of the audio section of the media section of the local Walmart, a wall of headphones awaited my arrival. I didn't want the cheap ones; I knew from experience that they break easily. I also didn't want the

“Cadillac” models, fearing they might prove to be no more durable than the cheapo models. After eliminating two categories relative to price, I settled on investigating the mid-priced models of workout headphones.

Even after narrowing my search criteria, I had a seemingly endless choice of headphones in my chosen price range. While every model purported the same function, each one had a unique feature or two to distinguish it from its competitors. Reluctantly, I took the time to inspect each model within my price range, choosing the one that was designed to meet my specific workout needs.

The headphone story reinforces the notion that we are living in the age of abundance. Regardless of the product or service, we have seemingly endless choices. They all perform the same basic function, so how do we decide which product to buy? In the age of abundance, we make our choices based on design. When they all do the same thing, we choose the product that appeals to our aesthetic sensibilities. To state it another way, we choose the products with the coolest designs.

John Heskett, author of *Toothpicks and Logos: Design in Everyday Life*, describes design as a combination of utility and significance. Dan Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, argues that, in the age of abundance, utility has become widespread, inexpensive, and relatively easy to achieve (all those headphones), which has increased the value of significance (which ones looked the coolest). Pink argues that design has become crucial for most modern businesses as a means for differentiation and as a way to create new markets.



“ I see us being in the art business. Art, entertainment, and mobile sculptures, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation. ”

Robert Lutz | former vice chairman | General Motors

Design is a whole-minded aptitude. Quality design elicits an emotional response and forms a connection with the consumer. Paola Antonelli, curator of architecture and design at the Museum of Modern Art, describes the power of design in modern life: “Good design is a renaissance attitude that combines technology, cognitive science, human need, and beauty to produce something that the world didn’t know it was missing.”

The best designers think holistically, and best designs emerge from interdisciplinary thought. Great designers see the big picture and provide products that serve a need, but also capture the soul.

Major players in the corporate world understand that quality and price, once the distinguishing factors of product differentiation, are merely the bare essentials in modern business. Norio Ohga, former chairman at Sony has been quoted as saying, “At Sony, we assume that all products of our competitors have basically the same technology, price, performance, and features. Design is the only thing that differentiates one product from another in the marketplace.” Former vice chairman of General Motors, Robert Lutz, stated: “I see us being in the art business. Art, entertainment, and mobile sculptures, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation.” Chris Bangle of BMW says, “We don’t make automobiles, we make moving works of art that express

IMPORTANT SKILLS LEARNED IN A COMPREHENSIVE ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM

| Elements of Design | 3D Art | 2D Art | Music | Dance | Graphic/Digital | Industrial | Drama |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-----------------|------------|-------|
| Space | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Line | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Color | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Shape | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| Texture | X | X | X | | X | X | |
| Flow | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Form | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Consonance/Dissonance | | | X | | X | | X |
| Theme/Variations | | | X | X | | | |
| Tension/Release | | | X | | | | X |
| Point | | X | | | X | X | |
| Movement | | | | X | | | X |
| Pattern | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tone/Shading | X | X | X | | X | | |
| Balance | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Repetition/Contrast | | X | X | X | X | | |
| Dominance | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Unity | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| Timbre | | | X | | | | |
| Symmetry | X | X | X | X | X | X | |

the driver's love of quality." Finally, fashion designer Paul Smith highlights the importance of design: "Design correctly harnessed can enhance life, create jobs, and make people happy – not such a bad thing."

Although there are many types, design is mostly divided into four major categories: industrial, interior, architectural, and graphic. Included among the elements of design, or the designer's tool kit, are the following: space, line, color, shape, texture, flow, form, consonance and dissonance, variations on a theme, tension and release, point, movement, pattern, tone/shading, balance, repetition and contrast, dominance, unity, timbre, and symmetry. If we are to help students learn and develop essential skills in design, we must teach them through a rigorous, comprehensive arts education program in our schools, including two and three-dimensional art, music, dance, graphic arts, industrial arts, and drama.

If our students are to develop as holistic thinkers and connectors with the skills to add aesthetic significance in a world where utility is becoming commonplace, then we need the arts now more than ever.

CONTRIBUTORS

Television has changed. Long gone are the days of the Brady Bunch and the Waltons, having been replaced by reality shows, lie detector laden "talk" shows, and animated situation comedies. Reality TV is the least common denominator, feeding our voyeuristic cravings and representing the worst of humanity. Trashy talk shows are incubators for a cesspool of deviance, and animated sitcoms continually lower the bar of socially acceptable behavior. Hidden in the

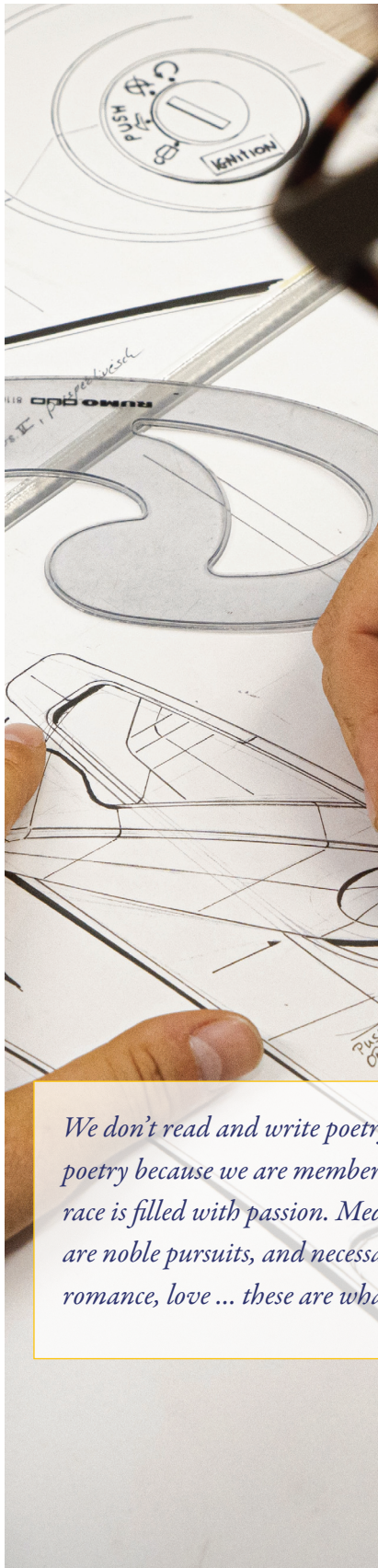


media trash heap are programs featuring people longing to be recognized for their creativity, passion and desire for significance.

These programs are familiar to us. *Dancing with the Stars*, *America's Got Talent*, *The Sing-Off*, *Iron Chef*, and *Cupcake Wars* are all wildly popular shows on television today. Although prize money is attached to the proceedings, the common thread among these shows is the participants' quest for significance as artists. As viewers, the performers on these programs move us. We are inspired by their passion, determination, and creativity. The best performers create a moment in time where we are fully present and connected viscerally, all of our senses alive; we are having an aesthetic experience.

“
Arts education is a study of aesthetics, and aesthetics is a study of how the elements of art forms are combined to create beauty and significance.”

r. mextorf



As human beings, we long for significance. Most of us will not become famous artists, musicians, dancers, actors, authors, photographers, or designers, yet we strive to create things of significance to leave our mark on the world. Evidence of this exists all around us. Nurturing a flower garden, creating the perfect table setting, decorating for the holidays, quilting, decorating cakes and cookies, singing in a choir, taking a dance class, and participating in a book club are just a few examples of how normal, everyday people pursue the aesthetic experience.

Arts education is a study of aesthetics, and aesthetics is a study of how the elements of art forms are combined to create beauty and significance. The arts are our attempt as human beings to build our place in the world through contributions of beauty and significance. The arts are part of the human condition -- part of what it means to be human.

In the film, *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams' character describes why his students should study poetry. The words ring true when describing why we need to study the arts:

We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race; and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits, and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love ... these are what we stay alive for.

In summary, the arts are a disciplined study of what it means to be human. And now, more than ever, we need more humanity in the world. The arts help us discover our passions, better understand ourselves, and give

us our best chance to live lives of significance and meaning. In the modern world, we need the arts now, more than ever.

CONCLUSION

The world is changing at a rate that is unmatched in human history. While basic skills continue to be essential, for our students to become "untouchables" in the 21st century, they must become solvers, connectors and contributors. Godin goes on to suggest: "What we want, what we need, what we must have are indispensable human beings. We need original thinkers, provocateurs, and people who care." A quality arts education program is uniquely qualified to prepare students to thrive in the 21st century.

Perhaps author C.M. Rubin said it best:

If you have been through the complex, interactive, dedicated, soul searching process that comes from playing a role in a dance, musical or theatrical production; if you have embraced the discipline, resourcefulness, inventiveness, passion and persistence it takes to create an original manuscript or work of art – then you will know what it means to have used all of your brain and you will be better prepared to compete in the global economy.

By educating the heads, hearts, and souls of young people, a comprehensive arts education program will provide our kids the tools to add value in work and in life by becoming excellent thinkers, empathic connectors, and passionate contributors in the modern world.

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This is the sixth in a series of essays designed to provide a framework for dialogue as, together, we craft the future of public education in Hamburg. Each essay is designed to highlight a particular aspect of education, and discuss how we can move forward to provide a future-focused, personalized learning plan for **every child, without exception**. We are fully committed to helping our kids become the best version of themselves, so that they may make their contributions to the world and live lives of significance and meaning.

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