

# Opening Minds Through The Arts Abstract



OPENING MINDS  
THROUGH THE  
ARTS

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*Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) is an urban school district covering 228 square miles with 108 schools serving approximately 60,000 students, 72% of whom are ethnic minority and 66% of whom qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. This project is collaboration between the Tucson Unified School District, University of Arizona School of Music and Dance (SOMAD), Tucson Symphony Orchestra, Arizona Opera Company, and UApresents.*

The Opening Minds through the Arts (OMA) Project was developed around children's neurological development and brain-based learning theories. The goal of OMA is to improve student achievement by actively supporting and positively engaging students through an interdisciplinary curriculum that directly connects the arts to academic subject matter.

During school year 2000-01 three schools began to implement the structure of OMA at grades K, 3 and 4. Local professional artists teamed with classroom teachers to develop weekly lesson plans (two times a week) based on the core curriculum/Arizona State Standards in language arts and mathematics. Music specialists taught all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to read music and play the recorder. Every fourth grade student learned to play the violin.

The federal grant *Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination* secured for years 2001-04 allowed TUSD to expand OMA to include a fourth school and to add more grade levels (1-5) at existing schools. At this time, WestEd became the independent evaluator for OMA, utilizing an adapted form of the GALEF classroom teacher protocol instrument. For purposes of evaluation, Accountability and Research Department of TUSD identified three control schools that were matched to the demographic profiles of the research schools.

As a result of OMA's success, thirty-seven additional elementary and middle schools have requested the arts infused model. At this time all of these schools have implemented at least one grade level of the OMA curriculum and plan to add other grade levels incrementally. The impact this model has had district wide is shown in all WestEd research. Arts education in TUSD has had its place assured because of OMA's data-driven success.

Currently OMA impacts 17,000 students in TUSD. Staff development for 650 teachers and 37 principals include

- ❖ Monthly meetings with OMA teachers and music specialists
- ❖ Grade level meetings with teachers, artists, administrators and music specialists
- ❖ Fine Arts Summer Institute for Teachers (May 29 – June 2 & July 30- August 3)

- ❖ Teaching Artist Summer Institute (May 29 – June 2 & July 30 – August 3 )
- ❖ Fine Arts Youth Academy for Students (June 4 - 29)

In an effort to identify methods for addressing the issue of sustainability the following tools are being utilized

- ❖ Quarterly newsletters circulated to 2,100 supporters and participants
- ❖ Website featuring the OMA Foundation, OMA Program and OMA Professional Development information
- ❖ DVDs depicting the OMA experience and its impact on children in grades K, 1, 2, 4 and 6
- ❖ Marketing Plan for Arizona’s Tax Credit program

In November 2002, the first evaluation report from WestEd highlighted results that were described as measurably significant by the evaluation team.

In November 2003, the second report produced even stronger findings. Once again, OMA students consistently out scored the comparison students. Even more notable was the continued progress in closing the “achievement gap” for Hispanic students in particular. Graphs of Stanford 9 scores are attached.

Findings include:

- ❖ Reading scores of first grade students in OMA schools were significantly higher than the reading scores of students in comparison schools.
- ❖ Hispanic kindergarten students in the OMA project made substantial positive gains in writing.
- ❖ During its first year, the OMA project made measurable progress in helping students who are at academic risk to succeed.
- ❖ CCSA (Core Curriculum Standards Assessment – measures how well students have learned the curriculum at a specific grade level, 50% is considered average)

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Writing</u>	<u>Math</u>
❖ OMA Schools (gr. 1)	82%	90%	60%
❖ Control Schools	49%	83%	48%
❖ WestEd year 2 findings are robust and significant. In all three tested areas			
❖ (Reading, mathematics, and language arts) on the Stanford 9 Achievement Test,			
❖ OMA students dramatically outperformed comparison school students.			

A second federal grant *Professional Development for Arts Educators* secured for years 2005-2008 allows OMA to expand professional development not only in the summer, but throughout the year. The many OMA groups serviced by this grant include: Principals, Instructional Coaches, Arts Integration Specialists, OMA Artists, Classroom Teachers and prospective OMA Artists. During this 3-year period, the OMA Professional Development Writing Team will produce materials enabling the OMA Program to be replicated in other school districts.

In September 2006, the OMA Program was selected, from a pool of 121 candidates, as one of twelve programs to participate in the Harvard Project Zero research study entitled *Qualities of Quality: Excellence in Arts Education and How to Achieve It*. The site visit by the Harvard Research Team was conducted on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. At the conclusion of this study a report (of approximately 100 pages) will be produced in December 2007.