

## **University of Arkansas Researchers Find Social-Emotional and Academic Benefits from K-12 Arts Field Trips**

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – Researchers from the [University of Arkansas' National Endowment for the Arts Research Lab](#) have released two working papers that find students who attend multiple arts field trips have higher levels of social-emotional skills, stronger school engagement, and higher standardized test scores.

Dr. Jay P. Greene is a Distinguished Professor and head of the Department of Education Reform in the College of Education and Health Professions, and is the director of the UofA NEA Research Lab.

“Most education research focuses on math and reading outcomes or educational attainment because those are the measures that the state collects and are readily available to us. Less is known about how students are doing in other subjects and whether their progress in those areas has important benefits for them and society,” Dr. Greene wrote last year in a [Brown Center Chalkboard article](#).

Greene and his research team collaborated with The Woodruff Arts Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and a large, local public school district for this longitudinal experiment focusing on the social-emotional and academic impacts of arts-related field trips on disadvantaged students. The Woodruff Arts Center houses The Alliance Theatre, Atlanta Symphony, and High Art Museum on one campus, making it an ideal partner for this ambitious project.

Researchers randomly assigned fourth and fifth grade students to receive three field trips to each of Woodruff's venues in a single year. Some students received three additional field trips in the second year, for a total of six. A control group of students within the same schools and in adjacent grades did not receive the treatment arts field trips.

In a first for arts field trip research, the authors were able to connect student survey responses with student administrative data like attendance, disciplinary infractions, GPA, and standardized test scores. This information provided a broad, long-term perspective on the effects of arts-focused field trips for students.

Students who were randomly selected to attend the field trips showed significantly higher levels of social-perspective taking, and higher levels of tolerance primarily through the survey item “I think people can have different opinions about the same thing.” Researchers also found that not only did female students who attended the field trips become more conscientiousness, those who attended six field trips in two years showed even higher levels of conscientiousness, showing a compounded effect.

“Because social-emotional learning is currently such an important topic in education discussions, this evidence of important gains in social-emotional skill acquisition is particularly relevant and encouraging,” said Angela Watson, lead author on one of the working papers and

a Distinguished Doctoral Fellow at the University of Arkansas. “Equally exciting are the study results on academic outcomes.”

The treatment group also showed positive academic gains and more interest in school overall. Students who attended multiple arts-related field trips had higher standardized test scores in math and English Language Arts than students in the control group.

“Additionally, there is some evidence that these effects persist when students receive two years of treatment and even one year following treatment,” she added. “We also found that students in the treatment group have more positive school engagement. They are less likely to agree that ‘school is boring’, and they have fewer disciplinary infractions in middle school than their control group peers.”

“With the ever-present focus on increasing standardized test scores and strengthening student engagement, schools should consider the importance of field trips and arts experiences in a well-rounded education.”

Greene and his research team are finishing data collection for year three of the Woodruff study, which will add a third cohort of elementary students’ survey and academic data. They will also continue to collect student administrative data from all three cohorts through middle school, high school and beyond.

[\*Altered Attitudes and Actions: Social-Emotional Effects of Multiple Arts Field Trips\*](#) and [\*Does Art Make You Smart? A Longitudinal Experiment of the Effects of Multiple Arts-Focused Field Trips\*](#) are both available for download now on SSRN.

**About the University of Arkansas NEA Research Lab:** The University of Arkansas NEA Research Lab is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts Research Labs program. This lab, located in the [Department of Education Reform](#) at the University of Arkansas, aims to study the potential non-cognitive and emotional benefits of activities related to cultural consumption and arts related educational field trips on elementary, middle, and high school students.

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