



Educational Arts Team

Transforming Children's Hearts & Minds through the Arts



Theater Strategies

**A US Department Of Education AEMDD Project
To Improve Teaching Methods and Increase Student Learning
Through the Infusion of Theater Arts Standards
with Language Arts and Literature**

2008-2011

Educational Arts Team

Mission

Through the power of the arts the Educational Arts Team provides young people with opportunities to transform their hearts and minds, realize academic success, increase self-worth, and create a vision of a larger world in which to achieve their goals and discover their individuality.

We believe that the imagination is a positive force which can change a young person's world.

District-Wide Projects

The Educational Arts Team has been providing arts integration experiences for young people since 1974. During the past 12 years we have been able to measure their effectiveness through a series of independently evaluated projects that have shown significant results for students on NJ Standardized Language Arts and Mathematics assessments, as well as on pro-cognitive and pro-social tests. This report includes the details and results of our latest project conducted with sixth and seventh grade Jersey City Public School students: Theater Strategies.

To view reports on other projects we have done, please visit www.educationalartsteam.org or call 201-432-1912 for more information.



Theater Strategies Project Overview

Project Summary

From 2008 to 2011, the Educational Arts Team (EAT) in partnership with the Jersey City Public Schools (JCPS) Department of Visual and Performing Arts carried out a three-year United States Department of Education Arts-in-Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant (USDOE AEMDD) to improve student literacy and teacher practice.

During years one and two of the three-year project, 28 sixth and seventh grade classes from 4 schools (MS#7, PS#11, PS#12, and PS #23) received 24 lessons focused on three core novels used in the language arts program throughout the district. Their 16 teachers received 12 hours of Professional Development training each year which demonstrated ways to integrate theater strategies into the classroom curriculum. 28 sixth and seventh grade classes at four other schools (MS#4, PS #24, PS#28, and PS #34) acted as control.

During year three, the project shared the strategies and lesson plans with all 109 sixth and seventh grade teachers in the JCPS through professional development and provided classroom demonstrations.

Products

The theater arts strategies and lesson plans developed and implemented during the project resulted in an applied lessons and integrated theater arts techniques handbook, named *Bringing Literature to Life* & a demonstration DVD. All 109 teachers who participated in the year three professional development workshops received a copy. The handbook was also disseminated at statewide and national conferences.

Additionally, two doctoral dissertations have been developed around the project.

Dissemination

The Team has presented the lessons and evaluation findings at American Alliance for Theater and Education conferences: the first, in San Francisco, California on August 8, 2010, and the second in Chicago, Illinois on July 28, 2011.

Other presentations have included: The US Department Education Policy Briefing held in April of 2011, The International Arts Educators Conference 2007; American Education Research Association 2008 and 2011; American Evaluation Association 2010; The Arts & Education Forum: Arts @ the Core of 21st Century Learning Southeast Center for Education in the Arts at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga May 14, 2010; the Ohio State University for a graduate class of education students studying the uses of drama in literacy from July 29 to August 1, 2008; for a group of Columbus Ohio elementary, middle and high school teachers May 14, September 28, and December 7, 2011; Theater Pedagogy: Teaching the Art Form at New York University on April 26, 2009; Art Educators of New Jersey on October 6, 2009; Indiana State University at Bloomington, Indiana on April 16, 2010; The New Jersey Education Association on November 6, 2008, November 5, 2009 and November 10, 2011.

Journal Articles

Two journal articles have also been published about the research findings and are available at www.educationalartsteam.org:

Elaine M. Walker, Lauren Bosworth McFadden, Martin Finkelstein and Carmine Tabone. Contribution of Drama-Based Strategies. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 25: 2-15, 2011. American Alliance for Theatre and Education. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

Elaine M. Walker, Carmine Tabone and Gustave Weltsek. When Achievement Data Meet Drama and Arts Integration. *Language Arts*, V. 88, No. 5, May 2011. National Council of Teachers of English.

NJASK TEST SCORES IN YEAR 1 CLASSROOMS

Student Performance on the Language Arts Portion of NJASK

During year one teaching artists developed and implemented the classroom lesson plans in collaboration with the language arts teachers and provided in class instruction. During the first year of the project, there was a significant increase in proficiency on the language arts portion of the 6th and 7th grade NJASK test.

At the end of year one, the percentage of sixth and seventh graders in the control group who passed the language arts portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge was 43.1%, while the percentage of treatment students scoring proficient was 56.4%. This 13.3% difference in passing rate is statistically significant.

On average, almost six out of every ten students from the most impoverished backgrounds in the school district, who were in the Theater Strategies project, were likely to pass the language arts assessment; compared to only four out of every ten students in the control schools with similar backgrounds.

Overall, the passing rate for low socioeconomic status students in the project was 55%, compared to approximately 43% for students in the control group.

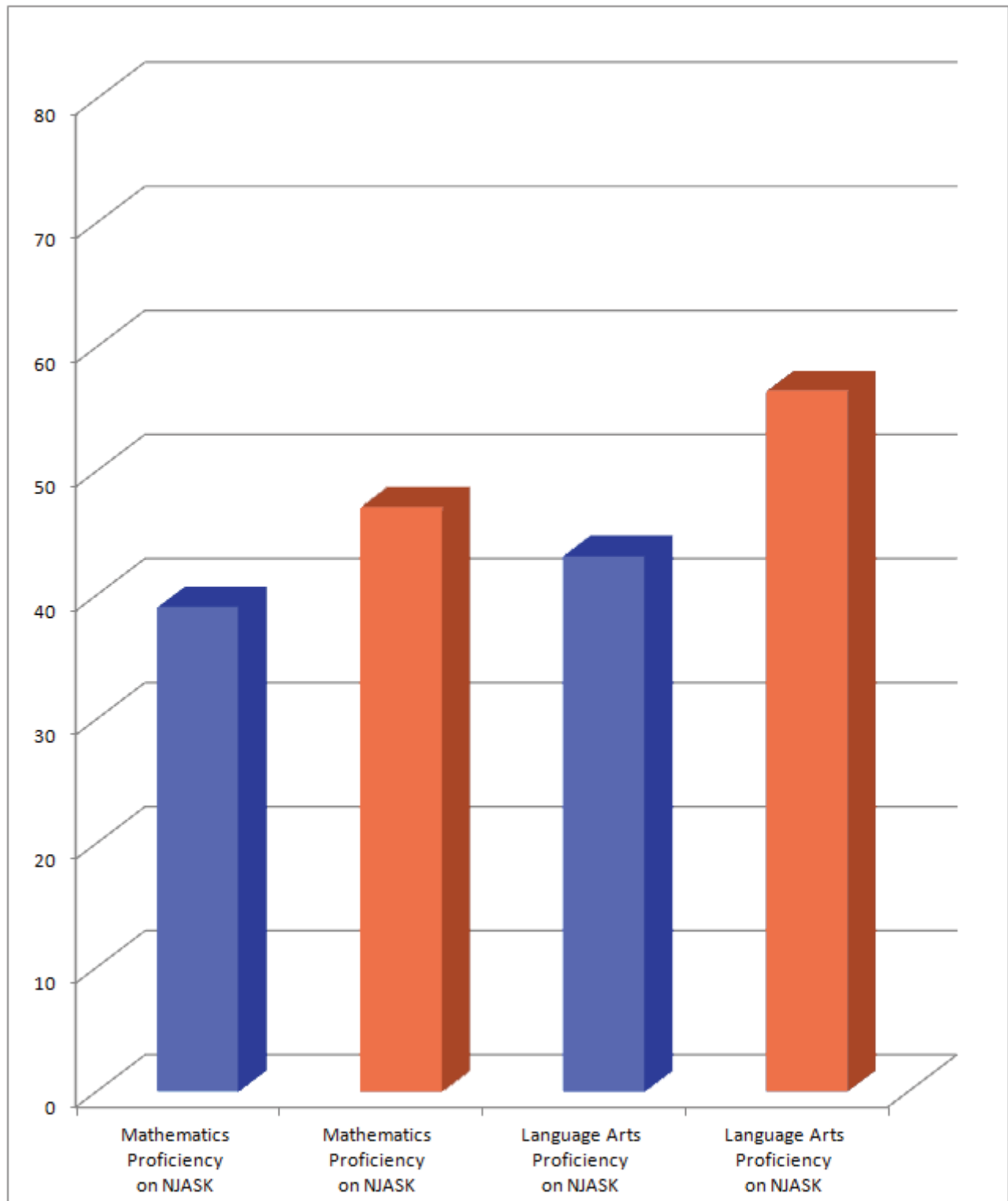
Student Performance on the Mathematics Portion of NJASK

In Mathematics, treatment students in the Theater Strategies project were also more likely to pass the NJASK state assessment than students in the control group. For example, only 39% of all students in the control group passed the state assessment in mathematics compared to 47% of all students in the Theater Strategies project. Also, more of the Theater Strategies students were likely to score in the advanced proficiency band in mathematics, compared to the students in the control group.



Student Achievement on Standardized Tests FOR STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM FOR 1 YEAR

Control Group vs. **Treatment Group**



NJASK TEST SCORES IN YEAR 2 CLASSROOMS

At the end of the second year of the project, the percentage of sixth and seventh grade students in the control group who passed the language arts portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge was 47.8%. The passing rate for Treatment students was approximately 50%.

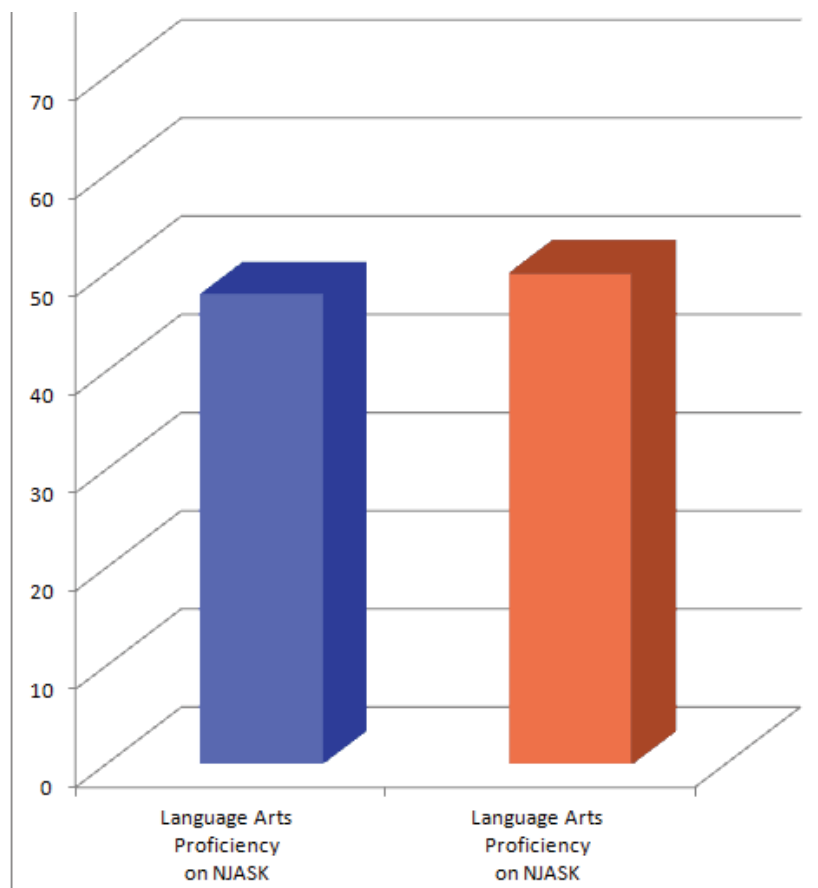
While this 2% difference does not immediately seem significant, when the data is disaggregated by skill level, we see that there are significant differences between the students in the Theatre Strategies project and students in the control group. In overall writing scores and in scores for persuasive writing, students in the Theater Strategies project received higher scores than students in the control group.

During year two the Educational Arts Team teaching artists coached the language arts teachers who provided the in-class instruction for the arts integration lesson plans.

In mathematics, the students in the project exceeded the performance of the control group by 13%. It should be noted that the state assessment for mathematics places a strong emphasis on students' ability to explain in writing how they arrive at their solutions to a math problem. We can infer that some transference of skills from the Theater Strategies project in language arts to mathematics is occurring.

Two other analyses that were pursued at the end of the second year of the project involved examining the achievement data for students who were in the Theatre Strategies project as sixth and seventh graders; and the achievement data for students who are currently eight graders but were in the project as seventh graders.

Control Group vs. Treatment Group



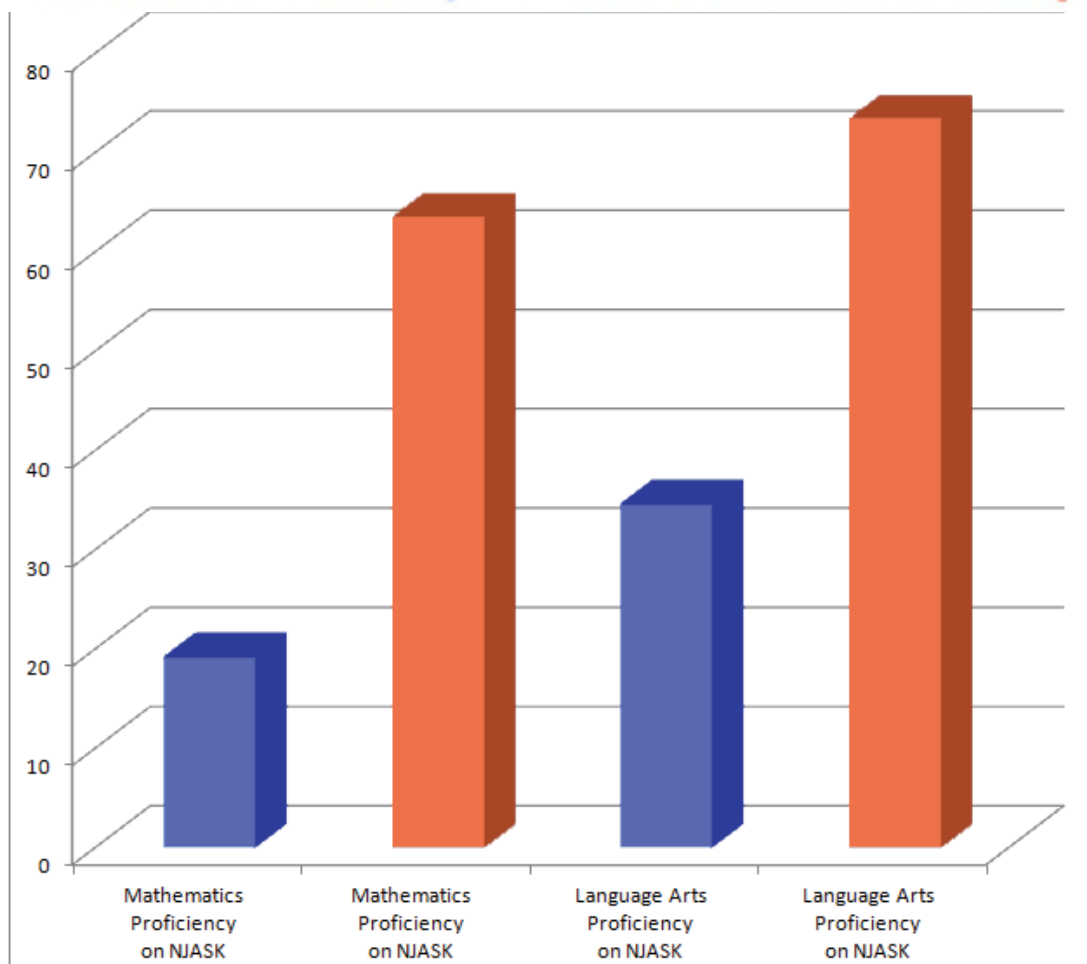
Students in the Program for Two Years

These analyses allowed the researchers to answer two questions. First, is dosage related to achievement - that is, are we likely to see stronger outcomes for students in the program for two as opposed to one year? The second question that we are able to raise centers on the sustaining effects of the project. In other words, what happens to the learning gains of students once they are no longer in the project?

For both the treatment and control groups, we were able to identify a small subgroup of seventh grade students whose status was unchanged for two years - that is they were either in the Theater Strategies Project as sixth and seventh graders (30 students); or in the control group as sixth and seventh graders (26 students). We used the theatre arts students who were in the project as sixth and seventh graders as our reference group, and compared the performances for students who were in the project as seventh graders for the first time, as well as the control students who were in the control group for two years against their performance.

For students who were in the Theatre Strategies program for two consecutive years, 73.3% passed the state's language arts assessment, compared to 34.6% of students in the control group. When we compared the performance of seventh grade students who were in the Theatre Strategies project for the first time in 2010, 47.8% passed the state assessment. In mathematics, 63.4% of students in the project for two years passed the state examinations, compared to 19.2% of students in the control group. While the focus of the workshops was on literacy, many of the strategies required students to use higher order thinking skills, such as analysis and inference which may explain the difference in math scores between treatment and control students.

Control Group vs. Treatment Group



NJASK TEST SCORES IN YEAR 3 CLASSROOMS

During year three the treatment teachers taught the integration lessons to their classes with minimum support from the teaching artists.

At the end of Year 3, approximately, 48% of the students in the Theatre Strategies Project passed the state assessment in language arts compared to 42% of the students in the control group. Disaggregation of these results by grade level revealed that in the sixth grade, 51% of the treatment students were proficient in language arts on the state assessment, compared to 46% of students in the control group.

For the seventh grade, 46% of the treatment students were proficient in contrast to just 37% of students in the control group. Students in the Theatre Strategies project received significantly higher scores for overall writing; reading, interpreting, analyzing and critiquing text; and the first writing task. In mathematics, the students in the project exceeded the performance of the control group by 17%. Looking at the performance by grade level, we found that while 66% of sixth graders in the project were proficient in mathematics only 53% of the control group students were.

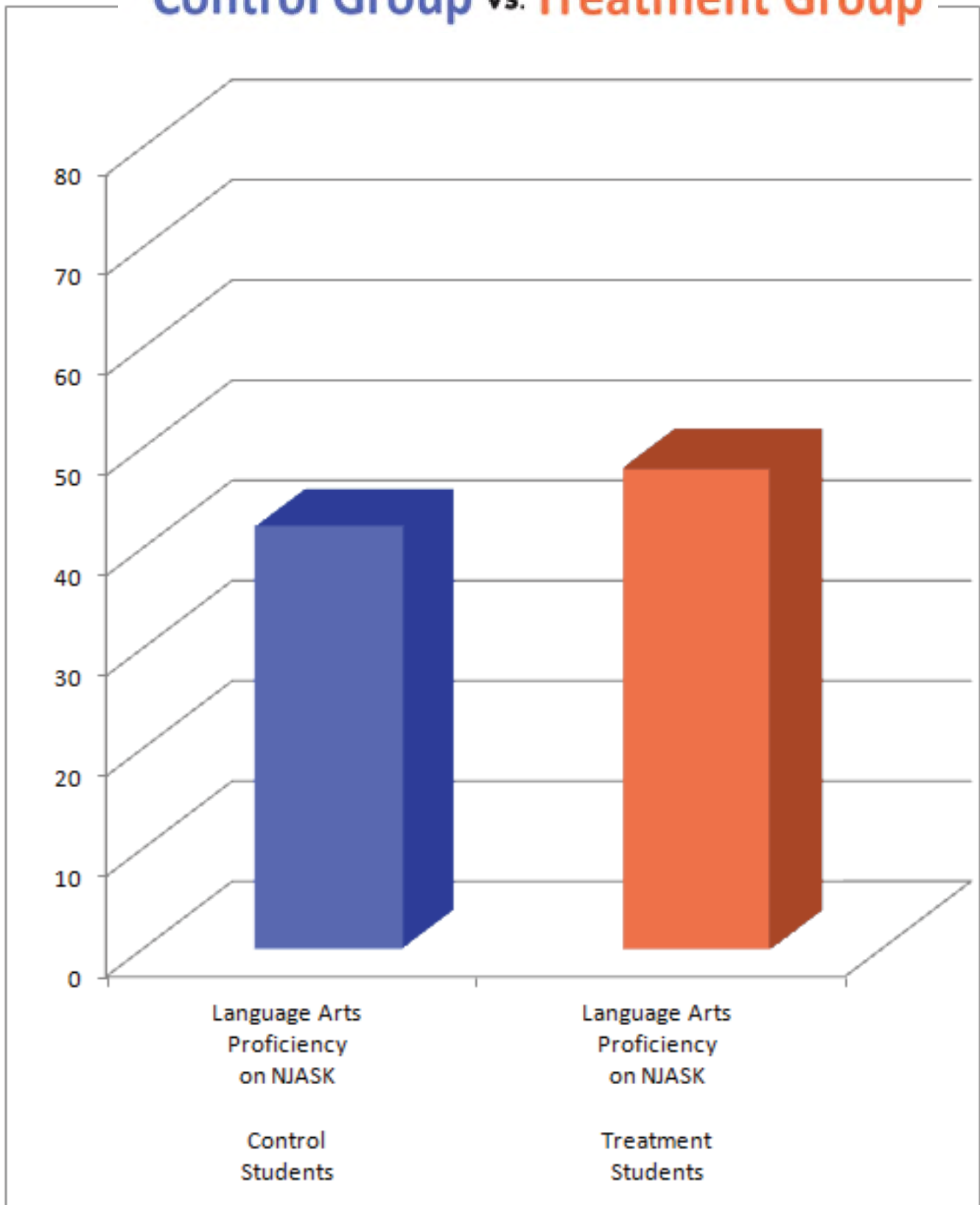
In the seventh grade, the difference was even greater. Approximately, 56% of students in the project passed the state assessment in mathematics compared to 32% of students in the control group, a 24% difference in passing rate.

Significant difference between both groups of pupils were found on all the math skill clusters (numerical operation; geometry; patterns and algebra; data analysis; and problem solving). We can infer that some transference of skills from the theatre immersion project in language arts to mathematics is occurring.



Student Proficiency on NJASK Language Arts Tests During Year 3

Control Group vs. Treatment Group



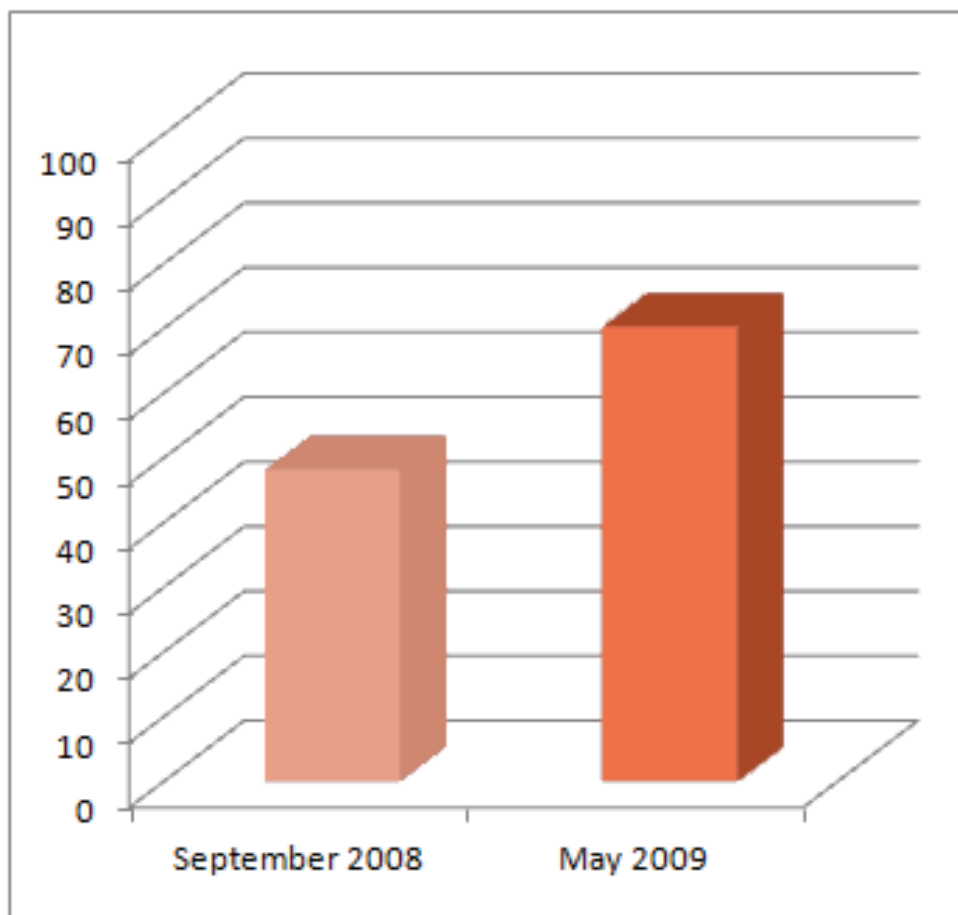
Pro-Cognitive and Pro-Social Growth of Students

In both September 2008 and May 2009 the Theatre Strategies teachers were asked to evaluate their students on a number of indicators that measured their pro-cognitive and pro-social behaviors. These indicators were as follows:

- * The ability to work independently
- * Effective working in groups
- * Demonstration of motivation
- * Remaining on task
- * The completion of homework in a satisfactory manner
- * Accomplishing more than what was expected
- * Demonstration of appropriate classroom behaviors
- * Completing in-class tasks in a satisfactory manner

In September, only 48% of the Theater Strategies teachers indicated that 50% or more of their students demonstrated positive pro-social and pro-cognitive behaviors. Thinking that students' behavior would improve during their language arts class when the use of theatre strategies are imbedded in to the curriculum, we projected that we would see an improvement of about 10% in the number of teachers in the spring who believe that at least half of the students that they teach exhibit positive pro-social and pro-cognitive behaviors. In actuality, there was a 22% increase, bringing the percent of treatment teachers who believed that more than half of the students demonstrated behaviors that were supportive of their learning to 70%.

CHANGE IN TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES
Percentage of Treatment teachers reporting that 50% or more of their students demonstrated positive pro-social and pro-cognitive behavior during their Language Arts Lessons



Sustainability for Eighth Grade Students

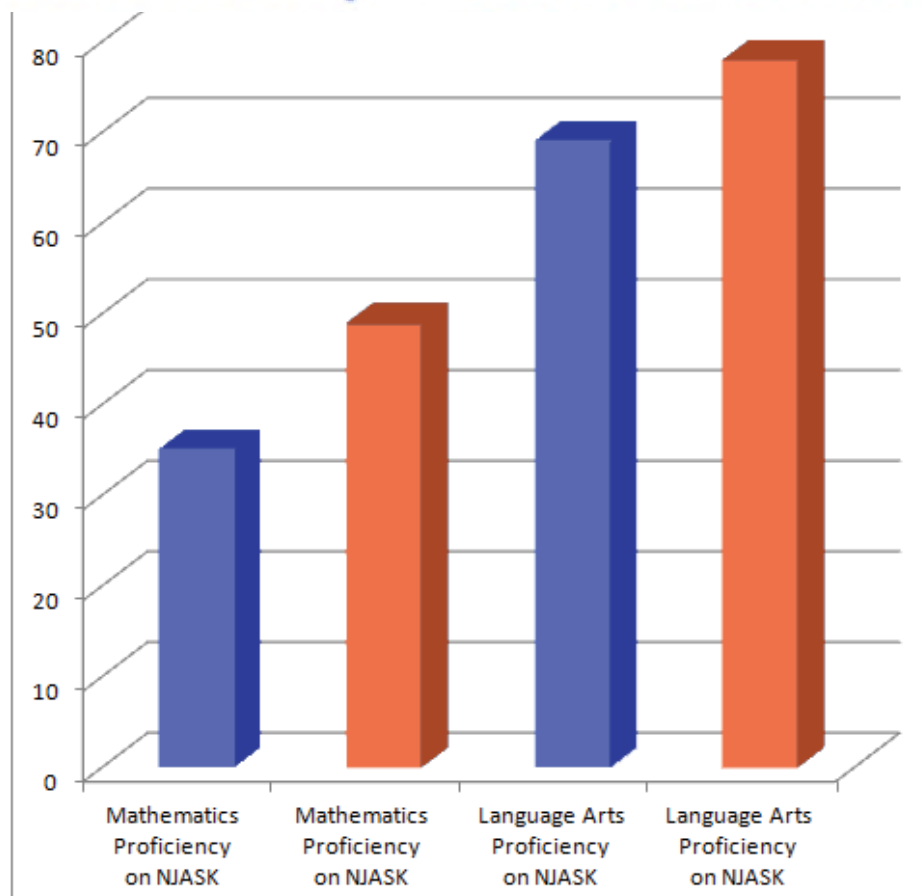
During the project, independent researchers from Seton Hall were able to track students who were in the project during year 1 as seventh graders into the eighth grade. They found that 78% of eighth graders, whose language arts instruction as seventh graders included the use of theatre strategies, to be proficient in language arts on the eighth grade assessment, compared to 69% of students receiving traditional classroom instruction.

In Mathematics, 49% of students who were part of the Theater Strategies project as seventh graders passed the state assessment; while the percentage of students who were not in the project who passed the math assessment was 35%.

The 2010 state results granted us an opportunity to analyze where the theatre arts strategies project made the greatest difference to students' language arts skills once they were no longer in the program. For this analysis, we looked at how well students performed in reading and writing. We found no significant differences between students in reading but significant differences in overall writing scores and the scores received on two types of writing prompts - persuasive and speculative. Former Theater Strategies students significantly outperformed their peers in persuasive and speculative writing on the grade 8 state assessments.

These students also continued to have fewer absences as eighth graders than their counterparts did. Eighth grade students who were in the Theater Strategies project during the seventh grade were likely to be absent 8.35 days, compared to 9.71 days for students who were not in the project when they were seventh graders. Conjoining these results with our findings on significant differences in academic outcomes leads us to conclude that students, even when they are no longer exposed to an arts integration instructional setting, are able to sustain earlier derived benefits. Thus, the benefits of arts integration are both immediate and sustaining.

Control Group vs. Treatment Group



Teacher Feedback

The students were extremely engaged in the story and activities, all of which improved their understanding of the story. The program will help our students in many ways for years to come. The students loved all the activities, and were actively engaged in learning.

- Mr. Hogan, Teacher at MS#7

This student has “F’s” in all major subject areas but you would not know it. She was so happy and did so well. She participated and felt successful.

- Ms. Trezza, Teacher PS#5

(The student) showed that she understood the novel and was able to connect character traits to the characters and scene and was able to support it. Usually she is very quiet and unresponsive.

- Mr. Black, Teacher at PS#23

Students were very involved and enthusiastic about the activities. I was impressed because there was a student who asked, “Do I have to do this?” during the moving picture activity and her tableau ended up being one of the best. I saw high achievers participating even though they were out of their comfort zones and low achievers actively participating and taking on a more powerful role in the class.

- Ms. Piparo, Teacher at MS#7

Students were able to connect mood into the setting and used descriptive words to describe the scene. It is always a challenge to keep them interested in writing and this process helps.

- Ms. Ochojski, Teacher at MS#7



Student Feedback

The workshop made it so I am less shy and can participate more in classroom activities- Chris G.

Because of the workshop, we were able to see the emotional journey of the characters – Matthew C.

The workshop gave me a chance to go beyond the storyline – Frances M.

The workshop helped me feel as if I were part of the story – Joelle E.

I understand things now that I didn't before just reading the story – April Z.



We would like to thank the following partners for their support with the Theater Strategies project:

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For a full report on any of our other projects or to order a copy of the Bringing Literature to Life handbook please visit our website at www.educationalartsteam.org

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