

Grading NJ Schools for the Arts

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When we're getting our kids ready for the school in the morning, a successful departure is part art, part science. The same mix should be in the education they're getting from September to June (with a little readin' and 'rithmetic thrown in), and a recent study conducted for The Star-Ledger's "Inside Jersey" magazine crunched the numbers to see how much arts education was in the mix in high schools across the state, and how that impacted the overall quality of the education for our little Jerseyans.

The annual "Top Performing Public Schools" survey tracks each public high school in the state by a variety of criteria, and this year added an Arts Percent column that tracked what percentage of students participate in some form of arts education; that result was factored into each school's total score. (Here's how they came up with their overall results.)

In Essex county, one school came out way ahead on the arts-ed scorecard: Cicely Tyson Community H.S. in East Orange had a whopping 97% of kids participating in the arts. Only 2 other schools in the county scored in the 90s: Arts H.S. in Newark and West Caldwell Tech. But high participation in the arts didn't correlate to overall school quality. Cicely Tyson Community ranked 14th overall (out of 36 Essex schools in the survey); Arts H.S. and West Caldwell Tech were both several spots lower than that.

In fact, the 5 top-ranking schools all had mixed rates of arts percentages, though all had more than half of their students involved in arts ed: Millburn H.S. (78%), North Star Academy C.S. of Newark (75%), Livingston H.S. (60%), Montclair H.S. (58%), and Glen Ridge H.S. (51%). The full list is here.

All of those schools ranked above the full-state median for arts-education participation, which "Inside Jersey" says was 47.3%. (The study broke that number out into specific arts disciplines: 30.2% for visual arts, 16.7% for music, 3.5% for drama and 1.8% for dance classes.)

Do your kids take visual art, music, drama and/or dance classes? Are all 4 disciplines available in the school? And do you think these classes are improving your kids' overall education?