

Evaluation of *Hartford Performs*

Summary of Impact over the First Three Years (2010–2013)

January 2014
Final



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Evaluation of *Hartford Performs*
Summary of Impact over the First Three Years (2010–2013)

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Hartford Performs
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Final

Prepared by PCG Education

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inaugural year in 2009–2010, *Hartford Performs* has worked closely with the Hartford Public Schools (HPS) to bring students unprecedented exposure to arts-integrated teaching and learning and direct access to the arts, including music, theatre, dance, and visual arts.

The *Hartford Performs* system has grown from a small pilot program to one that works with multiple area arts institutions and arts providers to serve HPS students in 19 schools in 2012–2013. As part of its agreement with Hartford Public Schools, *Hartford Performs* hired Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct a three-year, collaborative evaluation of program implementation and impact.

Accordingly, PCG has systematically collected data from multiple sources using a variety of methods. These sources included surveys of teachers, students, arts providers, and principals; site visits and observations; review of program implementation data; interviews; and analysis of student performance and attendance data. The collaborative evaluation methodology meant that the PCG team got an intimate and sustained view of the program and was able to provide interim feedback to *Hartford Performs* staff over time, information that was often used to improve program implementation. At the same time, the perspective of an outside evaluator allowed for an objective view of program impact.

This report summarizes findings related to impact over the first three years of *Hartford Performs*. Four impact themes emerged from the study: Program Growth, Quality Assurance, Impact on Hartford Public Schools Teachers, and, as a result of these, Impact on Hartford Public Schools Students.

GROWTH OF HARTFORD PERFORMS SYSTEM

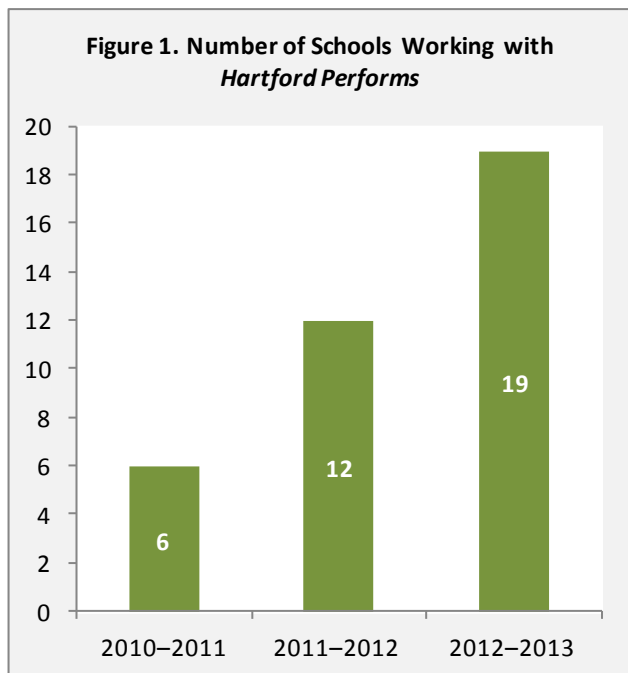
Hartford Performs has accomplished much in the past three years. As educators and the public are aware, programs with lofty aims are common, but they are seldom implemented as promised. Poor or partial implementation can be due to many factors and can significantly derail potential impact. In contrast, *Hartford Performs* has implemented its planned rollout consistently, with focus and determination.

*Hartford Performs' Multi-Year Plan*¹ outlined a “Multi-Year Growth Plan” for implementation of PK–8 programs, professional development, and out-of-school time/extended day. The plan aimed to expand the reach of the system by six PK–8 schools each year, with the target of working with all PK–8 Hartford Public Schools by 2014–2015. After three years, *Hartford Performs* is where it planned to be in terms of program size and scope. Its work in the schools has grown steadily, as have the number and types of professional development offered by the system. Implementation is ahead of schedule in terms of out-of-school time initiatives, specifically Summer Arts Literacy². It is, in part, due to this measured growth that the program has achieved the impact on Hartford Public Schools teachers, classrooms, and students described in this report.

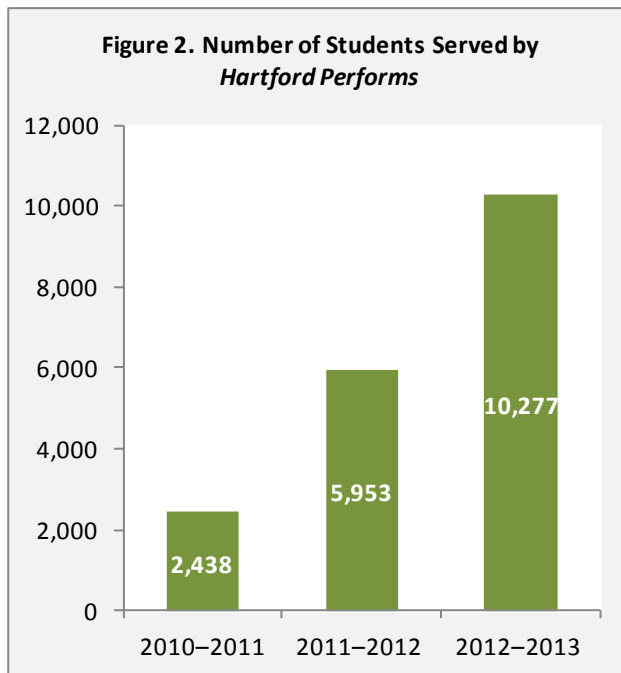
¹ *Hartford Performs*. (2010). An Arts Education Collaborative Serving all Hartford Public School Students: Multi-Year Plan (2010–2020). Hartford, CT.

² *Hartford Performs* work on out-of-school time/extended day was not scheduled to begin until all schools were on board in 2014–2015.

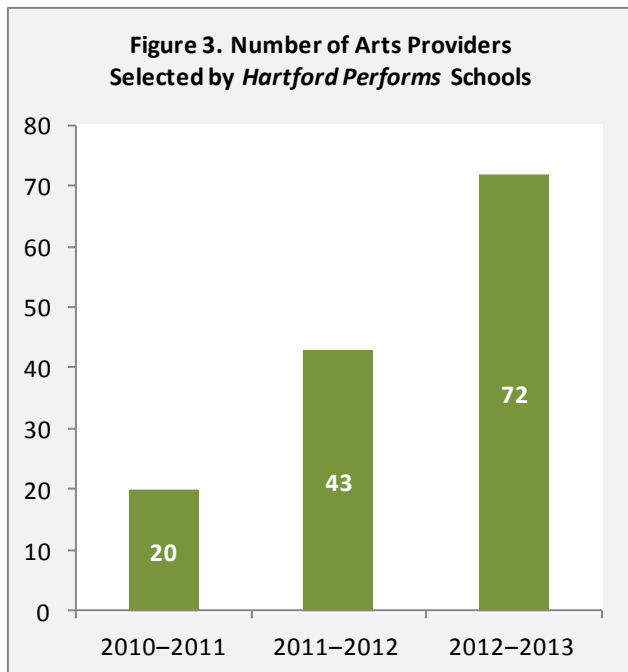
The figures below demonstrate the growth of *Hartford Performs* since 2010. They illustrate the steadily increasing number of Hartford Public Schools and students served, as well as the increasing number of arts providers and art-integrated programs.



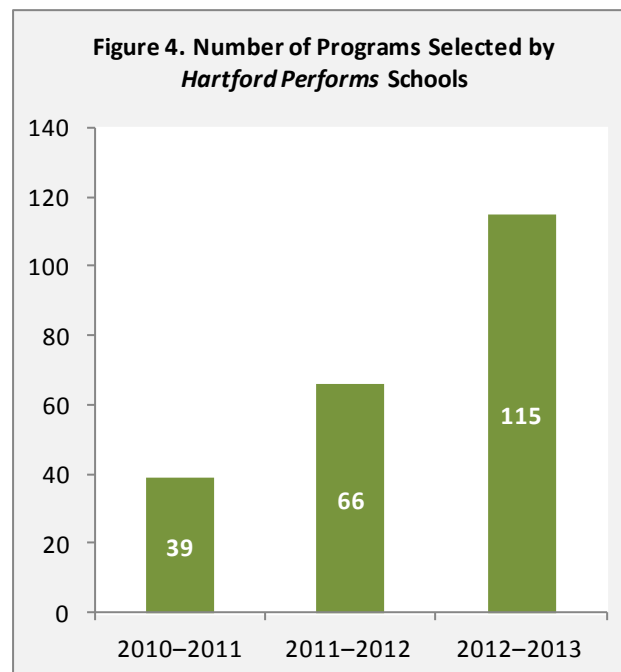
Note: Data were obtained from *Hartford Performs*.



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The *Hartford Performs* system has also grown in the variety of program offerings in terms of curricular content, cultural focus, and media. In the first year, program choices focused on arts-integrated literacy and mathematics. In the second year, program choices expanded to include connections with social studies and science content, and in 2012–2013 these choices expanded yet again, offering grade-level arts integration teams multiple opportunities to connect the arts with their curriculum. Media have expanded to include activities such as puppetry and quilting and the cultural focus of programs has expanded to reach across historical time and continents from African folklore to the Holocaust.

Hartford Performs has made a concerted effort to assure that participating arts providers are racially and ethnically diverse, reflecting the diversity of Hartford Public Schools' students. Over the past three years, *Hartford Performs* has increased outreach efforts within the African-American and Hispanic arts communities in order to invite new arts providers to participate in the initiative, build a network for *Hartford Performs* across multiple communities, and offer students the opportunity to 'see themselves' in the arts providers leading arts activities.

Providing access to quality arts programs for Hartford Public Schools students is at the core of the *Hartford Performs* mission, as articulated in the *Multi-Year Plan* (2010). Survey responses from teachers, principals, and arts providers all point to progress toward this goal:

- 94% of principals, 95% of teachers, and 97% of arts providers agreed that the initiative has increased access to arts programming for students.
- Many teachers commented on the value of this access. One kindergarten teacher noted, "For my students, the experience is priceless. They live minutes away from the Atheneum and the Bushnell, but without *Hartford Performs*, would most likely never get to either."
- More than half of students (56%) who answered questions about attending a performance or visiting a museum in 2012–2013 said that this was the first time that they had visited that institution, something *Hartford Performs* made possible.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

One distinguishing factor of the *Hartford Performs* system is the care with which staff has worked with Hartford Public Schools in both the design and implementation of program offerings. From the beginning, there were several quality assurance elements put into place and sustained throughout the first three years. These can be categorized into three important areas: the selection of program offerings; professional development for teachers, principals, and arts providers; and communication strategies and feedback loops. All three have had a direct impact on the system's ability to sustain overall program quality.

1. *Program offerings* were vetted carefully through a clear process from the beginning so that students were more likely to have effective learning experiences. Applications from arts providers were evaluated by a selection committee for inclusion in the portfolio of options available to schools. Among the selection criteria, applicants were required to submit a lesson plan with explicit connection to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

To ensure that students were exposed to different arts experiences over time, specific types of arts experiences (music, visual art, theatre, and dance) were linked to specific grade levels. The vast majority of teachers (93%) and principals (94%) indicated that the range of program offerings supports the different goals and needs identified by teachers within each school and grade level. As one third grade teacher noted: "There is a wide abundance of selections which is good... add more if possible. The more choices, the easier it is to find things that coincide with the curriculum." Principals also indicated that they felt that *Hartford Performs* program selections were aligned with their curriculum (89%). Some teachers reported choosing the same program multiple years in a row because they felt the program was high quality and fit well with their curriculum—the arts activity had become an expected and regular part of their curriculum because the offering was so successful the year before.

2. *Professional development* was provided both to teachers and to arts providers. Professional development content and design was modified to meet evolving needs among each group and continues to evolve based on feedback.

For teachers, professional development focused on arts integration. Teachers experienced professional development through the annual arts integration kick off conference the year their school joined or through half-day workshops at their school if they are in returning schools. Schools were able to determine not only when to hold the arts integration workshops, but also what the focus would be. For example, in 2012–2013, while one school wished to emphasize strategies for community building, another was interested in focusing on music, while a third school wanted more information about arts-integration strategies to build vocabulary.

Teachers described many ways in which the professional development supported greater arts integration. For example, a PK teacher noted: "[The professional development] allowed me to step in my students' footsteps and understand how they might feel when asked to do something out of their comfort range. I was able to use this example to lead a discussion about the importance of taking risks when learning."

For arts providers, professional development workshops focused on integration of standards and learning goals into the programs they offered. *Hartford Performs* also established quarterly arts provider meetings to foster an arts provider network and to create a regular forum in which *Hartford Performs* staff could provide updates, answer questions, solicit feedback, and offer additional professional development workshops. Arts providers requested and received additional workshops focused on topics like classroom management and the language of education (e.g., curriculum, child development). An arts provider commented on how participation in *Hartford Performs* had altered her presentation at the schools: “It was my first curriculum-based program. I have been a teaching artist for years, but never had the curriculum lead. I will definitely be doing more.”

Additional voluntary arts experiences were provided to principals of participating schools through Saturday Studios in 2012–2013. Response to these opportunities from all groups was, overall, very positive.

3. *Communication strategies and feedback loops* were put into place. *Hartford Performs* staff frequently checked in with principals, teachers, and the designated site coordinator at the participating schools to support the process of program choice and implementation. The evaluation study itself has provided the staff with ongoing feedback from surveys, interviews, and site visits, which staff have used to improve program communication, delivery, and quality.

Teachers and arts providers offered high praise for how *Hartford Performs* communicates with participants; the majority of teachers (89%) felt adequately supported by *Hartford Performs* staff during the selection process, and 88% of the teachers felt that schedules and expectations had been clearly conveyed to them. Almost all (94%) of arts providers indicated that communication had been clear, and 88% of the arts providers felt they had received adequate and effective support from *Hartford Performs*. One teacher noted the significance of the support provided by *Hartford Performs* staff for the long-term sustainability of the initiative: “Often a program deteriorates due to lack of funding or lack of a coordinator. Then it falls upon the classroom teacher to try and maintain the same level of quality (which is difficult). *Hartford Performs* made the process ‘user friendly.’”

IMPACT ON HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS TEACHERS

Before changing classroom practice, teachers, understandably, want to make sure that the proposed changes will benefit their students and improve learning. There is substantial research affirming arts-integrated teaching and learning as beneficial to both student engagement and achievement. But to have the expected effect, teachers have to collectively change their classroom practice. This appears to have happened to some extent across *Hartford Performs* schools. For example, nearly two-thirds of teachers (65%) indicated that participation in professional development offered by *Hartford Performs* had changed their approach to teaching. More than four-fifths (84%) indicated that participation in *Hartford Performs* arts experiences helped them to integrate the arts into other subject areas in the classroom.

Having the arts providers come into classrooms so that teachers could see the artists working with their students appears to have been the piece of this work that tipped the balance. Survey results and interviews with teachers revealed specific ways that many teachers in *Hartford Performs* schools are changing their practice to incorporate more music, theatre, art, and movement into their academic reading, writing, math, science and social studies instruction. Teachers offered the following examples:

- My students memorized a poem during the *Hartford Performs* class and now they just love poetry, so I took advantage of that and we started learning more about poetry. [Grades 2–3]
- Within mathematics, students have been taught new and creative methods in which to express mathematics in relation to the arts. We have carried out more hands-on math projects which involve artistic vision such as an architectural design project. [Grade 6]

By the spring of 2013, almost all of the principals (94%) in *Hartford Performs* schools affirmed their expectation that more arts-integrated instruction occur in classrooms. Many teachers across the participating schools asked for additional *Hartford Performs* professional development, citing its quality as well as the positive outcomes they saw when students learned through the arts. One principal commented: “The [*Hartford Performs*] model is exceptional, where the teacher is changed by the experience with the student, [which] allows the teacher to observe the students’ interaction with the art.”

Over the three years, arts providers met more often with teachers and worked with them on preparation and follow-up for programs they offered. In the case study schools, while there were teachers who were not fully “on board,” a great many said that participation in *Hartford Performs* is changing their classroom practice, both in terms of how they integrate the arts into their lesson plans and how they prepare students to engage in and build upon *Hartford Performs* programs. Impact on instruction is an obvious prerequisite for an impact on student engagement and achievement.

IMPACT ON HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS

The three-year evaluation study has documented positive effects for students beginning with the first year of implementation. Teachers noted that the arts sometimes support different students to succeed and engage students who are not always active participants in the typical classroom environment. In general, teachers described higher enthusiasm for learning when the arts providers worked with their students or when they themselves integrated the arts in classroom teaching and learning. There was substantial evidence that students, teachers, and principals perceived that the arts help students to express themselves and to develop 21st century skills including teamwork skills, analytical skills, and presentation skills.

Specific examples of the impact on students observed by teachers and principals include:

- Almost all teachers agreed that impact was high on curiosity and imagination (97%); engagement in learning (96%); and working cooperatively (95%). Almost all teachers likewise agreed on the impact on communication skills and students' motivation (94%); students' capacity to be adaptable and take creative risks (93%); confidence and self-esteem (92%); and critical thinking and problem-solving skills (90%).
- The majority of teachers agreed that *Hartford Performs* programs fostered the development of leadership skills (83%); increased students' ability to offer and receive constructive criticism (83%); and encouraged students to use revisions to improve their work (80%).
- Most teachers (87%) said they saw new abilities in their students as a result of *Hartford Performs* activities. Teachers discussed how some of the most introverted students found freedom in performance. In addition to participating in the experiences, students also demonstrated confidence by being more willing to share their own ideas.
- Similarly, principals were positive about the impact of participating in *Hartford Performs* activities on students' engagement, self-confidence, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, motivation, and communication skills for students at all grade levels.

Students perceive that participation in the arts helps both themselves and their peers be more creative, become better problem-solvers, and work together more cooperatively. Students reported gaining confidence, learning arts-related vocabulary, and remembering what they learned.

Highlights of the impact of participation in *Hartford Performs* activities as observed by students include:

- Students enjoyed the arts activities provided through *Hartford Performs*. The large majority of students (80%) agreed with the statement that *Hartford Performs* arts activities “made school fun.” Nearly three quarters of students also agreed that *Hartford Performs* activities made them want to come to school (70%).
- Students said that in-class arts experiences promoted working in a team (84%), encouraged students to try new things (92%), fostered greater self-expression through the arts (83%), and provided an opportunity to speak in front of a group (63%).
- Participation in *Hartford Performs* activities also had an impact on how students saw each other: the majority of students (69%) agreed that they saw new abilities in kids in their class during *Hartford Performs* activities. Many students described new self-confidence in their peers, improved communication and collaboration skills, creativity and imagination, motivation, and arts skills.

The many positive outcomes described by students, teachers, principals, and arts providers would, in themselves, be reason to continue to provide Hartford Public Schools students with expanded access to the arts and increased experience with arts-integrated teaching and learning. However, the evaluation also explored the impact of participation in arts programming on student achievement as measured by standardized tests and attendance. Specifically, as the majority of arts programs offered through *Hartford Performs* focused on literacy development, writing, and language, the evaluation explored impact on literacy outcomes in particular. Finally, an expectation of *Hartford Performs* is that exposure to the arts over time will have a cumulative effect. In its third year (2012–2013), the analysis of student outcomes continued to consider the length of time that schools had participated in *Hartford Performs*.

Findings related to student outcomes in literacy over the three years include:

- **Participation in *Hartford Performs* was associated with improved reading scores for ELL students, over one year, as measured by the 2011 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) when compared with peers in non-participating schools.**
- **Participation in *Hartford Performs* was associated with improved reading scores on the 2013 DRA2, over one year, when compared with peers in non-participating schools.**
- **Participation in *Hartford Performs* may be particularly advantageous to students receiving special education services:**

- **Students receiving special education services in *Hartford Performs* schools performed better than their peers in non-participating schools on the 2013 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) Writing assessment over the past year.**
- **Over three years, students receiving special education services in *Hartford Performs* schools performed better on the CMT Reading assessment than students in non-participating schools who also received special education services.**
- **Participation in *Hartford Performs* over time is associated with gains on CMT Reading scores. Students who have been in *Hartford Performs* schools for two and three years, performed better in reading, as a group, compared with their peers who have not.** Students in schools that participated in *Hartford Performs* for three years experienced the most improvement on CMT Reading scores, followed by students in schools that have participated for two years. Students in schools that have had only one year of participation in *Hartford Performs* showed no difference in performance than their peers in non-participating schools.

Taken together, these results appear to suggest that longer exposure to *Hartford Performs* programming is associated with a stronger effect on reading achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

Hartford Performs is seen as an effective partner in supporting arts-integrated teaching and learning and expanded access to the arts by students, teachers, and principals in the participating schools. The success of the program is underscored by a positive impact on student achievement.

Hartford Performs has a notable focus on quality control and on making progress towards its goals. Its partnership with the Hartford Public Schools is genuine and substantial—shared staffing, program design that aligns specifically with district goals, and a commitment to the students in the Hartford Public Schools. From the perspective of the evaluation team, *Hartford Performs* is doing a high quality job of accomplishing what it set out to do. This accomplishment is even more notable given the fact that the organization has been in existence for such a short time.

In the years to come, *Hartford Performs* will need to expand its infrastructure, donor base, and partnerships with arts providers and local arts institutions in order to proceed to its goal of providing all Hartford Public Schools students with high impact access to the arts. Based on past performance, the evaluation team feels confident that this is doable if the close partnership with and support of the district and arts partners continues and if the organization is able to keep the same standard of rigorous quality assurance in place. Should that be the case, Hartford Public Schools students will be very lucky indeed.