

Minnesota State Arts Board: Youth Development Outcomes Evaluation

Cohort Outcomes Summary

Introduction

In 2025, the Minnesota State Arts Board partnered with Wilder Research to evaluate the youth development outcomes of arts programming with a subset of eight grantees who engage young people in arts and cultural activities. This summary presents aggregate findings regarding youth development outcomes across all grantees, or grantee cohort.

While our analysis suggests that young people overall experienced all 10 outcomes that Wilder measured, the eight grantees were particularly effective at contributing to the following outcomes:

- Youth experience improved emotional wellness
- Youth form or maintain a caring relationship with a safe adult
- Youth develop or maintain interest in the arts
- Youth learn more about the historical or cultural significance of art

In addition to conducting evaluations with the eight grantees, Wilder created a toolkit of the approaches we used to gather and analyze youth outcomes data, including youth surveys, arts-based methods, and interviews and focus groups with grantee staff and caregivers of youth participants. Refer to the Arts Board's *Youth Development Evaluation Toolkit for Arts Programs* for more details about the methods we used.

Cohort outcomes

To guide this project, Wilder compiled a set of 10 common youth development outcomes associated with arts programming based on our expertise in youth development and the outcomes that grantees noted in their grant applications. The 10 outcomes include social-emotional outcomes (items 1-4 below); goals and motivations outcomes (items 5-7); and artistic outcomes (items 8-10):

1. Youth experience improved emotional wellness.
2. Youth improve peer relationship skills.
3. Youth form or maintain a caring relationship with a safe adult.
4. Youth expand connections within their community.
5. Youth are motivated to learn and achieve their goals.
6. Youth have clearer plans for their future.

7. Youth improve educational or professional skills.
8. Youth develop or maintain interest in the arts.
9. Youth improve or expand technical art skills.
10. Youth learn more about the historical or cultural significance of art.

Wilder used these 10 outcomes to guide survey development with the eight grantees who participated in this evaluation project. With each grantee, we discussed the 10 outcomes and determined which of them to measure with a post-program survey.

Regarding data collection, the Arts Board and Wilder aimed to decrease grantee burden as much as possible. We did not want to duplicate data collection that grantees were already doing, and we wanted to honor the ways in which grantees have historically gathered data. For some grantees, we obtained outcomes data via youth surveys (self-report) and for others we obtained data via surveys with parents or caregivers (Figure 1). For some grantees, we created new surveys. For others we adjusted existing surveys or used standardized surveys from third party organizations that grantees were already administering, such as El Sistema USA's *National Standardized Student Survey*.

1. Overview of post-surveys

Grantee	Location	Art form	Survey type	Outcomes measured	Respondent type	Total respondents
1. Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota	Greater Minnesota	Visual art and dance	Adjusted existing survey	1-4, 7-10	Youth	59-60 ^a
2. Circus Juventas	Twin Cities metro	Circus arts	Existing survey (no changes)	1-3, 5, 7, 9	Caregivers	125
3. ComMUSICation	Twin Cities metro	Music	Existing survey (no changes)	1-2, 5, 7, 9	Youth	18
4. Grand Center for Arts and Culture	Greater Minnesota	Visual art and sculpture	New survey	1-3, 8	Youth	9
5. Great River Educational Arts Theatre	Greater Minnesota	Theater	New survey	1-2, 7, 8-10	Youth	202-216 ^a
6. Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies	Twin Cities metro	Music	Existing survey (no changes)	1-3, 5, 8	Caregivers	45
7. Kulture Klub Collaborative	Twin Cities metro	Poetry	Adjusted existing survey	1-4, 6-10	Youth	8
8. Sueños Unidos/Dreams United	Greater Minnesota	Visual art	New survey	1, 8-10	Youth	7

^a For two grantees, the number of respondents answering specific questions varied.

2. Cohort results

	Grantees								
	All	1 (N=59-60)	2 (N=125)	3 ^a (N=18)	4 (N=9)	5 (N=202-216)	6 ^a (N=45)	7 (N=8)	8 (N=7)
Social emotional outcomes									
1. Youth experience improved emotional wellness.	86%	71% (3 measures; n=179)	93% (1 measure; n=125)	64% (2 measures; n=36)	100% (3 measures; n=27)	94% (1 measure; n=205)	97% (2 measures; n=90)	69% (4 measures; n=32)	100% (2 measures; n=14)
2. Youth improve peer relationship skills.	78%	74% (2 measures; n=119)	74% (2 measures; n=250)	67% (2 measures; n=36)	100% (2 measures; n=18)	95% (3 measures; n=630)	87% (2 measures; n=90)	50% (1 measure; n=8)	--
3. Youth form or maintain a caring relationship with a safe adult.	91%	89% (3 measures; n=180)	88% (1 measure; n=125)	--	100% (2 measures; n=18)	--	96% (1 measure; n=45)	83% (3 measures; n=24)	--
4. Youth expand connections within their community.	60%	57% (3 measures; n=178)	--	--	--	--	--	63% (2 measures; n=16)	--
Goals and motivations outcomes									
5. Youth are motivated to learn and achieve their goals.	79%	--	79% (3 measures; n=375)	67% (2 measures; n=36)	--	--	90% (2 measures; n=90)	--	--
6. Youth have clearer plans for their future.	75%	--	--	--	--	--	--	75% (1 measure; n=8)	--
7. Youth improve educational or professional skills.	68%	67% (4 measures; n= 239)	68% (2 measures; n=250)	56% (1 measure; n=18)	--	79% (2 measures; n=420)	--	69% (2 measures; n=16)	--
Artistic outcomes									
8. Youth develop or maintain interest in the arts.	87%	81% (3 measures; n=179)	--	--	100% (3 measures; n=27)	85% (2 measures; n=420)	90% (3 measures; n=135)	64% (1 measure; n=8)	100% (2 measures; n=14)
9. Youth improve or expand technical art skills.	84%	78% (3 measures; n=179)	91% (1 measure; n=125)	72% (2 measures; n=36)	--	87% (1 measure; n=203)	--	75% (2 measures; n=16)	100% (1 measure; n=7)
10. Youth learn more about the historical or cultural significance of art.	88%	82% (3 measures; n=179)	--	--	--	93% (4 measures; n=831)	--	75% (1 measure; n=8)	100% (1 measure; n=7)

a Pre-existing surveys for ComMUSICation (Grantee 3) and Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies (Grantee 6) included neutral response options. Neutral responses were removed from the analysis to standardize response options across grantee surveys.

Cohort results

Figure 2 displays cohort results for the 10 outcomes. For each outcome, the “All” column presents an average of positive survey responses across all grantees. “Positive survey responses” refers to responses that indicate a grantee’s work contributed to young people experiencing a particular outcome. Please note that percentages in the “All” column do not represent an average of all responses. Rather, they treat the eight grantees as distinct units of analysis, averaging the percentage of positive survey responses from each grantee whose survey included at least 1 measure about a particular outcome.

In the grantee columns (that is, columns labeled with numbers), Figure 2 presents the percentage of survey responses indicating that the grantee contributed to young people experiencing a particular outcome. Some surveys included multiple measures related to a single outcome; this is denoted in parentheses in each cell. For instance, 71% of responses in the survey for Grantee 1 (Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota) indicated that the grantee contributed to improved emotional wellness (outcome 1), which included three questions.

Social emotional outcomes

All eight grantee surveys included at least one question that measured whether youth experienced improved emotional wellness as a result of the program. Fewer grantees measured whether youth improved peer relationship skills (7 grantees), formed or maintained a caring relationship with a safe adult (5 grantees), or expanded connections within their community (2 grantees).

Regarding **improved emotional wellness**, 64%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people experienced improved emotional wellness, with an average of 86% across all eight grantees.

Regarding **improved peer relationship skills**, 50%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people experienced improved peer relationship skills, with an average of 78% across seven grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Regarding **forming or maintaining a caring relationship with a safe adult**, 83%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people experienced a caring relationship with a safe adult, with an average of 91% across all five grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Regarding **expanded connections within their community**, 57%–63% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people expanded their connections within their community, with an average of 60% across both grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Goals and motivations outcomes

Three grantees measured whether youth are motivated to learn and achieve their goals, one grantee measured whether youth have clearer plans for their future, and five grantees measured whether youth improved educational or professional skills.

Regarding **motivation to learn and achieve their goals**, 67%–90% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people exhibited motivation to learn and achieve their goals, with an average of 79% across three grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Regarding **clearer future plans**, 75% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people have clearer plans for their future; only one grantee included a question about this outcome in their survey.

Regarding **improved education or professional skills**, 56%–79% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people improved their education or professional skills, with an average of 68% across five grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Artistic outcomes

Six grantees measured whether youth are developed or maintained interest in the arts, six grantees measured whether youth improved or expanded technical art skills, and four grantees measured whether youth learned more about the historical or cultural significance of art.

Regarding **interest in the arts**, 64%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people developed or maintained interest in the arts, with an average of 87% across six grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Regarding **technical art skills**, 72%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people improved or expanded their technical art skills, with an average of 84% across six grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Regarding **learning about the historical or cultural significance of art**, 75%–100% of grantee survey responses indicated that young people learned more about why art is significant, with an average of 88% across four grantees that included at least one question about this outcome.

Considerations and limitations

Overall, the cohort outcomes analysis suggests that the programs and activities provided by grantees resulted in positive outcomes for youth. Evidence for some of the 10 outcomes was stronger than for others and is also dependent on factors such as the number of grantees that measured an outcome, the survey questions used by grantees to measure outcomes, and the number of completed surveys for each grantee from young people and caregivers.

We are especially confident in the results regarding whether youth experienced improved emotional wellness—because all eight grantees included at least one question that measured this outcome. At the same time, results differed across grantees (64%–100% positive), suggesting that youth experiences with the grantees may vary. On the other hand, while only two grantees included questions to measure whether young people expanded connections within their community, the range of results was relatively narrow (57%–63% positive). Wilder advises consideration of these important characteristics of the data when interpreting cohort outcomes results.

Lastly, each grantee used a different survey, and some grantees surveyed young people while others surveyed caregivers of youth participants. While we believe our analysis adequately navigates these data characteristics, the differences by which we gathered data also limit the generalizability of the findings. We recommend the Arts Board continues to balance methodological rigor with supporting grantees' own evaluation practices (rather than duplicating or supplementing them). Based on grantee feedback, we believe that exercising flexibility in survey design—and, for instance, not mandating a single, standardized survey—improved grantees' capacity to partake in this evaluation project and strengthened their own evaluation practices moving forward.

Appendix

Figure A1 presents the survey question used to measure each outcome, which grantee survey it appeared in, and which response options indicated a positive versus a negative outcome.

A1. Survey measures and cohort outcomes

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
1. Youth experience improved emotional wellness			
I learned more about my self-identity or culture.	1	Checked	Not checked
I feel more confident overall.	1	Checked	Not checked
I got better at managing my feelings.	1	Checked	Not checked
Has increased self-confidence	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I am able to confidently express my perspective or opinion to others.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I am proud of myself and the things I've accomplished/learned.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I feel welcome when I am at heART Therapy.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I am proud of what I have accomplished in heART Therapy.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I know more about myself.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I feel proud of myself.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
Harmony has improved my child's confidence.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Harmony has had an overall positive impact on my child's wellbeing.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I learned more about my self-identity or culture.	7	Checked	Not checked
I feel more confident overall.	7	Checked	Not checked

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
My mental health improved overall.	7	Checked	Not checked
I feel more hopeful about my future.	7	Checked	Not checked
I am proud of what I have accomplished in this class.	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I feel more proud of where I come from because of this class.	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
2. Youth improve peer relationship skills			
I made friends with someone from a different culture or heritage.	1	Checked	Not checked
I learned about how to work with a team or group.	1	Checked	Not checked
Is more comfortable interacting with other students of all ages	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Enjoys mentoring others more	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I celebrate and lift up the accomplishments of others.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I am able to collaborate and work well with others.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I enjoyed being with other students in heART Therapy.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I am more confident in my art skills.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I got along well with my classmates while making a musical.	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I am proud of what the 5th grade classes accomplished as a group this week	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I can work with others.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
My child has friends in Harmony.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Harmony teaches my child to treat others with kindness.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I learned about how to work with a team or group.	7	Checked	Not checked
3. Youth form or maintain a caring relationship with a safe adult			
The art/dance staff cares about me.	1	Checked	Not checked
I feel comfortable sharing about myself with the art/dance staff.	1	Checked	Not checked
The art/dance staff thinks the art I make is important.	1	Checked	Not checked
Is more comfortable interacting with coaches and other adults	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
I felt like the adults or staff at heART Therapy cared about me as a person.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I have people that care about me.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
My child is excited to share their experiences at Harmony with family and friends.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Kulture Klub staff care about me.	7	Checked	Not checked
I feel comfortable sharing about myself with Kulture Klub staff.	7	Checked	Not checked
Kulture Klub staff think the art I make is important.	7	Checked	Not checked
4. Youth expand connections within their community			
I learned more about the people in my local community.	1	Checked	Not checked
I learned about a culture or heritage that is different from mine.	1	Checked	Not checked
I can be a voice for change in my community.	1	Checked	Not checked
I know what I can do to make my community a better place.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I learned about someone else's culture or heritage.	7	Checked	Not checked
I feel more connected to people in my community.	7	Checked	Not checked
5. Youth are motivated to learn and achieve their goals			
Is more comfortable approaching challenges and taking risks	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Has increased understanding of the importance of pursuing goals	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Makes better use of leisure time (not 'bored' as much, less time 'looking for something to do,' more productive activities, etc.)	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I am willing to take risks and step out of my comfort zone.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I can complete a challenging task that requires ongoing belief in myself.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
Harmony staff have high expectations for my child.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Harmony has helped my child keep going when doing something hard or difficult.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
6. Youth have clearer plans for their future			
I feel like I have grown as a person or think about my goals in a new way.	7	Checked	Not checked
7. Youth improve educational or professional skills			
I learned about how to take care of art/dance supplies and spaces.	1	Checked	Not checked
I feel more comfortable sharing or speaking in front of others.	1	Checked	Not checked
I improved my writing/reading skills by writing/reading in class.	1	Checked	Not checked
I improved my math skills by using math in class.	1	Checked	Not checked
Has increased follow through with plans and commitments	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
Does better with school work	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I am dependable; others can count on me.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I got to help lead something while we practiced or performed the musical.	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I can be a leader.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
I learned new skills that will help me in school, work, or future opportunities.	7	Checked	Not checked
I feel better about finding a job or getting more stable income.	7	Checked	Not checked
8. Youth develop or maintain interest in the arts			
I plan to continue doing art/dance.	1	Checked	Not checked
I feel like my art is meaningful.	1	Checked	Not checked
I got to choose the type of art I created (song, project, or dance).	1	Checked	Not checked
I enjoy going to heART Therapy.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I would do this class again.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I am more interested in art.	4	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I enjoyed creating a musical.	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I want to do a theater or musical program again.	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
My child enjoys Harmony.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
The music they play in Harmony is engaging for my child.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
My child is excited to attend school when they have Harmony.	6	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I plan to continue doing poetry.	7	Checked	Not checked
I enjoyed learning about Mexican art in this class.	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I am more interested in Mexican art because of this class	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

9. Youth improve or expand technical art skills

I got better at doing art/dance.	1	Checked	Not checked
I am more comfortable doing art/dance.	1	Checked	Not checked
I became more aware of how my body moves.	1	Checked	Not checked
Is more comfortable performing in front of an audience	2	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree
I am able to lead an activity in front of a group.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I can sing with others and by myself in front of other people I know.	3	Much more, A little more	A little less, Much less
I can present in front of a group.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
I got better at writing poetry.	7	Checked	Not checked
I got more comfortable sharing my poetry.	7	Checked	Not checked
I am more confident in my drawing and portraiture skills because of this class.	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

10. Youth learn more about the historical or cultural significance of art

I learned something new about art/dance.	1	Checked	Not checked
I did something for the first time.	1	Checked	Not checked
I tried new materials, technology, or learned a new dance style.	1	Checked	Not checked
I learned about theater during Musical-in-a-Week.	5	True, Somewhat true	Not true
I know what a musical is.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
I can explain what an audition is.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
I know how to create a character using my body and voice.	5	Increase, Maintain high	Decrease, Maintain low
I learned something new about poetry.	7	Checked	Not checked

Survey measure	Grantee	Positive responses	Negative responses
I know more about the history of Mexican art because of this class.	8	Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree

For more information

For more information about this report, contact Ryan Ander-Evans at Wilder Research, 651-280-2677 or ryan.ander-evans@wilder.org.

Authors: Ryan Ander-Evans

June 2026

