



“MAKING THE GRADE” IN THE ARTS continued from page 1



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and parents as primarily effort-based, non-essential content areas. The prevailing viewpoint for grading in visual art has been that a child’s artwork was judged subjectively, and mostly on its aesthetic appeal and creativity. The parallel for music was the degree to which the child was having fun and enjoying the experience of the music class. The result of this perspective was the expectation that students would automatically receive the report card’s highest grade, an “A”, in art or music. The reality of assessment using the SBPR, however, is much different.

The content standards for music and art, as they appear on the SBPR, are listed below. These standards represent fundamental knowledge, concepts, and skills upon which both music and visual art content is based.

Music Standards	Art Standards
Sings and performs alone and with others	Demonstrates an understanding of art concepts and related vocabulary
Reads, listens to, analyzes, and describes music	Uses tools/materials to create a variety of art for self-expression

In music, some of the skills associated with these standards are:

- using locomotor and non-locomotor movement to move to music
- singing with proper vocal technique and diction
- matching pitch
- keeping a steady beat
- naming orchestral instruments by family (string, brass, woodwind, percussion).

In visual art, these two standards address a student’s ability to demonstrate knowledge regarding:

- art elements (color, texture, line, shape, form, space)
- a variety of two and three-dimensional art media
- correct identification and safe and appropriate use of tools for different art media
- vocabulary related to art elements, art media and tools

Knowing the art and music standards to be assessed and some of the skills and knowledge that define them, it should be evident that providing a grade in elementary music and art has nothing to do with a subjective judgment on the part of the music or art teacher regarding aesthetic appeal, creative expression or enjoyment. Instead, there is a specific body of knowledge, concepts and demonstrated skills in music and art that can be objectively quantified for purposes of assessment. The opportunities for students to use the skills and concepts learned about art and music for creative expression and imaginative solutions are not being assessed.

Art and music teachers use a variety of assessment instruments and strategies to determine a student’s progress including those that are *formative* (conducted formally and informally throughout a grading period) and those that are *summative* (administered as a culminating activity at the end of a grading period or the end of a unit). The marks given for effort are completely separate from those given for progress towards grade-level standards. Effort marks identify the student’s ability to focus on his/her work, his/her level of participation in the art or music lesson, and the completion of assignments.

Although assessment in the arts at the elementary level has its supporters as well as its detractors, both perspectives agree on the critical role the arts play in the overall curriculum. Student learning in the arts is invaluable, not only for the quantifiable, assessable fine arts skills that provide foundational knowledge, but especially for the ways in which those skills can be applied to the abstractions of problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and inventiveness that are absolutely essential for all students to demonstrate to be successful in the global economy that is our future.