



## Does Dancing Boost Student Achievement?

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America's pretty dance obsessed lately. Three popular shows—*So You Think You Can Dance*, *America's Best Dance Crew*, and *Dancing With the Stars*—all get stellar ratings, and Natalie Portman won an Oscar for her portrayal of a troubled ballerina. But is there a connection between learning the art of dancing and better performance in school? The example of Santa Ana, California-based nonprofit, The Wooden Floor suggests that there is. Since 1983, they've been integrating year-round dance training for fourth-through twelfth-graders with academic assistance and family service. Since the program's inception, 93 percent of participants have gone on to college, and for graduates from the past six years, that number has climbed up to 100 percent.

What's especially impressive is that The Wooden Floor has achieved those results without cherry-picking kids from wealthy backgrounds. Santa Ana's a mostly poor and working class city with a large population of Latino immigrants. Almost all of the 375 participants in the program fall under the federal Housing and Urban Development poverty classification of "extremely low

income" to "very low income," but 100 percent of high school juniors in the program take the SATs, compared to 35 percent of their peers in the area. Many of the students who go on to college are the first in their families to do so.

So how does the program do it? Enrolled students receive intensive dance training from some of the top companies and choreographers in the nation, which gives them the ability to innovate, communicate, and collaborate with others, and teaches self discipline and perseverance. This may sound like fluff, but a recent report from President Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities said there are "strong and consistent links between high-quality arts education and a wide range of impressive educational outcomes." And, recognizing that these are students who need extra help with the academics, The Wooden Floor also provides tutoring for each student and gives them the college counseling they need to make higher education a reality. In contrast, given the deprioritization of arts programs in schools, dance programs in the Santa Ana Unified School District are pretty rare.

To ensure that students can attend tuition-free, the organization raises over \$2 million dollars per year. The money covers the \$3,500 per student cost throughout the year, and the school offers graduates four-year college scholarships which range from \$4,000 to \$10,000. Graduate Genovpetry Calderon, who spent eight years in the program, says she is "the first in my family to obtain higher education because I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from The Wooden Floor." This year's class of graduates will head to New York University, Cornell, UCLA, and Southern Methodist University.

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