



FABRIC OF MILWAUKEE
PILOT YEAR EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Fabric of Milwaukee opens up new worlds for self and cultural expression for ELL students who are often isolated academically and socially in their new schools.

The program, and accompanied evaluation, allowed Arts@Large educators to survey the landscape and assess vital student needs along. Results will help Arts@Large enhance culturally relevant pedagogical approaches that address specific needs and leverage existing strengths. Evaluation provides evidence that, in its pilot year, the Fabric of Milwaukee Program accomplished many critical things. Most importantly, it provided an opportunity to engage students and deliver enriching arts programming. Data from all sources support the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Data show that Arts@Large program leaders and artist-educators were able to build trust and engage ELL students to meet the following attainable goals initially identified by MPS educators and area partners.

Arts@Large Goals	Documented Progress	Observations
Building student confidence	Moderate to High	Confidence building takes place through cultural expression. Program participation also eases academic stress. This is well established through 3 rd party (artist-educator) observations. However, we need future tools that document change in confidence from the student perspective.
Expanding student cultural awareness	High	Observed through student work (as reported by artist-teachers and community survey respondents)
Strengthening student connections (and building a system of support)	High (but limited)	Artist teachers observed student connections (to other ELL students) growing substantially through group work and mentorship. Future iterations of the program must also focus on ELL student network development with mainstream students.
Strengthening parent/family-to-school (community) connections	High	Well established through survey responses. Student work should be shared more broadly and include parents to build stronger connections to community, helping organizations, and MPS for the future.



2. Evaluation results suggest that future iterations of the program can include broader goals and outcomes, as observed by artist-educators. For example, evaluation models can be expanded to explore takeaways observed earlier (pages 7 and 8). This might include exploring the impact of ELL student self and cultural expression through the arts, for example, as an alternate form of communication, to increase self-confidence, build team/relationships, and leadership/mentoring skills.
3. Data from all sources suggest that the Fabric of Milwaukee program can do even more to enhance outcomes to bring greater value to the ELL students it aims to serve. Namely, addressing behavioral concerns that are common with younger ELL students, particularly throughout their middle school years. Arts@Large can work in partnership with MPS to set goals and benchmark the program's impact on reducing ELL student absenteeism and behavioral offenses.
4. The Fabric of Milwaukee program achieved well-documented success in engaging and educating the broader community through the arts, cultural expression and poignant storytelling from the immigrant perspective. Survey feedback reveals the strong impact of community exposure in educating, building empathy, and stimulating involvement. This may also spark helpful social connections for students, their families, and larger immigrant communities. Following survey recommendations, Arts@Large and MPS can seek out more opportunities to share these powerful events more broadly across the city, at schools, community events, and through broadcast media.
5. Based on artist-educator feedback, program enhancement revolves around building trust and expanding social network development among ELL students and the larger population of mainstream students. Build trust through continuity with facilitator, relevant field trips, instituting a buddy system with intercultural mentoring. These steps, paired with small-group ELL student exposure to mainstream students for cross-cultural learning and relationship building, hold the keys to enhanced impact.



Introduction

The Fabric of Milwaukee is a peacemaking program that arose from the needs of Milwaukee's growing immigrant and refugee student population within Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). During the 2017-18 MPS school year, the Fabric of Milwaukee program was in its first [pilot] year at Wedgewood Middle School and Milwaukee High School of the Arts. The program was initially designed by Arts@Large leaders and MPS educators to ease the transition of immigrant students (ages 12-18), currently enrolled in ELL programming, from sixty-eight countries, speaking 14 languages, from around the globe.

Through the design and administration of the 10-week program¹, Arts@Large and MPS asserted that supportive environments would be created to build students' feelings of engagement at school. Individual projects were taught by artist-educators/ mentors, representing some of Milwaukee's immigrant communities (e.g., Overcoming Trauma, Living your Heritage, Language & Oral Tradition). Projects were intentionally designed to engage and empower students with feelings that they can impact the climate and culture of their schools. These, program designers assert, are the essential ingredients for students to build strong connections to their new communities.

In this vein, program designers identified the following goals and strategic objectives for the Fabric of Milwaukee program²:

- 1. Building student confidence**
- 2. Expanding student cultural awareness**
- 3. Strengthening student connections (and building a system of support)**
- 4. Strengthening parent/family-to-school (community) connections**

Being new at school can be a daunting time for any student. Being a new student of a different color, culture, faith, with limited/no access to the English language combine to create real barriers to high quality education. Social acceptance is not always easy, regardless of where you are coming from. In fact, 40% of all MPS students recently reported some type of harassment and bullying as presenting a significant problem in middle and high school³. Victimization of adolescents can have significantly greater negative influence on physical health, psychological wellbeing, and academic outcomes. For ELL students who have already experienced trauma, the effects are severely compounded. For this reason, pre-teens and teens from MPS' Wedgewood Middle School and Milwaukee High School for the Arts were purposively selected for participation in the Fabric of Milwaukee's pilot year.

ARTS@LARGE: INSERT PROJECTS OVER 10 WEEK PERIOD & PARTICIPANT COUNTS

¹ See the full 10 week program overview included in Arts@Large FY19 Funding Request

² Excerpted from Arts@Large FY19 Funding Request (of Jane Bradley Petit) for the Fabric of Milwaukee Program (Jan. 2018)

³ Milwaukee Public School *Risk Behavior Survey* statistics from 2015-16 academic year.

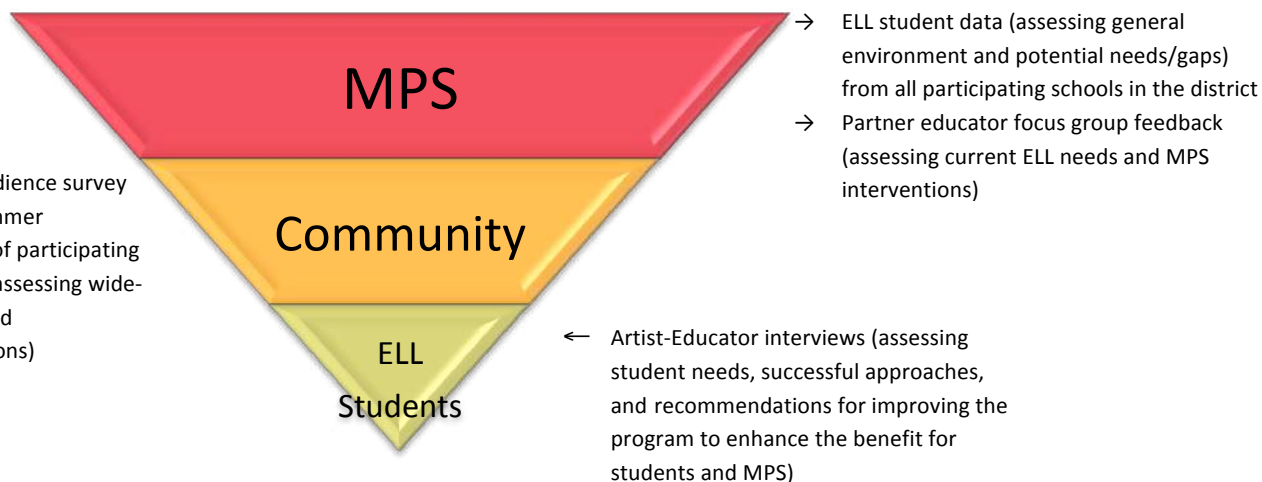


Evaluation Methods and Goals

Specific ELL student needs and program outcomes were unknowns in the pilot year of the program. In addition, there are barriers to directly assessing student impact considering language and research access to young students. Considering these facts, the evaluation team took a step back to create a plan that examines student needs against program outcomes to better understand: a.) reasonable and attainable goals; b.) effective indicators/metrics to measure success in the future; and c.) what is actually measurable (and from what perspective). Results from the first year of evaluation will inform the foundation of the program's logic model, primary metrics, and changes to enhance its positive impact on ELL students and their communities.

Evaluator, Mary Reinders, Arts@Large founder, Teri Sullivan, and Lead Educator, Jacque Troy, along with other members of the Arts@Large team co-designed an integrated evaluation approach. One that incorporates secondary, primary, qualitative, and quantitative data to examine student needs and program outcomes from a variety of "co-evaluator" perspectives. The following graphic illustrates this approach along with data sources and target audiences impacted by the Fabric of Milwaukee Program:

IMPACT ON...



Integrated evaluation methods included:

- Secondary (2016-17) data from MPS' Climate Survey, extracting a sample of General Population (7,512) and ELL students (1,432) from participating schools;
- Pre-program focus group with 14 Arts@Large educators, partners from MPS schools, and community leaders representing immigrant interests;
- Post-program focus group and interview discussions with 6 Arts@Large artist educators and program administrator, Jacque Troy, who worked as facilitator during the administration of the Fabric program;
- Community audience survey of 102 area participants who attended ELL student productions of their Fabric of Milwaukee creative projects in August.

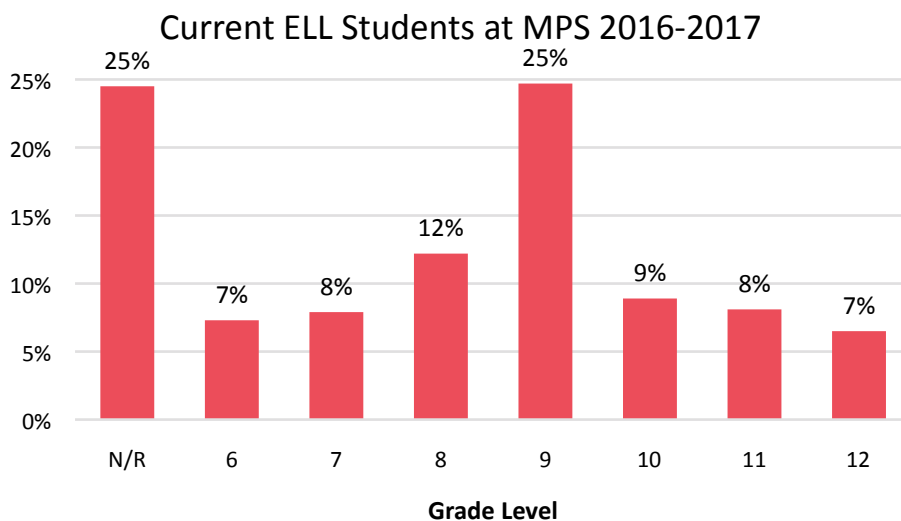
English Language Learners at MPS

According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), there were approximately 8,552 English Language Learners (ELL) students enrolled in the k-12 in schools throughout the Milwaukee Public School system during the 2017-18 school year. Being the largest and most urban school district, it is no surprise that MPS also accommodates the largest proportion (29%) of ELL students in the state⁴.

MPS has done its best to accommodate a steady influx of foreign-born ELL students though state-wide trends point to below average performance in math, science and social studies. During the 2016-17 school year, MPS reported that district-wide progress toward On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness remained the same during the 2016-17 school year, the overall four-year graduation rate increased to 60.9 percent, up from 59.3 percent. Dropouts fell slightly to 5.1 percent in the 2016–17 school year compared to 5.7 percent the previous year. However, data provided in MPS' most recent 2016-17 District Report Card⁵, show that ELL students do not fare as well as their mainstream peers. A four year cohort analysis reveals a 54% graduation rate for students who are classified as 'Limited English Proficient.'

MPS Climate Survey data, from the 2016-17 school year, provide a profile of the ELL student population. Additional data gathered for this evaluation also provide indicators of their needs and experiences in participating schools across the district.

The Climate survey sample contains 1,144 ELL students, distributed across the following grades:



⁴ Migration Policy Institute – National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, Fact Sheet: English Learners in Wisconsin (2017-18 school year data), Sugarman, Julie and Geary, Courtney (Aug. 2018)

⁵ <http://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/MPS-English/OBG/OAE/District-Accountability-/MPSDistrictReportCard2016-2017.pdf>



The data above show that most (54%) students were currently taking part in the ELL program between the ages of 13 (in 7th grade) and 16 (in 10th grade). MPS also data show that a plurality of students was reportedly Hispanic though a large portion (nearly half) of participants' ethnicity or home countries were unreported on the survey. In their FY19 Funding Request, however, Arts@Large reported that ELL students came from 68 different countries, most commonly including: Puerto Rico, Mexico, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, Iraq, Tanzania, Kenya, Syria, Jordan, Honduras, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan and India.

Comparisons of social issues and behaviors between ELL students and the general population reflect the unique challenges ELL students face in adjusting to the culture of new communities and schools while working toward language learning and other academic trials.

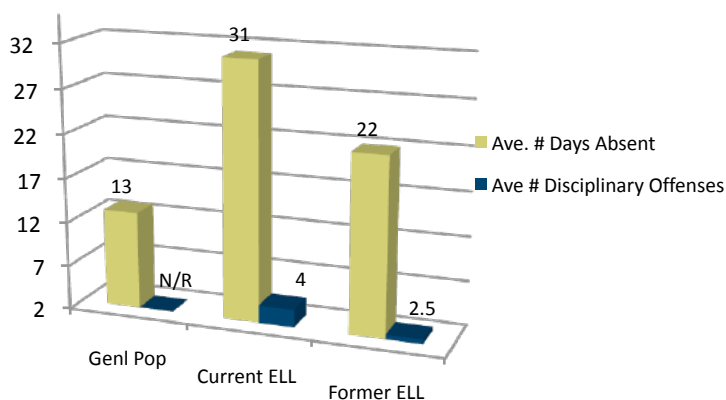
The following table provides a comparative breakout between the general student population, current, and former ELL students in grades 6-12 on important social and economic indicators:

Student Segment	Count	% Special Education Qualified	% Qualifying for free or reduced school lunch
General Population	7512	7%	30%
Current ELL Students	1144	25%	63%
Former ELL Students	288	0%	n/r

Data above indicate that ELL students are significantly more likely to be classified as special education, as defined by MPS⁶. ELL students are also more likely to experience the perils that accompany low incomes. As the above data show (current) ELL students are twice as likely as the general population to meet the lower family income threshold to qualify for free or reduced lunch, provided by the district.

The following table provides a visual comparison of student engagement and behavior at school. Data show significant differences between ELL students and their general population peers at MPS. For example, on average, current ELL students miss class at nearly 3 times the rate of general population students. One positive trend points to lower absenteeism (dropping an average of 9 days during the school year) among *former* ELL students. This may be due to advancing students naturally becoming

more engaged in school with time and *after* they have acquired the English language skills required to learn and build social connections (and potentially improved academically while learning more about American and local culture)



⁶ <http://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/Programs/Special-Education/Behavior.htm>

In addition to school disengagement, data also show higher disciplinary offenses among *current* ELL students. This is likely part of the challenge these students face when trying to “fit in” at a new school and culture. It could also be linked to situations of self-defense as with bullying, teasing, or frustration with being isolated from the mainstream population and American culture. A closer look at the data shows that a majority (60%) of offenses was described as “disruption of the learning environment” and an additional 35% were described as “personal or physical safety” concerns.

Once again, though data reflect a precipitous drop (by nearly half) in the average rate of behavioral offenses committed by *former* ELL students. This underscores a point of leveling off, presumably after students gain comfort at their new schools and acquire English language skills.

Trends in the overall data serve as a mandate for the Fabric of Milwaukee program. Educators and administrators can and should work toward increasing younger/current ELL student engagement in school and work to increase sociability with peers in and outside their own cultural group. For future evaluation, two key indicators of success in these areas could include tracking attendance rates along with disciplinary offenses of participants in an effort to improve the student experience at MPS.

Partner Focus Group

Prior to initiating the Fabric of Milwaukee program, upfront discussions with educational partners and community leaders lent valuable insight to programmatic gaps, needs of ELL students, and ways to uniquely structure the Fabric of Milwaukee program (and delivery) to sync with MPS programming and add value wherever possible.

During the pre-program discussion, teachers and community partners unanimously agreed that there is an “*incredible need*” (for a program of this kind) to support the needs of ELL students. They commonly view MPS as being poorly equipped to help support and position students for success. There was wide agreement that schools are taxed with limited budgets and staff to effectively support these students.

Currently there are no additional programs aside from language classes that help ease the transition into MPS schools. Educators reportedly struggle to make an impact given the huge student loads placed on them. One ELL teacher observed, “*we are around students each day who walk into teachers’ classrooms, trying to learn, who cannot speak any English at all.*” Not surprisingly, many of these kids tend to give up quickly and fall behind academically.

In addition to language learning, educators agreed that the following needs are central to ELL student acclimation and wellbeing at school:

- Transitional supports to help students learn “the basics”
- Learning self-advocacy



- Forums and mediums for self-expression and cultural sharing, *"everyone has a story to tell!"*
- More English Language Teachers and Aids
- Cultural awareness training for MPS teachers, covering cultures, religion, traditions, etc.
- A "buddy system" and mentors to help with translations and cultural mediation

We also heard that interpersonal skills are central to ensuring success for ELL students. Educators commonly observed that ELL kids face significant challenges with "fitting in" because of a basic lack of knowledge and access to the system (this includes "the basics" such as, using the bathroom, the library, going through the lunch line, etc.). What's more, ELL students tend to share what educators describe as a *"general fear of the unknown."* The group agreed there are cultural and interpersonal barriers between new and existing students that serve as walls or social barriers that effectively exacerbate ELL student challenges. As one guidance counselor observed, *"peer students need to understand that we really are all the same."* Educators agreed that cultural sharing and connecting is critical however the typical school is not structured to offer many opportunities to nurture and build these relationships.

Educators suggest that the Fabric of Milwaukee program (and those like it) take into account the *whole* student and understand that the immigrant experience is wholly dependent on personality and individual experiences of each student (as well as their backgrounds). Success means we treat them as individuals and stop lumping them into the same category and understand that some have they been traumatized and have received very little education...and others have simply moved here with family as a job relocation. There was wide agreement that, when we understand, we become more qualified to offer "the right" kind of assistance. As one educator observed, *"Students need a safe, welcoming/nurturing community right within the school... [Fabric of Milwaukee] can help us help them!"*

Perhaps the most commonly missed point raised by educators is that ELL students also have valuable *strengths* to share. Not just a laundry list of needs. For example, several noted they tend to be the hardest working kids because they are highly motivated to learn the language and, eventually, succeed academically. There was general consensus that MPS and Arts@Large can help bolster and leverage strengths to help fast-forward the *"fitting in"* process that seems to flow along with language acquisition. The Climate Survey data from former ELL students supports this assertion.

Post program feedback from Artist-Educators

Jacque Troy, Artist Educator and program administrator with Arts@Large, was deeply involved as the main facilitator, artist-educator, and liaison between schools, classroom teachers, students, and Arts@Large artist educators. She assessed needs, established trust, and provided valuable continuity for students. She created structure and professional development for artist educators throughout the 10 week run of the Fabric of Milwaukee program. Her observations help lay the groundwork for understanding the student experience, their takeaways, and pathways for enhancing and expanding the program.



During her evaluation interview, Jacque framed the typical ELL student experience at MPS. She observed that, the school experience consists of total English language immersion, regardless of the depth of language skills ELL students have upon entry. In addition to language learning courses – they are steeped in English for all daily instruction, including math, science, reading, and history classes. Understandably, academics are, for the most part exhausting and “anxiety inducing” for most ELL students. Particularly for newer students with limited English language skills and cultural understanding. Jacque also noted that there is currently no forum for personal or cultural expression at school. Socially, ELL students remain isolated from mainstream students by barriers of language and culture and, often, the feelings of isolation that follow. Social isolation shunts even the most basic avenues of ‘fitting in,’ such as socializing and network development (outside of ELL students’ own cultural groups) at school.

Over the course of the 10-week program, Jacque and other artist-educators observed continued growth in trust with instructors. They also saw openness and bonding between fellow students throughout their participation in art activities (e.g., collage building) that allowed them opportunities to share personal stories, descriptions of their culture, and history from their native countries. Though English language skills were limited, ranging from non-existent to moderate, students helped each other, in many cases, describing exercises/instructions to others with similar language and cultural backgrounds to achieve success. Ultimately, students were able to pool their strengths in self-expression and storytelling through art as well as leverage their own cultural/language skills to serve as mentors to other, students newer to the ELL learning process.

Observations from Jacque and the artist-educator’s time teaching and working with ELL students in their classrooms uncovered the following themes:

Student Needs/Issues	Skills Gained Through Program	Fabric of Milwaukee Offerings/Assets
No/Limited English Language	Alternative Arts Communication	• Expression through the arts, as a <i>universal</i> language • Mentoring and social connections • Use of modeling and student pairings, based on shared culture
Social Isolation	Self/Group/Cultural Expression	• Participation helped build vital connections among ELL students and social bonding with small groups • Students shared work with the broader community to promote understanding through cultural sharing

Shyness/Withdrawal	Self Expression	• Trust building and bonding with Jacque (as facilitator), which led to openness to other artist-educators • Participation increased comfort with artistic process, individual expression, toward understanding.
Identity/Cultural Confusion	Teamwork	• Self-expression of cultural, identity and personal history. • Use of art mediums to express and understand the American experience
Trauma	Leadership/Mentoring	• Use of arts expression as a type of exploratory therapy to normalize fears and process difficult experiences. • The use of story-telling to share experiences with others.
Academic Anxiety	Self Confidence	• Classroom teachers got involved and were able to learn more personal details about students – allowing them to respond to unique needs. • Program allowed students to make independent choices and being a master of individual artistic process. • Sessions offered a valuable break from academic anxiety

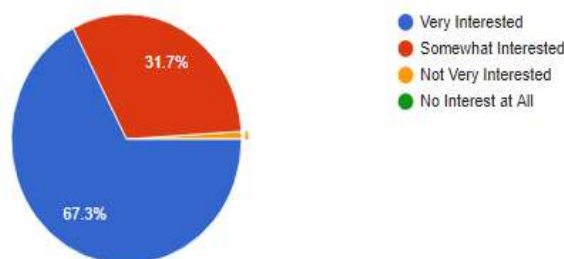
Based on valuable experiences and first-hand observations of outcomes from the pilot year, Artist-educators made recommendations for future program enhancement. Most of these share a common theme of raising trust to reduce anxiety, increase comfort, and effectively engage students to open themselves to arts participation, cultural sharing, and meaningful social connections. Artist-educators recommended the following:

- Ensure proper translation so that all students know what's expected of them and what to expect at the start of each session.
- Provide a "constant" trusted presence by having a single facilitator present, along with various artist educators, for each session.
- Student ambassadors (utilizing the buddy system recommended by educators in the earlier focus group) or those more confident with the English language to mentor, translate, and work continually to introduce new students to the program and the school as a whole.
- Enlist other teachers at the same school to work in partnership to support the program with field trip opportunities and pair ELL students (to leverage strengths and experiences) with mainstream students to expand cultural learning and subject matter covering matters such as social justice.

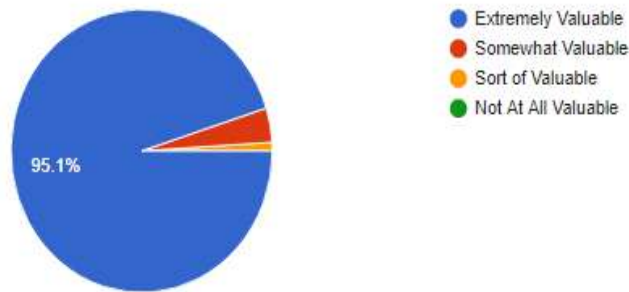
Community Survey Outcomes

Earlier in the summer, ELL student work was adapted and showcased in performances made available to the larger community when it was turned into live-action plays and performed in local Milwaukee neighborhoods. Audience members included ELL students, their parents, extended family/friends, and area residents. Arts@Large experienced a high turnout and achieved a high response rate, ultimately surveying 102 audience members. Results helped gauge public interest, program impact, and broader value. The survey also gathered ideas and input for expanding and enhancing public performances in the future.

Audience members were specifically asked about their interest in topics related to immigration prior to seeing the show. The chart below shows a very high interest level (67% "very interested") in the subject matter. Results (depicted in the chart below) indicate that the time and environment is "right" for these types of educational experiences that promote cultural sharing and understanding through the arts.



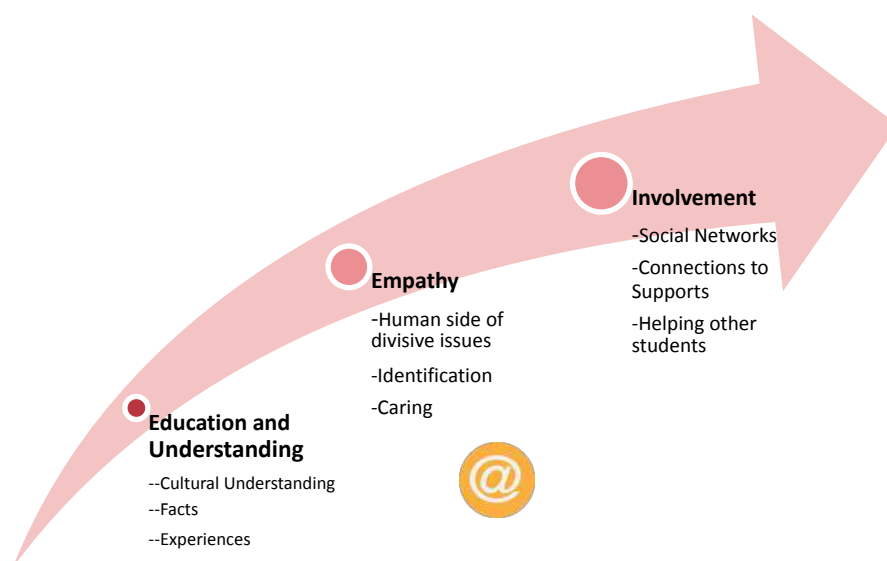
Not only is the community interested in cultural expression through the arts, they also reportedly see the value of these specific types of presentations that provide first-hand student accounts. The following chart illustrates that 9 out of 10 survey respondents described the event as "extremely valuable".



Open ended responses point to two main takeaways for the community. The first is the event's value in informing (the public) about deeply personal "human" stories related to the immigration experience for young people. Storytelling promotes connection and understanding, which leads to the second greatest takeaway: Empathy building for those experiencing immigration (forced or otherwise) first-hand. Responses show that impact was greatest among residents from outside the community and farther from the issues being discussed. As this quote indicates: *"I came from outside this community and the show helped me develop a level of understanding that you just can't get from the news."* Another captures the perspective changing value through story-telling, *"We need these kinds of events to educate the public and show the human side and how immigrants can make a positive contributions to our society."*

Survey respondents commonly agreed that the show was so powerful, that it needs a much larger audience to expand its impact on the broader population. Audience members (like this one) spoke of the need to expand for even greater exposure, *"Everyone needs to hear these perspectives...perform this in schools, libraries, colleges, and other communities around the city...film it and put it on YouTube and PBS."* Others asked to hear presentations, first hand, from the students who wrote the material.

Clearly, the power of story-telling and sharing through the arts is a powerful medium that removes partisanship and preconception from the conversation. Results and feedback point to a type of impact cycle that moves from education to action:



Conclusions and Recommendations

The Fabric of Milwaukee opens up new worlds for self and cultural expression for ELL students who are often isolated academically and socially in their new schools.

The program, and accompanied evaluation, allowed Arts@Large educators to survey the landscape and assess vital student needs along. Results will help Arts@Large enhance culturally relevant pedagogical approaches that address specific needs and leverage existing strengths. Evaluation provides evidence that, in its pilot year, the Fabric of Milwaukee Program accomplished many critical things. Most importantly, it provided an opportunity to engage students and deliver enriching arts programming. Data from all sources support the following conclusions and recommendations:

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