

## **2000 Vermonter Poll: Levels of Support for Art Education**

### **Introduction**

Art educators are continually searching for new ways to improve the opportunities for students to learn the Arts, excite students about learning, and facilitate the learning process. Further, teachers often try to expose students to different mediums that their newfound skills can be applied. The Vermont Millennium Arts Partnership (VT-MAP) is an Internet-based arts education program that, through the use of the latest technologies, is working to facilitate student learning through an online exchange among students, teachers, artists, musicians, and other professionals. Classroom involvement in VT-MAP exposes students to the art and musical creations of their peers, the language of critique in the Arts, the critique of their work by professional artists, and the creative possibilities available through the use of technology.

VT-MAP is a program of the Vermont Arts Council, in conjunction with the Vermont MIDI Project, ARTT (Artists Responding Through Technology), Vermont Young Playwrights Online (Vermont Stage Company), the Vermont Alliance for Arts Education, the WEB Project, and the Vermont Department of Education. Funding is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce – Technology Opportunities Program, with other funding coming from the state, corporate interests, and private citizens (VTMAP, 2000).

This study was conducted to help the Millennium Arts Partnership assess the Vermont public's perception of the importance of the arts in education. The goals of the study were to:

1. *Ascertain the level of support in Vermont for art education in general;*
2. *Determine the awareness of Vermont residents of the Vermont Millennium Arts Partnership;*
3. *Find out how much initial support there is to have an Internet-based arts program extended across the state;*
4. *Investigate how demographic characteristics might play a role in whether or not a person is aware of or supports arts education;*
5. *Investigate whether a prior awareness of the Millennium Arts Partnership influences support for its expansion;*
6. *Establish a baseline of data to measure change in the Vermont public's perception of the importance of the arts in education.*

Several questions were developed by CRS personnel in conjunction with VT-MAP administrators, to meet the goals listed above. These questions were included in the Vermonter Poll 2000, a representative survey of the Vermont population, conducted in February 2000 by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. A series of descriptive and prescriptive statistical analyses were conducted to determine Vermont public's perception and opinions about arts education.

### **Data and Methods**

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The data used in this study was collected by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. The questions concerning VT-MAP were asked as part of the Center for Rural Studies' annual "Vermont Poll." The poll was conducted between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., beginning on February 14, 2000 and ending two weeks later on February 24, 2000. The poll was conducted at the University of Vermont using the computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system. The sample for the poll was drawn through random digit dialing and used all of the telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as a sampling frame. Only registered voters over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont.

There were 697 respondents to the Vermont Poll. The median age of respondents was 51. The median income for respondents was between \$35,001 and \$50,000. Also, the median respondent had some college education but no degree. Throughout the testing the sample was weighted using "geographic weight" to ensure that the sample was representative of the actual population.

The Vermont Poll asked three questions in regard to arts education in Vermont. The interview schedule asked the questions as follows:

*-How would you rate the importance of an arts education for young people in Vermont?*

*-Are you aware that Internet-based arts education programs, such as the Millennium Arts Partnership exist in Vermont?*

*-Do you think Internet-based arts education programs should be extended to all young people in Vermont's schools?*

The first question allowed the responses, "Very important", "Important", "Neutral", "Not important" and "Not at all important." The next two questions could be answered with "yes" or "no". Options were given to the interviewer in case a respondent refused to answer a particular question or did not know the answer.

The following statistical analysis was completed through the use of the software package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Initially, a descriptive analysis of the data was conducted to provide the frequency of responses given to each individual question. It was expected that there would be a large amount of support for art programs in general and a low amount of knowledge about VT-MAP. There was uncertainty of the level of support for an Internet-based arts education to be extended to all young people in Vermont's schools.

Second, a prescriptive analysis was conducted to examine how the demographics of gender, income, education, family size, number of children, employment, and geographic location play a role in the awareness and support of arts education. It was hypothesized that the major demographic influences would be education and number of children. These hypotheses were based on the idea that people with children would be more likely to have heard about Internet-based arts programs for schools and that they would support programs that would give their children a better education in the Arts. It was also assumed that people who have achieved a

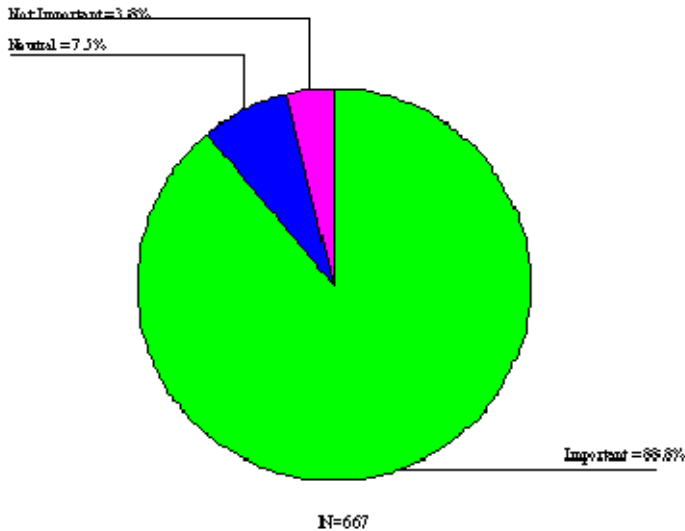
college degree or more would be more likely to value an arts education compared to a less educated person.

Furthermore, the prescriptive analysis examined the hypothesis that people with prior awareness of Internet-based arts programs would be more likely to support their expansion. The possibility that support for arts education in general would lead to support for Internet-based art programs was also examined.

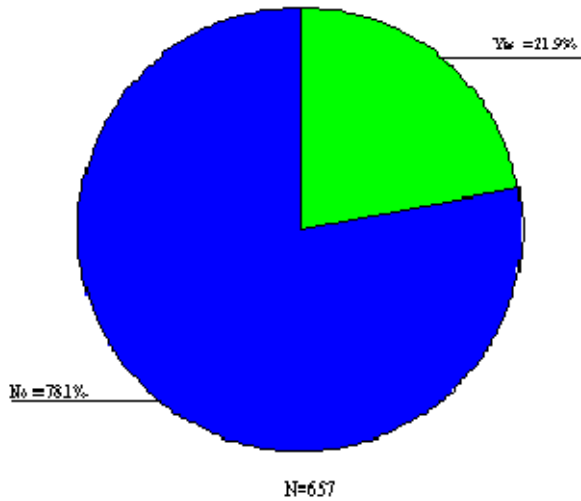
## Results

The analysis began by determining the distributions of the three questions. The results of this analysis is depicted in Figures 1-3.

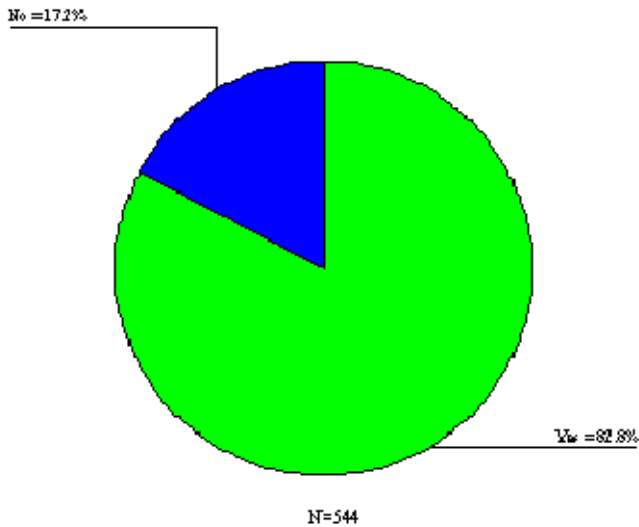
*Figure 1: How would you rate the importance of an arts education for young people in Vermont?*



*Figure 2: Are you aware that Internet-based arts education programs, such as Millennium Arts Partnership, exist in Vermont?*



*Figure 3: Do you think Internet-based arts education programs should be extended to all young people in Vermont's schools?*



The next step in the analysis was to investigate how demographic characteristics may have played a role in a person's awareness or support for art education in general and in particular the Millennium Arts Partnership. Demographic characteristics of gender, income, education, family size, number of children, employment, and geographic location.

Education seemed to be the most influential factor in a person's support for arts education, awareness of Internet-based art education, and support for expanding Internet-based art education to all Vermont schools.

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- *People with at least some college education were more likely to think that an arts education is important (93.9%) than those that had not received at least some college education (85.1%) (p# .01).*
- *People with at least some college education were more likely to have heard of Internet-based arts programs such as the Vermont Millennium Arts Partnership (25.3%) than those that had not received at least some college education (19.5%) (p# .05).*
- *People with at least some college education had a higher likelihood of supporting the expansion of Internet-based arts programs (85.1%) than those that had not received at least some college education (79.6%) (p# .01).*

Income has the only other significant and somewhat meaning influence on whether a person supports extending Internet-based arts education.

- *People at or above the median income in Vermont were more likely to support extending Internet-based arts education to all the schools in Vermont (86.0%) than those below median income (80.0%) (p# .10)*

None of the other demographic characteristics had any significant and meaningful influence. Overall, respondents hold a high perception of the importance of the arts in education and supported extending Internet-based arts education throughout Vermont.

The final section of analysis included a comparison of a person's awareness of Internet-based arts programs with both their support for arts education in general and their support for expanding Millennium Arts Partnership to all schools in Vermont. No correlation was found between awareness of Internet-based arts education and a person's support of art education in general. However, a slight connection was found between awareness of Internet-based arts education and the belief that such a program should be expanded to all schools in Vermont.

- *People who were aware of Internet-based arts education were more likely to support the idea of extending the Millennium Arts Partnership to all Vermont schools (86.9%) than those people who were not aware (81.3%) (p# .10).*

The results of the comparison or responses to demographic groups and the comparison between awareness and support must be carefully used. Though several of the findings are statistically significant, an overwhelming support suggests that Vermonters support arts education in general and the expansion of Internet-based arts education programs. Several conclusion can be made on the basis of these results.

## **Conclusions**

The data from this study provides a baseline of the Vermont public's perception of the importance of the arts in education and awareness and support for Internet based arts education

programs, such as VT-MAP in Vermont schools. Follow-up data will be collected during the Vermonter Poll 2000 to measure change in this perspective.

The data shows that there is widespread public support in Vermont for arts education in Vermont schools. Almost 90% of Vermont residents support arts education regardless of demographics. People who have achieved higher education are more likely to be in favor of art education. Further, people at or above the median income in Vermont are more likely to support extending Internet-based arts education to all schools in Vermont. Surprisingly, whether a person has children or not does not seem to influence support for arts education.

There is, however, a low level of public awareness of Internet-based arts education in Vermont. Less than 22% of Vermonters have heard about VT-MAP or any other Internet-based arts programs. This may be due to the fact that VT-MAP is a relatively new project, as it was initiated in 1998 and brought into ten classrooms in Vermont in 1999. In spite of this lack of awareness of Internet-based arts programs there is still a large amount of public support for the idea of such a program being extended to all of the schools in Vermont. *Almost 83% of Vermont residents support expanding the Internet-based arts programs to all of the schools in the state.* This is a positive finding as a goal of VT-MAP is to increase by 23 the number of participating classrooms using computers and the Internet technologies by July 2001. Increasing the number of classrooms involved in the project may increase the level of public awareness of, and support for Arts education and VT-MAP.

Based on these results there seems to be a need for an increase in the state-wide spread of information on Internet-based arts education. While, awareness of such programs is low the potential for support is high. The results suggests that Vermonters would be supportive of extending VT-MAP into their local school systems and thus further increase awareness of VT-MAP and support for Arts education. As the project continues to expand, further state-wide support for VT-MAP may be gained by increasing support at the local community level. This may take place by classroom and school advocacy of the project, through public presentations/demonstrations of the project, concerts and/or exhibits that display examples of student work, etc. Vermonters seem to see the pressing need for the states children to have a comprehensive arts education and seem to think that using the Internet to assist in that education is a viable option.