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STEVE ADUBATO, host:

The arts in New Jersey schools. Are we making the grade? Next on CAUCUS.

Announcer: Funding for this edition of CAUCUS NEW JERSEY has been provided by The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, supporting those values that contribute to a society more humane and a world more livable.

Offscreen Voice: Good evening, Rutherford, New Jersey.

LAURA LITTLE reporting:

It's just over 30 miles from Edison to the Meadowlands, but Bon Jovi keyboardist David Bryan has come light-years since graduating from JP Stevens High School in 1980.

Mr. DAVID BRYAN (Keyboardist, Bon Jovi): In fifth grade I was taking violin, trumpet, and then at seven they took me for piano lessons and I put my hands down and I stunk.

LITTLE: Undeterred, he studied piano privately for the next 13 years. At school he played both instruments, and that's where he met band director Andy DeNicola.

Mr. ANDY DeNICOLA (Band Director, JP Stevens High School): He played piano for us in jazz band, he played trumpet for us in concert band, really a nice kid.

LITTLE: Andy DeNicola has been band director at JP Stevens since 1977, and, in his words, it's a topnotch program.

Mr. DeNICOLA: We have three concert bands. There are students that are just involved in marching band. We also have two performing jazz ensembles.

LITTLE: And that's not all. Others sing in choir. Still others draw, paint and sculpt. The arts are a high priority in Edison. JP Stevens High School added a whole fine arts wing in 1990.

Mr. DeNICOLA: We're teaching history. We're teaching math skills. We're teaching language skills. They've got to come up with a vocabulary of musical terms.

LITTLE: Students learn about playing together in harmony and in sync. They learn about being on stage, and they learn about goals.

Mr. BRYAN: If I mess up or I don't learn that, it's whose fault? It's my fault. And then vice versa, when I do know it well, when I do know that, I can really nail that, I feel good about myself.

Unidentified Teacher: (To dance students) Try it again.

Mr. ROBERT MORRISON (Chairman, Music for All Foundation): We teach our

children the arts as a part of their basic education because of the skills that it provides them to be successful in life. Things like teamwork, problem-solving, being able to work independently and be self-directed.

LITTLE: Robert Morrison is chairman of the Music for All Foundation.

Mr. MORRISON: A survey of 1,000 principals in four states showed that nearly 42 percent of those principals were planning to reduce or eliminate instruction in the arts because of their focus on meeting the testing mandates as a result of No Child Left Behind.

LITTLE: This is the crux of the problem for schools like Carteret High School, less than 10 minutes away from JP Stevens. It has a diverse student body, many the children of recent immigrants.

Mr. ALAN FOSSA (Music Director, Carteret High School): We have a lot of kids moving in that might not be on--on par academically where they should be.

LITTLE: Alan Fossa has been music director at Carteret High School for 30 years. He is a dedicated, talented teacher. His students are bright and willing. But there are more pressing priorities.

Mr. FOSSA: These kids have got to learn how to read. The more people that you need for supplemental instruction, it--it takes away from being able to hire, you know, another arts teacher.

LITTLE: Music students at Carteret play in what was once the woodshop. The instrument locker across the hall is in a former shower room. Carteret has no practice rooms, no choir teacher, no assistant band directors. Most of the school's instruments are older than the students who play them. But, still, Alan Fossa carries on.

Mr. FOSSA: We have wind ensemble. We have a concert band, marching band, the jazz ensemble and then we also have what we call a show band.

LITTLE: The students carry on, too.

Unidentified Student: I'm the first person to actually play an instrument in my family. They support me, never complain when I'm practicing.

LITTLE: But the hard reality is primarily one of dollars and cents.

Mr. FOSSA: You can buy a trumpet for two, \$300, a student horn. And then you can buy a Bach trumpet that's going to cost you 1200, \$1400. It makes a big difference.

LITTLE: The arts are required as part of New Jersey's core curriculum content standards. But mandates don't necessarily mean action.

Mr. MORRISON: How will we ever know if we have arts for all of our children if we don't even take the time to go out and measure?

LITTLE: To help answer this question, the Music for All Foundation has linked up with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the department of education, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey to conduct the first state-wide survey to gauge the status of arts education in our public schools.

Mr. MORRISON: Every school will be responsible for providing information about their arts education programs.

LITTLE: The census project will quantify programs. A final report will be issued in the fall.

Mr. MORRISON: This is a national model. This has never been done in any other states to this degree, where we're doing a building by building census.

LITTLE: David Bryan hasn't forgotten his roots at JP Stevens, and his message to students is simple.

Mr. BRYAN: Never stop dreaming. I go, 'I'm a kid who grew up in Edison, New Jersey. You can do it. Don't let anybody ever tell you you can't.'

ADUBATO: Welcome to THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN NEW JERSEY, a very special CAUCUS series looking at the vital role the arts play in our communities and our schools. I'm Steve Adubato.

Joining me to talk more about arts education are Dale Schmid, visual and performing arts coordinator at the New Jersey State Department of Education; Robin Middleman, art education coordinator at the New Jersey State Council on the Arts; Arielle Smelkinson is a junior at Westfield High School who's very active in the arts in her school and in her community; and finally, Freda Rhodes, who is a head--excuse me, the head art teacher for the New Brunswick school system and also an art teacher in the Paul Robeson Community Theme School of the Arts. Boy is that a tongue twister.

I want to thank all of you for joining us to talk about the arts in our schools. You know, we saw this Carteret situation. I have to ask you, Dale, how common is that Carteret situation, where they were--they wanted to do the right thing, but, boy, the equipment just wasn't there, the facilities weren't there? How common is that?

Mr. DALE SCHMID (Visual & Performing Arts Coordinator, New Jersey State Department of Education): Well, truthfully, we don't know, and that seems like an odd question--or an odd way to start...

ADUBATO: Are we going to find out any time soon?

Mr. SCHMID: But we are going to find out soon. Bob Morrison mentioned the survey project, the census project, and that's a very, very important first step for us.

ADUBATO: The census project?

Mr. SCHMID: The census project. For the first time, we will be making a--building-by-building query of all the schools in the state, asking who's teaching, what arts offerings are--are being provided to students under what kind of conditions and length of time. So we will be able to get an accurate picture of what's really going on, what's the landscape really look like out there.

ADUBATO: By the way, the arts education, if you will, census that was being talked about, we're going to provide our resource guide information. Reach out to us. You see the number on your screen. Also, we're going to provide

some online information. I assure you once that survey is done, the information is out, we'll provide it to you.

(Graphic on screen)

(973) 233-9886

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State of the Arts Resource Guide

ADUBATO: Let me ask you--Robin, this whole question of the census report, I--I'm interested in the disparity question between rich and poor. Will that be examined, as well?

Ms. ROBIN MIDDLEMAN (New Jersey State Council on the Arts): We're going to be gathering a lot of data where we can make correlations and determinations. That's--that's the power of this. The power is in the data. We'll know, in each school building, what is happening, we'll know what the arts budget is for the first time, building by building, district by district--or probably district by district, I guess.

ADUBATO: What happens when you find this out? What do you do with the information?

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Well, that's the key to the way this survey is being carried out. It's the very first time we know in the state, and perhaps nationally, that a department of education--state department of education survey is being conducted in partnership--this is a public and private project. So, for the first time, we're very, very pleased that the department of education has agreed to do this planned arts education survey in partnership with the state arts council, the Dodge Foundation, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey.

ADUBATO: That--that's great, and--and I'm sure it's going to be a national model. What I'm trying to get at is what's supposed to happen with the information.

Let me ask you, Arielle. What should happen with that information?

Ms. ARIELLE SMELKINSON (Student Involved in the Arts) : Well, I only wish that after getting every--that information that some changes could be made, because I know at Westfield, personally, we're a somewhat, you know, affluent neighborhood.

ADUBATO: You're pretty affluent.

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yeah, and we have a generally good school system, and so you'd expect that we'd have a large budget for the arts, and we don't. And that's a problem.

ADUBATO: How do you know it's not a large budget for the arts? You're comparing it to what, sports, athletics?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, we don't get what we need. And I know that there was a vote in the school board for new lighting and sound. It was about five years ago. And we've just gotten that money. And...

ADUBATO: You just got that? What do you really need? Be more specific.

Beyond those things, what kinds of things do you need, because you love the arts, it's had a great impact on your life, and obviously, we're going to talk more about some of the benefits of--of what young people get through the arts in their educational experience. What do you need specifically?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, we need lots of teachers and outlets and classes to take and options because the arts is such a broad category. I, myself, am into theater, but there's--there's music, as we saw on that film...

ADUBATO: Taped piece, right.

Ms. SMELKINSON: ...and there's art, you know, visual arts, and when it gets overshadowed by things like sports, it--it sometimes is forgotten.

ADUBATO: Does that bother you?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: It does bother you?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: Let's talk about some of the benefits, some of the benefits, the payoffs. Someone watching, saying, 'You know what? We have a 5 to \$6 billion budget deficit. It would be nice if we could do these things in our schools, but come on. You can't really do the arts.' Someone might be saying that. You say, what are the payoffs? What are the benefits, tangible, for our kids?

Ms. FREDA RHODES (Head Art Teacher New Brunswick, New Jersey, School District): Well, I find that students learn in many different ways, and sometimes, through the arts is another way of--of--a way of learning.

ADUBATO: How do you do it in New Brunswick?

Ms. RHODES: How do--well, I don't speak the--the...(unintelligible)...in school.

ADUBATO: Sure.

Ms. RHODES: We have a special program that's different from the other schools that we infuse the arts into the curriculum. And the arts sort of drive the curriculum so that we--we still teach the art skills and concepts without losing that integrity, but we really tie it in very closely to what the students are doing in the class.

ADUBATO: I've learned this through the art of doing a program like this, that if--until you come up with a concrete example, people are like, 'Huh? I don't really know what that means.' Give us a concrete example of you're talking about.

Ms. RHODES: Let's see. Right now, we have a resident artist who's doing creative writing with the students. and we have another artist who's coming in and doing photography. I'm working with both of them. And what we're going to do is the students will use the photographs that they take as picture prompts to create stories.

ADUBATO: Right.

Ms. RHODES: And this will prepare them for the testing that goes on in the state.

ADUBATO: So you're talking about the testing, the core curriculum that is being required, right, the mastering, if you will, this body of information, this body of knowledge? The state is saying you must do that. But in the taped piece we saw, there's a difference between mandates, the state mandate, and action, fair to say?

Mr. SCHMID: Fair to say.

ADUBATO: How do you measure it.

Mr. SCHMID: Well, policy always leads and the implementation lags for a lot of the reasons we've talked about, economic issues. Acculturation issues, telling--selling people on the importance of the arts, like you were looking for some concrete examples.

ADUBATO: Yeah.

Mr. SCHMID: So...

ADUBATO: That people can relate to.

Mr. SCHMID: ...if you want to look at academic achievement, for example...

ADUBATO: Right.

Mr. SCHMID: ...there's been a lot of talk in recent years and a lot of study about the corollaries between academic achievement in language arts/literacy and math as opposed to what opportunities they've had in the arts. So you look at last year's SAT scores, on average, kids who have had music two days a week score 100 points--80 points higher. If you look at language arts/literacy, for those kids who've also been involve din theater, not surprisingly, the SAT scores are on average 100 points higher. That's pretty significant.

ADUBATO: Very significant. By the way, is it more significant for athletes, I'm curious, to have that information? Do you have any sense of that, Arielle?

Ms. SMELKINSON: No, I don't.

ADUBATO: OK. I'm just curious. Some might be wondering what this correlates.

Mr. SCHMID: Well, Freda tapped into something else, too, in terms of the way kids know. So when you're talking about multiple intelligences, their school has--happens to be unique. They're one of a series of pilot schools that was teaching in and through the arts. So they're always providing context. But kids also learn in different ways and have different intelligences.

ADUBATO: Well, let me play this out for a second. In preparation for the show, I read about some history courses. And help me on this. How could you use the arts as a powerful, enhancing, if you will, tool? If you're teaching history, where do the arts come into it? I want someone to play that out for

me. How--how could that work?

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Well, I know in our artisan residency program, where professional practicing artist go into schools to team up with teachers to help them carry out their--their school-based goals, there's been many exciting examples of an artist going in and with the teacher and the students doing research into their own history, there's Logan Township School in Swedesboro, had what they called--and is still going on--ongoing, the Logan History Project, which started with two residency artists, one a writer, one a visual artist, coming in and working side by side with the teachers. And together, an entire group of students went out and explored and claimed their own history. One of the reasons why the teachers wanted the residency was because Logan--Swedesboro is a growing--a growing community and they were afraid that the new students were losing the center of the town and the history. So through this artisan residence project with the art teacher and the English teacher and the history, they reclaimed their town history. The culminating event was they built a three-dimensional tour of Logan Township history and as a result, it's an ongoing curriculum and the Logan Historic Commission actually, which had been a dormant--started up again from the excitement of this community arts project. So that was history, English, writing, all with the arts.

ADUBATO: That's the kind of example I'm talking about. And by the way, it is that kind of example and others that we will list in our resource guide. Please call the telephone number on your screen. This series is called The State of the Arts in New Jersey. One part is looking at arts in our schools, the other one looks at the arts in our communities. Obviously, there's some overlap, but reach out and we'll get you that information.

Arielle, let me ask you, you're a junior, OK?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: You love theater. It's been a part of your life for how long?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Since I was five or six so about a decade.

ADUBATO: OK.

You have been performing in school plays?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: What has it done for you?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Oh, well, especially since coming to the high school, the plays that we've done recently have been very, you know, historical.

ADUBATO: Such as?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Such as, my freshman year was "Evita," which taught about Argentinean history, which isn't, I guess, one of the more obscure ones, but...

ADUBATO: Also talked about strong women leaders, no?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes, of course, which was wonderful to learn about. But

last year was "Plain and Fancy," which is a musical about the Amish, so the cast got to learn about a culture that they wouldn't normally know about. And...

ADUBATO: From Evita Peron to the Amish?

Ms. SMELKINSON: To the Amish. And...

ADUBATO: I'm just trying to follow you here.

Ms. SMELKINSON: And this year was a big jump to the Holocaust and a play called "Ghetto," which is about the survival of the Jews in the ghetto. And now "Jesus Christ Superstar." So we're encompassing...

ADUBATO: Were you in all of them?

Ms. SMELKINSON: I--I was in a few of them, not all.

ADUBATO: What has this done for you?

Ms. SMELKINSON: It's--well, I just love--the theater just enriches my life anyway. I love to learn through musicals, especially. There's so many that are based on historical events. And I've taken away so many things from things like this.

ADUBATO: And you also volunteer with the Paper Mill Playhouse. You're involved. Talk--talk about that experience because we have a very close relationship with them as well. What do you do there?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, I started taking classes when I was seven, eight, and it's grown into a big community project and service. And now I'm in an educational production called "The Castaways," which is about orphan trains back at the beginning of the century.

ADUBATO: Have you ever gone out to actually perform for community groups.

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: Where?

Ms. SMELKINSON: That's what we do. We go to schools and nursing homes. And there's a cerebral palsy center that's always an annual trip, and that's great because we get to meet the kids and interact with them and sometimes they sing along, which is wonderful.

ADUBATO: You know, it's interesting. I asked the question, what has it done for you, and for a lot of people watching right now, you're 16 or 17?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Sixteen.

ADUBATO: Sixteen. One of the things it may have done for you without you even realizing is allowed you to be in this program where there's no editing, there's no going back. I don't mean to create more pressure for you. But this is a live, taped--you live television situation and not a lot of 16-year-old could handle that. To what degree is Arielle's ability to just project and be here and be a strong young woman, just--or a strong young person, just really being very impressive, how much is that is a product of

being in the arts?

Mr. SCHMID: I'd say a majority of it.

Ms. RHODES: I know.

ADUBATO: Really?

Ms. RHODES: Public speaking and...

Mr. SCHMID: Definitely. Absolutely.

ADUBATO: You see that as well?

Ms. RHODES: Oh, yeah, I see that. It just makes her comfortable in front of people, able to project herself well. Even though I'm a visual artist, but I see and deal with all the other arts from my school.

ADUBATO: Sure. What does that do for...

Mr. SCHMID: But there are...

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

Mr. SCHMID: ...the other kind of intangibles...

ADUBATO: Yeah.

Mr. SCHMID: ...that you know, you were talking about, what does the arts do for you?

ADUBATO: Yeah. What's the payoff?

Mr. SCHMID: You know, it's not that our goal is to make artists of everyone, although you know, we've got a budding artist on our hands here.

ADUBATO: Right.

Mr. SCHMID: But those kind of job-embedded skills, the ability to communicate, also feed into the notion of the creative economy, which is a conversation we've been having a lot lately about, you know, we're no longer in an information age. Also, as our economy shifts from a technological base to an idea-based economy, that's what we need is people that can act on their feet, that can think creatively, that can present ideas boldly. Sometimes, they're, you know--it may not be--if it's something--anytime you're doing something different, it may not be...

ADUBATO: Right.

Mr. SCHMID: ..readily accepted but you know, young women like this, you know, that can present themselves clearly...

ADUBATO: And it builds self-confidence.

Mr. SCHMID: Absolutely.

Ms. RHODES: Definitely.

ADUBATO: And it builds self-confidence. I'm also thinking about some young people who may not readily join clubs involved in sports, be the most, quote unquote "popular" kids. I'm not even sure what that means anymore. But they're--they hang around with a lot of other kids and they just socially are very comfortable in school. I'm wondering to what degree the arts provide opportunities for kids to be with other kids who may not want to be with that so-called "in crowd"? I don't even know what that means. I wasn't in it, so maybe that's why I don't know what it means. To what degree does it offer opportunities for those kids?

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: The arts are essential--the arts are essential to being human. And so kids who don't fit into what's been laid out for them is--are lost. So if--if the arts are not in the schools, those kids feel left out unless they find their own venues and avenues. I mean, here's a young woman who has a powerful need to have the arts in her life and she's so passionate about it and her--I know she has support from her family. But she's doing whatever she can to fill that need on her own.

ADUBATO: Right.

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: and I think it's essential. We always say, and we--we truly believe, that an education is not complete without the arts, for many reasons, including...

ADUBATO: It's not--it's not a frill, it's not luxury, it's not an add-on.

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: No.

ADUBATO: It's at the core...

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Yeah.

ADUBATO: ...which is why it's the core curriculum.

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Absolutely.

ADUBATO: Arielle, let me ask you, how do you believe you are--well, I'm not going to ask that. I was going to say, how do you think you're perceived by others. To what degree do others see you as, 'Hey, she's a really talented young person in the arts and she's going to be a star one day'? Is that's what's going on for you?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, I'd like to think that.

ADUBATO: That would be nice, right?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yeah. I've gotten that in the past. If my peers think that of me, that's the best I can do.

ADUBATO: Let me ask you this. Do you tend to hang around with other kids in school, young people in school, young adults, who are involved in the arts?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, some of them, yes, but I'm also, you know, there are the academics at school, too, so I'm with kids in my classes who aren't necessarily in the arts because the arts draw everyone, all sorts of people. So if I'm in a cast of a show, maybe there'll be a few people in that class

who are in my math class. But I--you meet all these different sorts of people who you wouldn't normally hang out with.

ADUBATO: What is your goal?

Ms. SMELKINSON: My goal?

ADUBATO: Yeah.

Ms. SMELKINSON: Well, success. You mean theatrically?

ADUBATO: Define--well, yeah. Define it. Do you see yourself having a career in the arts, in theater?

Ms. SMELKINSON: I would like to.

ADUBATO: That's the plan?

Ms. SMELKINSON: Yes.

ADUBATO: To what degree--this is interesting because we're talking about it gives you self-confidence, you can project, you can speak in public, you're more confident and all those things. But for Arielle, she wants to make a career of it. To what degree are our schools actually helping to help promote and foster young people who not only have a talent but the ambition and drive to do that?

Mr. SCHMID: Well, we were talking about this in the green room before.

ADUBATO: Is it actually green in that room because I've been hearing that for years. No. I'm sorry, go ahead. It is the green room.

Mr. SCHMID: It is the green room but.

ADUBATO: I digress. I apologize.

Mr. SCHMID: The--the goal of the--our stand is for arts for all kids is not necessarily to channel them into career tracks. However, we do have specialized programs that do concentrate on the needs of kids who do want to go into careers. We have a series of sch--there are 36 schools right now in the state that are occupationally approved that have career track programs. And those are the ones that are actually running a conservatory kind of foundation that is preparing kids for the field.

ADUBATO: Interesting. Freda, are there actually high schools that are dedicated exclusively to the arts?

Ms. RHODES: Oh, yes. We just visited a school in Howell, a Howell performing arts school.

ADUBATO: Howell, down at the Jersey Shore?

Ms. RHODES: Uh-huh.

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

Ms. RHODES: And they take from all different counties, I believe, to create

a performing arts school. They focus on--on the performing arts. Their visual and music programs are not as big because they would have to take off too much from the standard high school off the top and that'd leave the high school with nothing, so.

ADUBATO: Let me ask you this. In the scheme of things, as--as--we have a couple of minutes left, as fiscal times get tougher in the state of New Jersey, just in governmental overall, and the governor and others talk about sacrifice and pain across the board, particularly state funding to local school districts, to what degree are the programs we're talking about that we say have these tremendous benefits that people can derive, students can derive, to what extent are they vulnerable?

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Well, they sort of have been vulnerable for a long time and everyone thinks it's going to...

ADUBATO: Are they more vulnerable now?

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Well, with the standards--with the standards...

ADUBATO: Are you guys like--there's a telepathic thing going on over here.

Ms. MIDDLEMAN: Well, because we work closely together, we're thinking about this all the time.

ADUBATO: Are you deciding about an answer to go with here? Five to \$6 million budget gap, governor says everything has to be on the table. What I'm asking is if we're talking about arts in our schools and then the payoff, the benefits, you have young women like Arielle who's just terrific, are they more vulnerable than other programs?

Mr. SCHMID: I don't think so. I think we actually have a lot of momentum right now. and despite what, you know, we have a lot of conversations about, you know, how the arts are at risk and they're being cut and so forth, again, feeding back into that conversation about the creative economy and looking into the future and what the training needs are for the future generations, if you look at how places--we have a number of towns, Newark being one of them, that have used the arts as an economic recover engine. You know, all these things are starting to get traction whereas we wouldn't have had these conversations a couple years ago about how important the arts are to the whole community. And so I think it's a hopeful time. I do.

ADUBATO: We're almost out of time. Just 20 seconds left. Go ahead.

Mr. SCHMID: Well, also the fact that the arts are included in No Child Left Behind at the federal level.

ADUBATO: Right. Federal legislation.

Mr. SCHMID: Federal legislation. It is including.

ADUBATO: Which is not insignificant.

Mr. SCHMID: That is very, very significant.

ADUBATO: Well, Dale, on that note, let me just say this. the other half of our program will look at the arts in our community. I promise you it will not

be the last program we do on this subject.

Great job, everyone. You're good. You're very good.

Announcer: If you would like more information on this program or if you'd like to express an opinion, e-mail us at info@caucusnj.org. And visit us on the Web at www.caucusnj.com.

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