

The Houston Chronicle

August 22, 2006 Tuesday  
3 STAR EDITION

## Music and dance will join math and science; **HISD plan will blend fine arts into the core subjects**

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**SECTION:** B; Pg. 1 MetFront

**LENGTH:** 517 words

The 12 young children from Codwell Elementary School slid their bows against the violin strings in unison - fast, then slow, then fast again - playing Ray Charles' Hit the Road Jack. They stood in three rows, turned slightly to their right, wearing white button-down shirts and navy pants for the boys, skirts and white tights for the girls. Retired teacher Conrad Johnson, donning a black blazer and thick-rimmed glasses, accompanied them on the saxophone. Houston Independent School District Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra sat in the front row. "Ladies and gentlemen, that's a tough act to follow," he said later. The performance set the stage for Saavedra's announcement Monday afternoon that the district is launching a \$1.75 million effort to expand its fine arts offerings in hopes of boosting student performance. The money, Saavedra said, will help train classroom teachers, especially at the elementary school level, to incorporate music, dance and other arts activities into core subjects such as math and science. The district also hopes to give more students access to musical instruments. Research indicates student involvement in the arts improves school attendance, behavior and performance, Saavedra said. But the arts often take back stage to core subjects, particularly math, reading and language arts as states and the federal government attach importance to standardized tests. Some public schools are choosing to pull struggling students out of arts classes to receive extra tutoring in math or reading. In HISD, individual school principals have leeway over their budgets, so the arts education students receive varies greatly from campus to campus, according to Terry Abbott, spokesman for the district. But the new funding should help bring the arts back into the spotlight, he said. James M. Clarke, the executive director of the Houston-based Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education, said he has seen public schools erode their arts education over the last two decades as the state adopted strict testing accountability, and the federal No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002. "There have been several studies done and overwhelmingly, communities want the arts in the schools," said Clarke, who served as director of arts for the Aldine Independent School District for 25 years. "But when it gets down to the bottom line, these kids have to pass the test, period. And they're pulling kids out of the arts." "They're giving them more and more work sheets and the brain doesn't learn that way," Clarke said. Tahchiona Smith, a fourth-grader at Codwell Elementary School who has played the violin for three years, doesn't need research to tell her the benefits. "You go somewhere in life if you play the violin," Tahchiona, 9, said after performing. Much of the funding for HISD's arts plan will come from grants and private funding, specifically \$850,000 from the U.S.

Department of Education, \$800,000 from the Robert and Janice McNair Foundation and \$100,000 from the Houston Symphony. Local artists interested in helping should e-mail [artspartners@houstonisd.org](mailto:artspartners@houstonisd.org)