

Choir membership improves grades

An estimated 46.6 million adults and children sing regularly in choruses, and a new study by Chorus America has found that doing so leads to social and academic benefits.

Chorus America first studied the impact of choral singing in 2003. This year's study, "How Children, Adults and Communities Benefit From Choruses: The Chorus Impact Study," was released last week. The organization, which has more than 1,600 members, is holding its annual conference this week in Philadelphia.

More than one in five households have at least one singing family member, making choral singing the most popular form of participation in the performing arts for both adults and children.

That's good news because singing in one of the 270,000 choruses in the United States, such as a church choir or school or community ensemble correlates strongly with such qualities as teamwork, discipline and greater civic involvement, the study found.

"The prototype of a choral singer is how Americans aspire to see themselves today: as active, involved citizens with a broad range of creative interests and concerns for their communities," said Chorus America President and Chief Executive Officer Ann Meier Baker.

This year's study included a new component that explicitly examined the effects choral singing has on childhood development. The results show children who sing in choirs display many of the enhanced social skills found in adult singers. Additionally, both parents and educators attribute a significant proportion of a child's academic success to singing in a choir.

The major findings of child singers include:

- The majority of parents surveyed said many skills increased after their child joined a chorus. Seventy-one percent said their child has become more self-confident, 70 percent said their child's self-discipline has improved, and 69 percent said their child's memory skills have improved.

- More than 80 percent of educators surveyed — across multiple academic disciplines — agreed with parents that choir participation can enhance numerous aspects of a child's social development and academic success. Educators also observed that children who sing are better participants in group activities, have better emotional expression and exhibit better emotional management.

- Ninety percent of educators said they thought singing in a choir can keep some students engaged in school who otherwise

might be lost — this was particularly true of educators (94 percent) who described the ethnicity of their schools as diverse.

- Children who participate in a chorus get significantly better grades than children who have never sung in a choir. Forty-five percent of parents whose children sing said their child receives "all or mostly A's" in mathematics (compared with 38 percent of non-choir parents) and 54 percent get "all or mostly A's" in English and other language arts classes (compared with 43 percent).

The major findings of adult singers include:

- Choral singers exhibit higher levels of civic involvement, with choristers almost three times more likely to be officers or committee members of local community organizations, such as the PTA.

- Seventy-eight percent of choral singers indicated they "at least sometimes" volunteer their time in their community, while just 50 percent of the general public say the same.

- Seventy-four percent of choral singers agreed or strongly agreed that singing in a chorus has helped them become better team leaders or team participants in other areas of their lives. Nearly two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that being in a chorus has helped them socialize better in other areas of their lives.

- Choral singers donate 2.5 times more money to philanthropic organizations than the general public.

- Ninety-six percent of choral singers surveyed who are eligible voters said they vote regularly in national and local elections. Just 70 percent of the general public cites the same level of participation.

- Civic engagement also extends to patronage of other art forms, with choral singers at least twice as likely to attend theater, opera and orchestra performances and to visit museums and art galleries.

"The data in this report suggests that it would be a mistake not to leverage the benefits that choruses bring to children, adults and the communities they serve," said Chorus America Chairman Todd Estabrook. "Simply put, if you're searching for a group of talented, engaged, and generous community members, you would do well to start with a chorus."

Source: Chorus America

Write about what's happening in your community.

Submissions must be exclusive to The Washington Times and sent via email to citizennews@washingtontimes.com. Please include a brief bio and your name, address and daytime telephone number. We prefer submissions that are 350-700 words.