

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

How a Vision for Arts Education Helped Transform Leisure City K-8 Center

Executive Brief

This brief summarizes the findings from Arts Access Miami Case Study No. 1, examining how arts education helped transform Leisure City K-8 Center.

The Challenge

When Principal Walter Hall arrived in 2019, Leisure City K-8 faced challenges common in high-need communities: limited elective offerings, attendance barriers, and family mobility. The school needed more than test scores—it needed an identity that would attract families and give students reasons to engage.

The Transformation

Through the partnership of Arts Access Miami and the school leadership, Leisure City K-8 transitioned from a STEM to a STEAM School with expanded music opportunities, and launched Florida's first Mariachi Magnet program. This transformed the school's identity to one that now attracts families to enroll their children in, and galvanized the school-spirit, where students are more connected to their academic experiences and enjoy attending school.

Key Outcomes:

The percentage of students reporting that they liked attending Leisure City K-8 increased to

100% from 48% in 2023–24

The percentage of seventh-grade students scoring at Level 3 or above in Mathematics increased

from **43%** to **75%**

The percentage of students achieving Level 3 or above in English Language Arts (ELA) increased

from **39%** to **49%**

Leisure City K-8 students in third grade reached a

100% promotion rate, up from 86.6% in 2018–2019.

Recognition

In 2024-2025, Florida TaxWatch, using a data-driven process, named Leisure City one of the state's 15 most successful high-risk public schools. The same year, Principal Hall was named MDCPS 2025 Principal of the Year by the Dade Association of School Administrators.

Why It Matters To Families

The clearest sign of trust is a family's choice. One Leisure City parent compared three private schools, a charter, and another public school before enrolling his child. "At the end of the day, we ended up making the decision that Leisure City K-8 was the best decision for us." His son, now in mariachi, practices at home and – in his father's words – "has more friends, communicates better, and is not as shy as he was before." In a market where families have more options than ever, a neighborhood public school winning that decision is powerful evidence of its value.

The Opportunity Ahead

Arts Access Miami is scaling the model that made Leisure City possible. Having grown from a pilot to more than 17,000 students across 88 schools, the initiative aims to reach 150 schools and 40,000 students each week in 2026-2027, in partnership with 30+ community arts organizations.

Invest in the Next Diamonds in the Rough

Behind every number is a story of a student, a family, and a school community. Arts Access Miami's Impact and Storytelling strategy uses data-driven case studies to show how access to arts education is transforming student experiences, building the capacity of arts and music organizations, strengthening schools and communities, and enhancing the arts ecosystem across Miami-Dade County. Through real stories supported by data, we are documenting a system being changed across Miami-Dade.

The Leisure City K-8 Center case study shows what sustained investment makes possible. We invite you to join us in investing in the next diamond in the rough. Whether you are a philanthropist, foundation leader, policymaker, principal, district partner, or community advocate, your leadership matters. Together, we can make Miami-Dade a national model for what public education can be when arts, data, leadership, and community investment come together.

Investing in arts education is investing in our collective future—in the young people who will lead it, the schools that will shape it, and the community ecosystem that will sustain it.

With gratitude,



Andrea Botero, PhD
Director of Impact & Storytelling, Arts Access Miami



[WATCH THE DOCUMENTARY](#)