A DANCE EDUCATION AND PERFORMANCE CENTER IN NEW YORK

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Introduction

Dance is one of the oldest and most natural forms of human expression. Long before people communicated through writing or formal language, they used movement to share emotion, tell stories, and connect with others. Throughout history, dance has appeared in nearly every culture, from ancient rituals and community celebrations to theatrical performances and social gatherings. In places like Egypt, Greece and India, dance was closely tied to religion, ceremony and storytelling. Over time, dance became a structured art form, especially in Europe during the Renaissance, when ballet emerged as a highly developed style. As cultures continued to interact and evolve, new forms such as modern dance, jazz, hip-hop, and contemporary dance appeared, reflecting shifts in society, identity, and creativity. Today, dance remains a universal language and form of expression, one that combines art, emotion, and design through the movement of the human body.

As both an art form and a mode of physical expression, dance integrates the body, mind and emotions in ways that few other activities can. This provides dancers with a uniquely holistic set of benefits. For dancers, these benefits are not only personally enriching but also essential to sustaining their artistic practice and over all wellbeing. Physically, dance is a powerful form of exercise that supports muscular strength, flexibility and coordination. Due to dancers having to move in multiple directions, balance for long periods of time and transition between dynamic postures, their training builds both fine motor control and full body stability. Along with that, dancing strengthens the heart, improves circulation and increases endurance, making it an effective way to promote long term cardiovascular fitness.[1] These physical benefits are especially significant for dancers whose art form demands endurance, precision, and

[1] Sara Lindberg, and Anisha Mansuri, "Benefits of Dance: 8 Benefits for Adults and Kids," *Healthline*, September 27, 2024, accessed October 16, 2025, https://www.healthline.com/health/fitness-exercise/benefits-of-dance

adaptability. Beyond its physical impact, dance has profound cognitive and mental health benefits. Studies have shown that dance enhances neuroplasticity which is the brain's ability to form new connections and reorganize itself in response to learning and experience.[2] Many dancers describe movement as a form of emotional release and self expression. It provides a space to process feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally, offering both therapeutic and creative benefits. A "UCLA Health study [by Kelsey Laird, PhD] shows conscious, or ecstatic, dance helps those struggling with depression and anxiety."[3] This emotional engagement contributes to self-confidence, body awareness, and positive self image, factors that are vital for performers whose bodies are central to their artistic identity. Additionally, dance fosters community and connection. Whether practiced in class, rehearsal, social setting, dance builds relationships and belonging, counteracting social isolation and strengthening mental health. The significance of these benefits lies in their interconnectedness. The integration of physical movement, mental focus, and emotional awareness, dance becomes both a form of self-care and a deeply human way of understanding oneself and the world.

Watching dance provides spectators with a range of psychological and emotional benefits that extend beyond simple enjoyment. Live performances, in particular, have been shown to evoke strong emotional and physiological responses. These responses are partly due to what neuroscientists call kinesthetic empathy, a phenomenon where viewers physically and emotionally feel the movement they see, activating parts of the brain associated with motor

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[2] WBHI Admin, "Dancing Improves Brain Health," *Women's Brain Health Initiative*, November 6, accessed October 13, 2025, https://womensbrainhealth.org/think-tank/great-minds-think-alike/dancing-improves-brain-health

[3] UCLA Health, "Free Moving' Dance Has Healing Benefits for People with Mental Health Concerns," *UCLA Health News,* July 31, 2024, accessed October 13, 2025, https://www.uclahealth.org/news/article/free-moving-dance-has-healing-benefits-for-people-with-mental-health-concerns

function and empathy.[4] Moreover, research has demonstrated that during live performances, spectators' brain activity tends to synchronize, creating a sense of shared focus and connection within the audience.[5] Expressive and dynamic performances leave these strong impressions on spectators, enhancing their emotional response and memory of the experience. Altogether, watching dance promotes empathy, stress reduction, and social bonding, offering spectators a meaningful form of emotional and cognitive enrichment.

The world of professional dance is vibrant and creative, but it's also marked by significant financial, physical, and structural challenges that affect dancers, choreographers, instructors, and the broader ecosystem of the dance workers. Most dancers work as freelancers or on short term contracts, often earning below a living wage and lacking access to benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans.[6] This economic instability is accompanied by the undervaluation of dance as labor, where artists are frequently underpaid or asked to perform without compensation.[7] These challenges are compounded by systemic inequities across the field. The mental health toll of constant competition and irregular employment pressures often leads to burnout and stress among professionals. Despite these hardships, dancers continue to contribute immense cultural and artistic value, using movement to explore identity, storytelling, and connection. Ensuring the future of dance as a sustainable profession requires stronger structural support, equitable compensation, and recognition of dance not only as art but as essential labor that shapes the cultural landscape.

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[4] Damien Gabriel et al., "Watching Live Performances Enhances Subjective and Physiological Emotional Responses Compared to Viewing the Same Performance on Screen," *IBRO Neuroscience Reports* 19 (2025): 381-390, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40832113/

[5] Julia Grimmett, "Live Dance Sparks Brain Synchrony," *Neuroscience News,* July 9, 2025, https://neurosciencenews.com/live-dance-brain-synchrony-29422/

[6] Dance/NYC, "Dance Industry Census Data Findings & Key Takeaways," *Dance/NYC,* April 10, 2023, accessed October 14, 2025, https://www.dance.nyc/CensusData

[7] Dance/NYC, "Beyond NYC Dance: Data on Artists Across New York State," *Dance Workforce Resilience Hub,* Accessed October 14, 2025, https://hub.dance.nyc/our-new-york-city-dance/beyond-nyc-dance-data-on-artists-across-new-york-state/

Dance in the United States has long been a site of artistic innovation, cultural expression, and professional ambition. From community-based programs to major performing companies, dance in America encompasses a wide spectrum of practices, genres, and organizational structures. Nonprofit companies not only serve as incubators for emerging choreographers but also act as cultural institutions that bring dance to diverse communities.[8] Despite the vibrancy of the sector, economic and geographic realities limit access and opportunity. New York City, in particular, occupies a unique position as a global hub for dance, hosting world-renowned companies, training programs, and performance venues that attract talent from across the country and around the world.[9]

The landscape of dance in New York City presents both extraordinary opportunities and significant structural barriers for small dance companies, emerging professional dancers, and underprivileged dancers. While the city remains a global epicenter for the performing arts, economic and spatial constraints often limit access to affordable rehearsal and performance spaces. New York City's dance ecosystem is under increasing financial strain, and access to rehearsal and performance venues is a growing challenge for emerging artists.[10] This strain is not only financial but also spatial, limited studio availability and competition for performance venues create a scenario in which only established companies or artists with substantial funding can reliably secure spaces. Dance groups struggle to find reliable, safe, and adequate space, exacerbated by rising costs and renovations highlighting how physical infrastructure and urban development pressures can directly impede artistic production.[11] These structural challenges are

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[8] Sarah Wilbur, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts.* (Wesleyan University Press, 2021) 45.
[9] Dick Netzer, "Dance in New York: Market and Subsidy Changes," *The American Economic Review 76,* no. 2 (1986): 15-19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1818727
[10] Zachary Whittenburg, "The Economics of Dance - Dance's Future According to the Numbers," *Dance Magazine,* February 26, 2024, accessed November 4, 2025, https://dancemagazine.com/dance-economics/#gsc.tab=0
[11] Lucy Kudlinski, "Dance Groups Struggle to Find Reliable, Safe, and Adequate Rehearsal Space, Exacerbated by Bernard Renovations," *Columbia Spectator,* February 7, 2023, accessed October 9, 2025,

compounded by broader economic realities, while New York is a hub for performance, shifts in market demand and public subsidy have historically created volatile conditions for small and mid-sized organizations.[12] Together, these factors illustrate a persistent tension in the city; while New York offers unparalleled visibility and audience potential, the financial and logistical barriers make sustained participation in the dance ecosystem difficult for emerging and underprivileged artists.

The design of dance spaces is not merely a matter of functionality; it is intimately connected to the development, creativity and well-being of dancers. Space is not a neutral container for movement, it is an active participation in the shaping of bodily subjectivity.[13] This highlights how thoughtfully designed environments can foster creativity, collaboration, and personal growth.

Despite the clear benefits of accessible and well-designed spaces, funding and policy frameworks often fail to meet the needs of small organizations and individual artists. While federal funding mechanisms exist, they frequently privilege established institutions over emerging or under-resourced artists.[14] This structural inequity is reflected in earnings patterns as well, many dancers earn well below a living wage, often requiring multiple jobs just to maintain a career in dance.[15] These challenges illustrate the need for infrastructure that addresses both the economic and creative needs of the dance community, ensuring that talent is nurtured rather than hindered by systemic barriers.

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https://www.columbiaspectator.com/arts-and-culture/2023/02/07/dance-groups-struggle-to-find-reliable-safe-and-adequate-rehearsal-space-exacerbated-by-barnard-renovations/

[12] Dick Netzer, "Dance in New York: Market and Subsidy Changes," *The American Economic Review 76,* no. 2 (1986): 15-19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1818727

[13] Valerie A. Briginshaw, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity.* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 7.

[14] Sarah Wilbur, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts.* (Wesleyan University Press, 2021), 112.

[15] Julien Marion, "How Much Do Dancers Make?" *More than Dancers,* January 19, 2021, accessed October 27, 2025. https://www.morethandancers.com/posts/how-much-do-dancers-make

Literature Review

History of Dance

Dance is as old as communal human life. Prehistoric marks and ancient iconography suggest rhythmic, ritual and imitative movement used for ceremony, social bonding, and storytelling long before written records. Archaeological and comparative studies treat dance as both social practice and embodied communication, visible in cave paintings, Egyptian tomb reliefs, and early ritual contexts across continents.[16] By antiquity and through the medieval period, dance performed multiple roles, sacred ritual, civic spectacle, folk entertainment, varying widely by culture. In many societies dance was embedded in ceremony and social life rather than separated as "theatrical" art. Where theatrical dance emerged, for example in court spectacle, it often carried political and social meanings.[17] From the Renaissance into the early modern period, European court spectacle helped transform dance into staged, codified forms that led directly to classical ballet. Courtly dances and court spectacles in Italy and France developed codified steps, positions, and theatrical presentation. The 17th-18th centuries saw ballet move from court pageant to professional theatrical form, with increasing technical codification and the rise of institutions (schools and companies) that stabilized technique and repertory.[18] The 19th century split ballet into Romantic expressive repertory, mythic/ethereal themes, pointe technique, the ballerina as an idealized figure. The later classical era that emphasizes virtuosity and formalized technique, developments that shaped training and performance models still central in many contexts today.[19]

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[16] Ann Dils and Ann Copper Albright, *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History,* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 18.
[17] Judith R. Mackrell, "Dance" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Last modified April 3, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/art/dance
[18] Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, *Dance History: An Introduction,* (Routledge, 1983), 15.
[19] Ann Dils and Ann Copper Albright, *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History,* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 33.

While these developments stabilized technique and repertory, they also marked a critical shift in how dance was culturally valued. Dance began to be recognized as an art form not simply because of its expressive capacity, but because it adopted structures associated with artistic legitimacy, formal institutions, codified training systems, professional authorship, and theatrical presentation.[20] The separation of performer and spectator, the emergence of choreography as compositional practice, and the development of pedagogical and archival frameworks aligned dance with prevailing definitions of fine art that privileged specialization, mastery, and aesthetic evaluation.[21] This process elevated certain forms, particularly European theatrical dance, while reinforcing hierarchies that excluded communal, vernacular, and non-Western movement practices from dominant art historical narratives.

The 20th century brought dramatic diversification. Modern dance, led by innovators such as Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, and Martha Graham, explicitly rejected strict classical forms and emphasized expressive, natural, or technique-based movement vocabulary. Modernists reframed dance as a medium for personal, social and psychological expression and built schools and companies that institutionalized new techniques.[22] From the mid-20th century onward the field fragmented and multiplied. Postmodernism questions virtuosity, narrative, and theatrical spectacle and proposed everyday movement, chance procedures, and conceptual strategies as legitimate choreographic material. At the same time globalism, decolonization scholarship, cross-cultural exchange, and the institutional recognition of diverse vernaculars broadened what counts as dance history and the practice of dance. Recent scholarships

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[20] André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement,* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.
[21] Mark Franko, "Dance and the Political: States of Expectation," *Dance Research Journal* 38, no. ½ (2006): 3-18, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20444656
[22] Alexandra Carter, Larraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris, *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*. (Routledge, 2004), 96.

emphasize context, politics, gender, race, and the role of archival methods, oral histories, and practice-as-research in recovering previously marginalized dance histories.

Today dance exists at an unprecedented intersection of art, technology and cultural exchange. The field continues to expand beyond traditional concert stages into digital and interdisciplinary spaces. Dance scholarship now emphasizes issues of inclusivity and decolonization, critically interrogating how Western-centric traditions have been privileged in curriculum and performance institutions despite readily shifting demographics and plural movement practices.[23] The push to decolonize dance involves revaluing vernacular, diasporic, and community based movement traditions, and challenging normative hierarchies of what counts as art. As these shifts demonstrate, dance today serves not only as an art form, but as an educational and societal force, equipping individuals and communities to navigate an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world.

[23] Nyama McCarthy-Brown, "Decolonizing Dance Education in Higher Education: One Credit at a Time," *Journal of Dance Education* 14, no. 4 (2014) 125-129, https://theatre.indiana.edu/research-creative-activity/publications/articles/decolonizing-dance-education.html

Dance and Culture

Across world cultures, the foundations of most dance forms are deeply rooted in community life rather than in formal theatrical spaces. Historically, dance emerged as a communal practice used to reinforce social bonds, transmit cultural knowledge, celebrate life events, and express shared identity. Early dance traditions functioned as collective expressions of belief, ritual, and social life, emphasizing that dance originally belonged to the community before it ever evolved into a performance based art.[24]

Anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce explains that in Indigenous, folk, and early societies, dance is inseparable from ritual, kinship, religion, politics, and everyday social organization.

> Dance makes its unique contribution to society and culture by virtue of its form and expression; at the same time it is intimately bound up with the elements of religion, kinship and social organization, politics, and economics. The fact that dance is inseparable from its means of expression - the human body making patterns in time and space - means that it cannot be divorced from its social cultural context.[25]

In folk and street dances worldwide, movement arises in neighborhoods, festivals, rites of passage, or collective gatherings. These traditions emphasize participation, shared rhythm, and group belonging rather than individual virtuosity. Ritual and social dances in particular serve as mechanisms for transmitting identity and cultural continuity across generations, often guided by elders or community leaders who maintain movement vocabularies and ceremonial knowledge. Contemporary psychological and anthropological studies confirm that synchronised participation

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[24] Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, *Dance History: An Introduction,* (Routledge, 1983), 50.
[25] Anya Peterson Royce, "The Anthropology of Dance." Bloomington, IN: Department of Anthropology, Indiana University Bloomington, 2002, accessed November 8, 2025, https://anthropology.indiana.edu/research/publications/the-anthropology-of-dance.html

in ritual movement increases social cohesion and prosocial behavior.[26] Active involvement in Communal dance correlates with stronger feelings of belonging and communal trust.

Situating dance within its communal origins highlights its ability to nurture belonging and inclusivity. Community based forms are often participatory rather than exclusive. This allows people of varying ages, abilities, and backgrounds to engage meaningfully with dance. This stands in contrast to some theatrical or professionalized contexts that emphasize competition, virtuosity or elite training. While elite and structured training is valued, in education drawing from communal approaches to dance allows students to access learning that is holistic, equitable, and culturally grounded.

Understanding dance as fundamental community-based, underscores why it holds such power in education. Dance can be seen as more than an aesthetic product, it becomes a vehicle for connection, identity, and collective expression. In a world increasingly defined by digital interaction and individualisation, returning to the communal dimensions of dance brings students back to embodied, relational and culturally rich modes of learning. This understanding affirms dance as a powerful tool for building community, deepening cultural understanding, and cultivating creativity rooted in lived human experience.

[26] Briar Irving, Christopher Kavanagh, Ronald Fischer, and Maski Yuki, "Dance for the Dead: The Role of Top-Down Beliefs for Social Cohesion and Anxiety Management in Naturally Occurring Collective Rituals," *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 3 (2024) https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0291655

Dance Education

In most American schools, music and visual arts have long been recognized as essential components of a well rounded curriculum. Students frequently receive structured instruction in drawing, painting, instrumental performance and music literacy. These disciplines are widely valued for cultivating creativity and supporting academic achievement. However, despite its deep cultural history and its status as one of the earliest human art forms, dance is rarely granted the same educational presence. Many K-12 schools either lack formal dance programs entirely, or limit dance to brief units within physical education, extracurricular clubs or performance based activities rather than academic study.[27] This imbalance persists even though research shows that dance offers cognitive, emotional, social and cultural benefits equal to, or greater than other arts disciplines. As a result, millions of students grow up without access to movement based artistic learning, despite evidence that dance enhances creativity, embodies cognition, strengthens community and promotes holistic development.

Dance education plays a vital role in developing the whole child, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and culturally. Research consistently shows that dance is far more than recreational movement, it is a comprehensive mode of learning that engages the body and brain simultaneously. According to the National Dance Education Organization's large-scale report, dance activates creative thinking, problem solving and cognitive processing through embodied learning. Students who participate in dance programs demonstrate improved attention, greater persistence, and increased ability to make connections across academic subjects.

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[27] Americans for the Arts, *Dance Education in American Public Schools: Case Studies,* Washington, DC: American for the Arts, 2016, https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/dance-education-in-american-public-schools-case-studies-0

Through movement, they learn sequencing, spatial awareness, rhythm, and symbolic thinking, skills that translate directly into literacy, mathematics, and science learning.[28]

The neurological perspective further strengthens the case for dance in schools. According to recent neuroscience research, dance engages multiple interconnected brain systems, spanning sensory, motor, cognitive, social, emotional rhythmic and creative domains. This is done through what is called synchronicity hypotheses, where participating in dance enhances both intra and inter brian synchronization.[29] This means that movement based, coordinated dance doesn't activate isolated brain regions, but synchronizes large networks responsible for action, emotion, memory, learning and social coordination. The implications of this are profound for education. If dance stimulates these broad networks, it can deepen students' conceptual understanding, support retention of learning, strengthen executive function, and embed learning in bodily experience rather than purely abstract cognition.

Beyond cognitive benefits, dance education supports social and emotional development. In public school case studies analyzed by American for the Arts, dance programs helped students build confidence, resilience and collaboration skills, especially in schools serving diverse or underserved populations.[30] Dance provided a nonverbal language for students learning English, a safe expressive outlet for students experiencing emotional stress, and a community building practice that fostered empathy and belonging. Teachers in these programs reported improved attendance, stronger student-teacher relationships, and a more positive school climate as a direct

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[28] Karen Bradley, Jane Bonbright and Shonnon Dooling, *Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting,* Washington, DC: National Dance Education Organization and National Endowment for the Arts, 2013, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-NDEO.pdf

[29] Julia C. Basso, Medha K. Satyal, and Rachel Rugh, "Dance on the Brain" Enhancing Intra and Inter-Brain Synchrony," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 14 (2021): 584312, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7832346/

[30] Americans for the Arts, *Dance Education in American Public Schools: Case Studies,* Washington, DC: American for the Arts, 2016, https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/dance-education-in-american-public-schools-case-studies-0

result of regular dance instruction.[31] Because dance integrates creativity, collaboration, and personal expression, it plays an essential role in helping students develop a strong sense of identity and emotional literacy.

From a cultural and historical standpoint, dance education also enriches students' understanding of society and the arts. Dance is inseparable from cultural history, as movement has long been a primary method for storytelling, community ritual, and the preservation of heritage.[32] Teaching dance in schools therefore expands cultural literacy, exposing students to global traditions, artistic practices, and social histories. This culture grounding helps students appreciate diversity and understand how movement reflects identity, power and community.

Dance education also sustains lifelong physical wellbeing by building coordination, strength, flexibility, spatial awareness and motor control. However, unlike traditional physical education, dance teaches movement not only as exercise but as expressive literacy. Researchers also refer to expressive literacy as movement intelligence, which highlights the way dance develops body awareness, creativity, and lifelong wellness habits from a young age.[33] Students learn to understand their bodies as instruments of communication, expression, and agency, skills that support both physical health and personal empowerment.

Despite its value, dance education remains unevenly accessible in the United States. Many schools lack qualified dance teachers, dedicated space, or administrative support which limits student's access to high quality arts education.

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[31] Americans for the Arts, *Dance Education in American Public Schools: Case Studies,* Washington, DC: American for the Arts, 2016, https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/dance-education-in-american-public-schools-case-studies-0

[32] Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, *Dance History: An Introduction,* (Routledge, 1983), 47.

[33] Gayle Kassing, *Dance On: Dancing Through Life,* (Human Kinetics, 2023), 45.

Cognitive Benefits

Several scholars frame dance as a domain where creative cognitive and social well-being intersect. Embodied training in dance cultivates ways of perceiving and problem solving that transfer beyond the studio. Kronstead and Gallegher in "Dance and Affordances: The Relationship between Dance training and Conceptual Problem-Solving," argue that dance practice functions as a systematic exploration of affordances, meaning the possibilities for action in an environment. They also argue that repeated sensorimotor tuning, attention shifts, habit breaking, empathy through attunement, supports conceptual flexibility and creative problem solving.[34] In other words, the skills dancers develop for reading bodies, space and timing in dance trains the brain for more abstract modes of thought often prized in innovation and pedagogy.

Neuroscience and psychological work complements this theoretical claim by showing that both participation in and collective reception of dance, changes brain and body states in socially meaningful ways. Recent research demonstrates that in-person dance performances elicit greater emotional and psychological responses than viewing the same works on screen, underscoring the heightened affective engagement produced through co-present spectatorship.[35] Complementary findings show that audience members watching live dance together exhibit increased interbrain synchrony. This is a neural marker linked to shared attention, impersonal connection and collective meaning-making.[36] Together, these studies suggest that live dance

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[34] Christian Kronsted, and Gallagher, Shaun, "Dance and Affordances: The Relationship between Dance training and Conceptual Problem-Solving," *University of Illinois Press* 55, no. 1 (2021): 35-55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5406/jaesteduc.55.1.0035.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A7e71dd357a9a02090b0c25bb33c77488&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&initiator=&acceptTC=1

[35] Damien Gabriel, Julie Devos, Sandrine Chapuis, Alexandre Comte, and Pierre-Edouard Billot, "Watching Live Performances Enhances Subjective and Physiological Emotional Responses Compared to Viewing the Same Performance on Screen," *IBRO Neuroscience Reports* 19 (2025): 381-390, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40832113/

[36] Julia Grimmett, "Live Dance Sparks Brain Synchrony," *Neuroscience News,* July 9, 2025, https://neurosciencenews.com/live-dance-brain-synchrony-29422/

cultivates intensified forms of social cognition and communal affect that are not easily replicated in solitary or digitally mediated viewing environments.

Systematic reviews and program evaluations document measurable mental health and developmental benefits from dance programs across ages. A 2022 systematic review summarized evidence that dance interventions improve physical fitness, motor development, mood and certain markers of psychological wellbeing in children and adolescents. This review also showed that dance is a promising adjunct or alternative modality in arts therapy contexts.[37] Importantly, this review highlights dance's efficacy not only as an arts education intervention but also as a promising adjunct or alternative modality within therapeutic and mental health contexts. A large systematic study conducted by *Sports Medicine*, found that:

> undertaking structured dance of any genre is generally equal to and occasionally more effective than other types of physical activity interventions for improving a range of psychological and cognitive outcomes including emotional well-being, depression, motivation, social cognition, and some aspects of memory.[38]

Complementary clinical and service oriented literature argues that embodied art therapies foster emotional regulation, self-knowledge and social connection, outcomes of direct relevance to schools, youth services, and community health initiatives.[39] This research situates movement based practice within broader models of preventative mental health support, emphasizing the role of creativity and embodied expression in fostering psychological safety, social connection and

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[37] Dan Tao et al., "The Physiological and Psychological Benefits of Dance and Its Effects on Children and Adolescent: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Physiology* 13 (2022): Article 925958, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35770195/

[38]University of Sydney, "Dancing May Be Better Than Other Exercise for Improving Mental Health," *News & Opinion (University of Sydney,* February 12, 2024, accessed October 9, 2025, https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2024/02/12/dancing-may-be-better-than-other-exercise-for-improving-mental-h.html

[39] Uwe Herrman, Margret Hills De Zárate, and Salvo Pitruzzella, *Arts Therapies and the Mental Health of Children and Young People: Contemporary Research, Theory and Practice.* Routledge, 2021.

developmental flourishing. Together, these literatures make a case that public investment in movement programs can yield health and social service savings as well as individual benefits.

Economic Instability in the Dance Profession

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook (2024), median hourly pay for dancers and choreographers was $24.53.[40] Dance is considered a niche occupation and job markets are concentrated in metropolitan areas with existing arts culture. However, funding limitations could reduce the demand for these workers. A typical professional dancer will earn nearly 70 percent of their income outside of performing.[41] This financial instability contributes to high weakening rates among early career artists, particularly those without access to affordable rehearsal or housing options. Despite the growing visibility of dance in popular culture, wages have stagnated.[42] Freelance dancers and small companies are especially vulnerable to fluctuating gig economics and limited institutional funding. This precarious labor system forces artists into unsustainable cycles of underpayment and self subsidization, often paying out of pocket for rehearsal space.[43] In 2024, dancers held about 12,300 jobs. 26% of these performers were employed by performing arts companies while 25% were self employed.[44] Self employment places an additional financial burden on the individuals due to the unpredictability of earnings.

Income structure in dance differs widely across professional roles. Freelance dancers are paid per class, rehearsal, or performance, with inconsistent pay schedules and little access to benefits. Because freelance work is irregular, many dancers experience months of

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[40] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "*Dancers and Choreographers,*" Occupational Outlook Handbook, last modified August 28, 2025, accessed January 27, 2026, https://www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/dancers-and-choreographers.htm

[41] Ali Duffy, *Careers in Dance.* (Human Kinetics, 2021), 44.

[42] Zachary Whittenburg, "The Economics of Dance - Dance's Future According to the Numbers," *Dance Magazine,* February 26, 2024, accessed November 4, 2025, https://dancemagazine.com/dance-economics/#gsc.tab=0

[43] Andy Horwitz, "The Untenable Economics of Dancing." *Culturebot,* March 7, 2014, accessed November 12, 2025, https://www.culturebot.org/2014/03/21361/the-untenable-economics-of-dancing/

[44] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "*Dancers and Choreographers: Pay and Jobs Outlook,*" Occupational Outlook Handbook, last modified August 28, 2025, accessed January 27, 2026, https://www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/dancers-and-choreographers.htm#tab-6

unemployment between gigs and rarely receive benefits such as health insurance or paid time off. In contrast, company dancers may have more consistent pay through seasonal or annual contracts. Even these salaries often fall below the national median income. Smaller companies may pay only a few hundred dollars per performance period, while larger institutions offer salaries that range from modest livable wages to upper-tier earnings for principal dancers.[45]

Dance educators, whether teaching in studios, schools, or universities, tend to have more financial stability. Their income is tied to hourly rates or full-time academic salaries. These salaries vary significantly depending on location, credentials and institutional funding. Teaching is often the most financially sustainable pathway within dance, offering consistent employment and opportunities for long term career growth.[46] Choreographers, on the other hand, face a different kind of instability. Their income depends on commissions, grants, or royalties, which are often inconsistent and tied to specific project timelines. Sarah Wilbur's *Funding Bodies* (2021) shows that access to federal and foundation support has declined since the 1980s, forcing choreographers to self-fund creative projects or depend on community partnerships.[47] While high-profile choreographers working in commercial settings or large institutions can earn substantial fees. Most independent choreographers rely on short term funding and personal investments to realize their creative work.

The disparities among these income streams reflect a broader imbalance in the dance economy, where artistic contribution often exceeds financial compensation. This reality underscores the need for affordable, dedicated facilities, sustainable funding models, and

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[45]Thomas M. Smith, *Raising the Barre: The Geographic, Financial, and Economic Trends of Nonprofit Dance Companies,* (The National Endowment for the Arts, 2003), 23.
[46] Ali Duffy, *Careers in Dance,* (Human Kinetics, 2021), 30.
[47] Sarah Wilbur, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts,* (Wesleyan University Press, 2021), 205.

institutional support systems that relieve financial burdens and allow dancers to focus on creative growth rather than survival.

Institutional and Geographic Factors

New York City remains a central hub for American dance, but it is simultaneously one of the most expensive and competitive environments for sustaining artistic work. Thomas M. Smith's NEA study *Raising the Barre* locates these pressures in clear geographic and market terms. Opportunities, audiences, and organizational infrastructure concentrate in a few large urban centers, notably New York, producing both density of artistic exchange and heightened competition for limited rehearsal, performance and administrative resources.[48] Netzer and Parker's *Dancemakers* similarly document chronic structural constraints faced by nonprofit dance companies, revealing how financial fragility and infrastructural scarcity shape the day to day realities of artistic production. They show that the challenges extend far beyond artistic vision or choreographic talent. Companies are routinely hindered by limited access to affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, by administrative workloads that fall disproportionately on small and mid sized organizations, and by constant fundraising pressures that require artists to serve simultaneously as managers, marketers and grant writers.[49] These demands not only redirect energy away from creative research and rehearsal, but also set up a system in which the cervical depends on sustained institutional savvy rather than solely on artistic merit. Importantly, Netzer and Parker demonstrate that such conditions are not temporary or isolated, they persist across decades and organizational scales, suggesting a structural rather than situational problem in the U.S. dance economy. In this context, nonprofit dancers and choreographers operate within an ecosystem that routinely privileges administrative endurance over creative innovation.

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[48] Thomas M. Smith, *Raising the Barre: The Geographic, Financial, and Economic Trends of Nonprofit Dance Companies,* (The National Endowment for the Arts, 2003), 2.
[49] David Netzer, and Ellen Parker, *Dancemakers.* NEA Research Report #28, Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1993, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Research-Report-28.pdf

Recent sector wide data has confirmed the human cost of this structure. The Dance/NYC Industry Census finds that most dancers must piece together multiple jobs simply to sustain basic living expenses. Despite this intense labor, average annual earnings for many dance workers remain in the tens of thousands, a figure that underscores the pervasive instability and economic precarity within the field.[50] This reality is not merely a matter of personal hustle or career stage, but a reflection of systemic conditions that leave artists perpetually under-resourced and overextended. When paired with high cost of living and limited affordable workspace in major cultural centers like New York, the census date makes clear that only those with additional financial support systems or economic privilege can feasibly commit to sustained creative practice in such environments. As a result, urban artistic hubs risk becoming accessible only to those who can afford the financial strain, reinforcing who is able to participate, develop work, and remain visible in the professional dance landscape.

Scholarly accounts deepen the analysis by linking spatial conditions to institutional power and cultural recognition. Sarah Wilbur's *Funding Bodies* (2021), traces how NEA funding practices and policy logistics have shaped which companies and choreographers receive institutional support. These patterns gave long privileged organizations with existing institutional status, administrative capacity, and proximity to major cultural centers. In this way, funding does more than resource artistic production, it shapes the ecology in which dance can take place, reinforcing geographic hierarchies. This also determines whose work is seen as professionally viable, culturally valuable, or historically significant.[51] Valarie Briginshaw's work on dance, space, and subjectivity argues that availability and form of space do more than enable

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[50] Dance/NYC, "Dance Industry Census Data Findings & Key Takeaways," *Dance/NYC,* April 10, 2023, accessed October 14, 2025, https://www.dance.nyc/CensusData

[51] Sarah Wilbur, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts,* (Wesleyan University Press, 2021), 83.

rehearsal and performance, they participate in shaping the very conditions of embodiment and artistic expression. Space influences how dancers move, what kinds of choreographic structures become possible, and which bodily practices are nurtured or constrained. Studio dimensions, floor types, architectural features and access to technologically equipped environments all subtly but powerfully condition training methods and aesthetic outcomes.[52] As a result, spatial inequality becomes artistic inequality. Dancers working in well resourced institutions often develop different physical vocabularies, repertories, and professional pathways than those creating in limited or makeshift environments. Space acts not only as infrastructure, but as a cultural and pedagogical agent, reproducing hierarchies in taste, technique and artistic legitimacy.

[52] Valerie A. Briginshaw, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 33.

New York's Housing Crisis

New York is facing an escalating housing affordability crisis that Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) attributes to decades of insufficient housing construction relative to population and household growth.[53] While the demand for housing had steadily increased, zoning restrictions, high construction costs and lengthy approval processes have constrained the city's ability to add new residential units at the scale required. As a result, the city recorded a historically low rental vacancy rate of just 1.4 percent in 2023, well below the 5 percent threshold traditionally considered necessary for a healthy rental market.[54] This extreme scarcity has had a direct and measurable impact on housing costs. Asking rents across New York has risen approximately 22 percent since before the COVID-19 pandemic, creating widespread financial strain for renters across all income levels.[55] A growing proportion of renters are now considered rent burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, with severe rent burdens disproportionately affecting lower income and working class households.[56]

The CBC further emphasizes that limited housing supply has reduced residential mobility throughout the city. Many New Yorkers remain in overcrowded or undersized units not by choice but because relocating would expose them to significantly higher rents.[57] This limits access to better employment opportunities, education resources, and healthier living conditions, reinforcing existing patterns of inequality. Beyond its social consequences, the housing

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[53] Citizens Budget Commission, *A Building Crisis: The Quality of Life, Population, and Economic Effects of Housing Underproductions,* Policy Brief, June 2024. https://cbcny.org/sites/default/files/media/files/CBCBRIEF_NYC-Housing-Underproduction_06252024.pdf

[54] Citizens Budget Commission, *A Building Crisis: How New York's Housing Shortage Threatens Its Future*, New York: Citizens Budget Commission, 2024, https://cbcny.org/building-crisis

[55] Citizens Budget Commission, *A Building Crisis: The Quality of Life, Population, and Economic Effects of Housing Underproductions,* Policy Brief, June 2024. https://cbcny.org/sites/default/files/media/files/CBCBRIEF_NYC-Housing-Underproduction_06252024.pdf

[56] U.S. Census Bureau, *New York CIty Housing and Vacancy Survey*, *2023,* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf

[57] Citizens Budget Commission, *A Building Crisis: How New York's Housing Shortage Threatens Its Future*, New York: Citizens Budget Commission, 2024, https://cbcny.org/building-crisis

affordability crisis posed serious risks to New York City;s long term economic stability. Employers across multiple sectors report difficulties attracting and retaining workers due to high living costs, particularly in education, healthcare and the arts.[58] Ultimately, New York's housing affordability is not just a social issue but a structural one, rooted in policies and market conditions that have failed to produce housing at the scale required to sustain an equitable and livable city.

[58] Citizens Budget Commission, *A Building Crisis: How New York's Housing Shortage Threatens Its Future*, New York: Citizens Budget Commission, 2024, https://cbcny.org/building-crisis

The Role of the National Endowment for the Arts

Among all institutional support, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) remains a cornerstone of dance sustainability in the United States. Sarah Wilbur's *Funding Bodies* (2021), traces decades of NEA dance investment, demonstrating how federal support has shaped choreographic innovation, stabilized touring infrastructures and professionalized artistic labor across shifting political climates. Wilbur argues that NEA funding functioned not merely as a financial mechanism, but as a cultural and political force that influenced which artists, aesthetics and organizational models could emerge and sustain themselves. This included enabling choreographers to experiment with new movement vocabularies and interdisciplinary processes, underwriting national touring circuits that expanded geographic access to dance, and advancing labor standards by supporting rehearsal wages, artist fees, and administrative capacity. Importantly, Wilbut situates these developments within a fluctuating policy environment, from the expansionist arts agenda of the 1960s and 1970s, through the austerity politics and culture war backlash of the late 20th century, to the contemporary debates about equity and public value. By contextualizing funding structures alongside artistic outcomes, Wilbur reveals how state investment materially shaped the ecosystem of U.S. dance, determining who could create, who could work, and who could be seen.[59]

This legitimizing function is echoed in early institution analyses. Thomas M. Smith's NEA report charts how federal dollars bolster regional distributions and enhance organizational durability, showing that grants not only provide immediate operational support but also help establish long term infrastructural stability for nonprofit dance companies.[60] This report

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[59] Sarah Wilbur, *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts* (Wesleyan University Press, 2021), 25.
[60] Thomas M. Smith, *Raising the Barre: The Geographic, Financial, and Economic Trends of Nonprofit Dance Companies,* (The National Endowment for the Arts, 2003), 1.

highlights how NEA funding enables organizations outside major cultural centers to build touring networks, invest in professional staff, and maintain consistent programming, thereby reducing geographic inequities in access to dance. By underwriting both core operations and strategic initiatives, federal investment reinforces institutional credibility, making companies more attractive to private donors, local funders, and community stakeholders. In this way, Smith situates NEA support as a mechanism that extends beyond simple financial aid, it legitimizes dance as a socially and culturally essential practice, while simultaneously shaping the organizational capacities necessary for sustain artistic production and community engagement.

Contemporary labor scholarship reinforces the argument that NEA funding has effects beyond immediate financial support, extending into the structural and social dimensions of the dance field. Ali Duffy in *Careers in Dance*, emphasizes that NEA support contributes to career viability by offsetting the unpredictable and often precarious income streams that characterize professional dance, enabling artists to pursue fulltime creative work without being forced to rely solely on unrelated employment.[61] In addition to economic stabilization, NEA funding open professional pathways by supporting training programs, residencies, touring, and mentorship initiatives, which collectively expand access to networks, skills and opportunities critical for long term career development. Pickard and Risner in *Dance, Professional Practice, and the Workplace* similarly underscores the broader labor implications of public arts funding, arguing that federal and state support helps mitigate workplace inequities, such as inconsistent compensation, lack of benefits, and limited access to safe rehearsal spaces, while fostering more sustainable labor practices that benefit both individuals artists and the organizations that employ them.[62] Together, these analyses suggest that NEA support functions not merely as a fiscal

[61] Ali Duffy, *Careers in Dance,* (Human Kinetics, 2021), 67.
[62] Angela Pickard and Doug Risner, *Dance, Professional Practice, and the Workplace,* (Routledge, 2020), 4.

lifetime but as a social and structural instrument. In this way, federal investment contributes to the cultivation of a resilient, equitable and thriving dance sector, reinforcing both artistic excellence and workforce stability.

Despite its centrality, the NEA and broader nonprofit dance sector remain acutely vulnerable to economic and political fluctuations. Unpredictable tax structures, changing philanthropic incentives, and shifting federal ecosystem, which relies heavily on a combination of government support, private donations, and earned income to survive.[63]

[63] Dance/NYC, "Dance Industry Census Data Findings & Key Takeaways," *Dance/NYC,* April 10, 2023, accessed October 14, 2025, https://www.dance.nyc/CensusData

The Impact of Studio Space

The physical environment of a dance studio plays a crucial role in both the safety and artistic development of dancers. Properly designed studios, with features such as sprung floors, adequate ceiling height, large open spaces, controlled lighting, acoustics and ventilation, provide an environment conducive to learning, creativity, and physical health. Sprung floors, for example, absorb impact forces during jumps and landings, reducing the risk of stress fractures, joint strain, and chronic overuse injuries, particularly for young dancers whose musculoskeletal systems are still developing.[64] Sufficient studio size allows dancers to execute technique classes, ensemble work, lifts, and improvisational exercises safely, while appropriate lighting and acoustics improve spatial awareness, musicality, and coordination. Climate controlled space prevents overheating and fatigue, supporting endurance and cognitive focus during training. Additionally, open and thoughtfully designed environments encourage experimentation and collaboration, fostering creativity and engagement among students.[65] Access to high-quality facilities also promotes equity, ensuring that all dancers, regardless of socioeconomic status, can train in safe conditions that support their physical, emotional and artistic growth.

Despite these clear benefits, proper studio space also presents challenges, particularly regarding cost and accessibility. High quality flooring, ventilation, lighting and large open studios require significant financial investment, often beyond the reach of smaller schools, nonprofit organizations, or freelance instructors. In urban centers like New York City, limited real estate drives up studio rental costs, forcing many dancers to rehearse in smaller,

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[64] James M. Hackney, Sara Brummel, Mary Newman, Shannon Scott, Mather Reingagel and Jennifer Smith, "Effect of Reduced Stiffness Dance Flooring on Lower Extremity Joint Angular Trajectories during a Ballet Jump," *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science* 19, no. 3 (2015): 110-117, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280644619_Effect_of_Reduced_Stiffness_Dance_Flooring_on_Lower_Extremity_Joint_Angular_Trajectories_During_a_Ballet_Jump

[65] Valerie A. Briginshaw, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 55.

multipurpose, or unsafe spaces, reducing opportunities for early career or low income artists.[66] Additionally, the under use of large expensive spaces can create inefficiencies, while disparities in access to ideal facilities may exacerbate inequities within the dance community. Schools or companies with well funded, purpose built studios may attract more talented students and instructors, leading under resourced programs at a disadvantage. An overemphasis on perfect conditions may in advertantly constrain creativity, as dancers accustomed to idealsized studio spaces may struggle to adapt to unconventional, outdoor or site specific performance environments.

The design of dance studios have a direct impact on training quality, injury prevention and creative expression. Thoughtful studio design supports holistic dancer development, while poor or inaccessible facilities can limit learning, increase injury risk, and perpetuate inequities. Addressing the physical infrastructure of dance education is critical not only for artistic and technical outcomes, but also for fostering equitable access and sustainable professional pathways within the field.

[66] Zachary Whittenburg, "The Economics of Dance - Dance's Future According to the Numbers," *Dance Magazine,* February 26, 2024, accessed November 4, 2025, https://dancemagazine.com/dance-economics/#gsc.tab=0