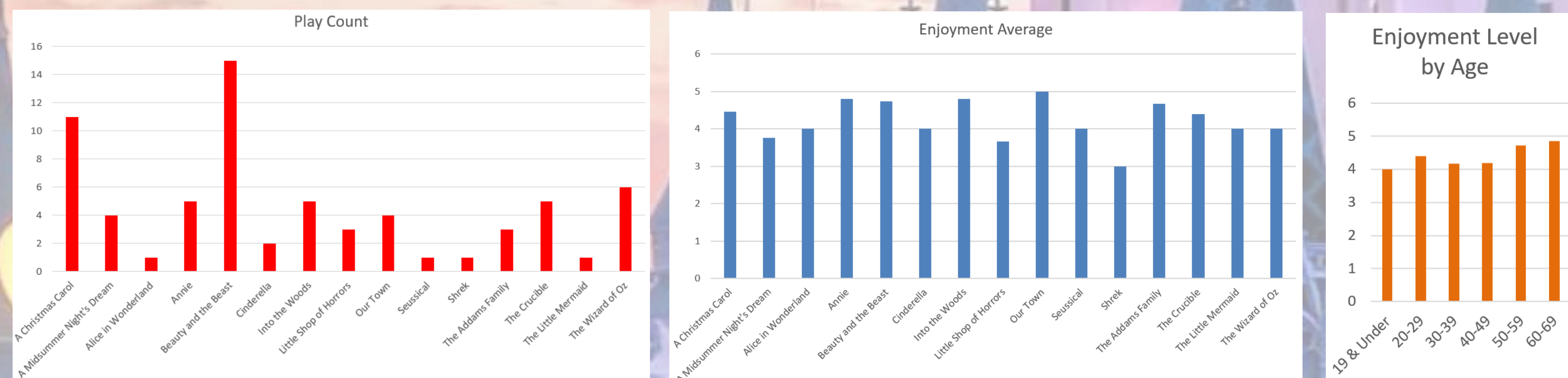


Disneyfication and Education

Abstract- Disneyfication in theater means the increase in popularity of Disney plays and the resulting reshaping of modern plays to more resemble those of Walt Disney, in order to gain viewership. In most cases, this means a shift to a musical format featuring upbeat ballads and gaudy but family-friendly costumes. While many theatre elitists frown upon such trends, this project shows how Disneyfication fosters renewed interest and enjoyment in theatre across age groups. A case study of the Knox and Sevier County school systems in Tennessee examines patterns of interest and enjoyment in the nation's most popular plays via snowball method questionnaire, as well as how modern school curriculums foster this interest. A survey of Knox and Sevier County students, both past and present, collected their favorite plays and degree of enjoyment of the play, and a geographic analysis of the placement of theaters near schools, as well as the incorporation of the arts into schools and the rise of Disneyfication in plays, aids in explaining this deep degree of enjoyment and engagement. This enjoyment then feeds back into schools, with the engagement of students in the arts improving their overall academic performance.

Method- Local schools incorporate more arts programs into their curriculums, especially Knox County, which received funding from the Tennessee Arts Commission. Such programs meld visual art, theatre, singing, and dancing, with core subjects such as math, social studies, science, and English. The manner in which schools incorporate theater into curriculums is often in the form of musicals, to aid in retention. "This is a lot more fun. This is a lot more meaningful, and it's really more connected to their lives. It's a lot easier to get them engaged than before we were using arts integration" says Jessica Cross, a teacher at Mooreland Heights Elementary. With this curriculum, children are taught that theater, often taught in dry settings in an English classroom, or overly enacted drama class, is an essential and enjoyable part of learning. Thus, prejudices on the lack of validity in drama studies, or in the elitist nature of the theatre, are subverted from the beginning. In a self-assessment spread via snowball method on Facebook, participants were asked to pick their favorite play from the list to the right, rate their enjoyment of it with a five star system, and state the TN county in which they were educated. Knox and Sevier County participants were singled out for study.

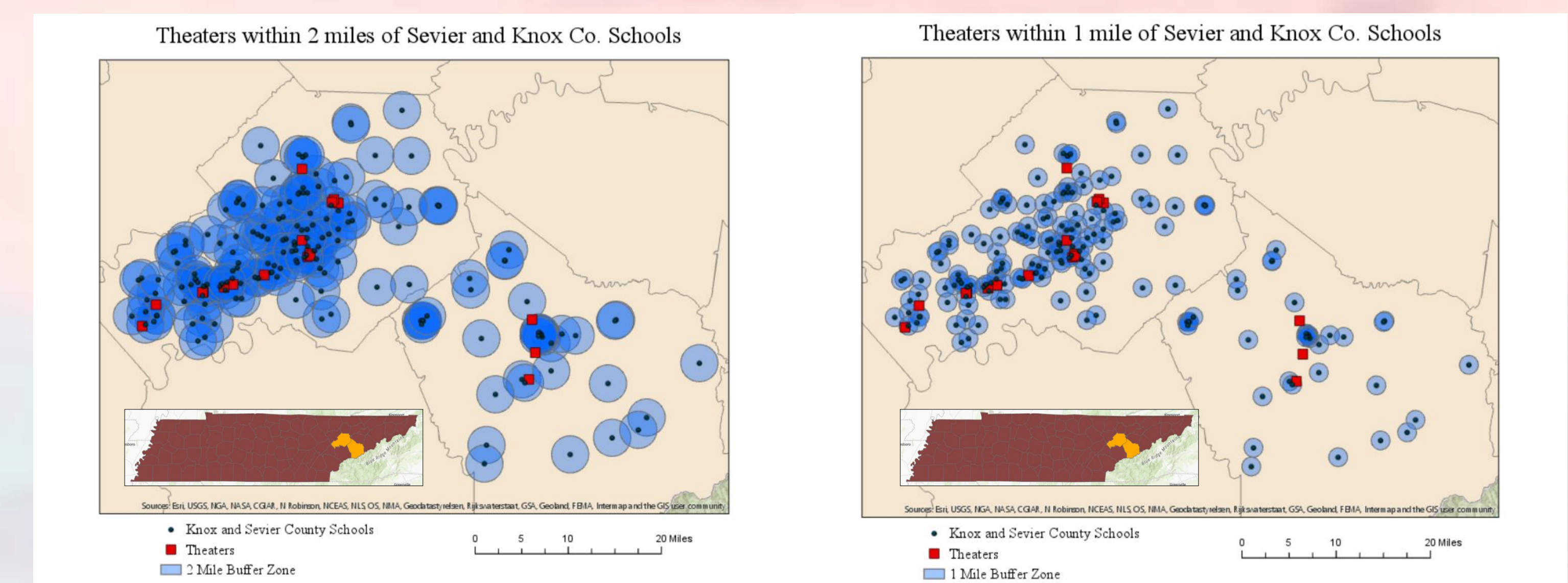
Below: bar graphs depict the results of the surveys, based on play enjoyment and age. Disney musicals rank the highest in favoritism and enjoyment, with respondents in school during increased arts funding periods had greater enjoyment



Sources: Knapp, Raymond. *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*. 2006, Princeton: Princeton University Press. | "Knox County Schools State Report Card" 2011, *Knoxschools*. | McCoy, Lydia X. "Arts infused curriculum showing results in Knox County Schools" 2011, Nadworny, Elissa. "The Most Popular High School Plays and Musicals" 2018, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/09/29/427138970/the-most-popular-high-school-plays-and-musicals>. | *Knox County News Sentinel*. | Moore, Kasey. "Every Disney Movie on Netflix: February 2019" 2019, *What's On Netflix*. | "Sevier County District Summary" 2018, *Schooldigger*. | Strait, Eddie. "Here are all of the Disney movies on Hulu" 2018.

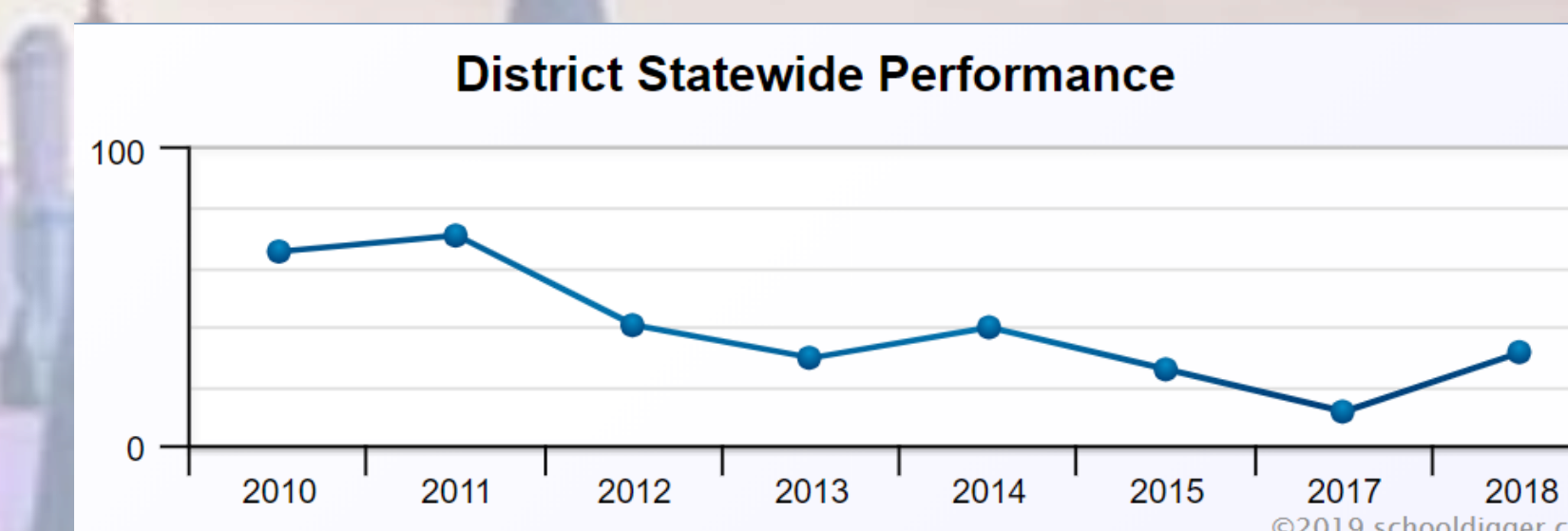
Physically, movie theaters playing a plethora of musicals are located near schools. All major theaters in the Knox and Sevier County area are located within 2 miles of a school, and 16 are located within one mile. Many Disney movies are shown as encores as their release anniversaries are met, as well as more modern live-actions being shown. The success of biopics in the last year, such as *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *A Star is Born*, as well as their critical acclaim, show that musical movies are not only popular, but considered high class. This melds accessibility with what would be elitism; with ticket process ranging from \$5 to \$15, and locations being so close to schools, teens with pocket money can easily access such movies, indulging nostalgia from their childhood, and venturing into more mature biopics.

Below: the spatial relation between Sevier and Knox County Schools in relation to theater locations. All theaters fall within a 2 mile radius of at least one public or private school, and all but three theaters (Halls Cinema 7 in Knox County, and Movies on the Parkway and Governor's Crossing Stadium 14 in Sevier County) fall within 1 mile of a public or private school.



Right: A sample of Knox County School District's performance in 2011, after the arts infused curriculum had gone into affect. Scores were better than state average.

Below: A timeline of Sevier County School District's performance. It increased in 2011 with Knox County, but performance dwindled as arts funding ran out.



State Report Card		
Achievement		
Reading	KCS: B	State: C
Mathematics	B	B
Science	B	C
Social Studies	B	B
Value Added Assessment		
Reading	C	D
Mathematics	B	B
Science	C	D
Social Studies	B	C

Conclusion- By incorporating musical theater practices into schools, this builds an appreciation for musicals not only for their aesthetic features, but also for their validity in the educational sphere. This makes them accessible and appreciated. This new fostered appreciation for musical theater can then find an outlet in movie theaters and on streaming services, with the rise in popularity and critical acclaim of such media forms. Thus, practices in school foster leisure time hobbies, melding practices in and outside of school to create a greater love of musical theater and a greater level of academic performance.