

STRENGTHENING ARTS EDUCATION IN THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress, in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to:

- **Retain the arts in the definition of core academic subjects and strengthen equitable access to arts learning through the following actions:**
 - Require states to report annually on student access to, and participation in, all core academic subjects.
 - Improve success in school, work, and life for all students, including those with disabilities, by strengthening arts education in provisions relating to afterschool/extended learning, teaching effectiveness, school turnaround, charter schools, and student assessment.
 - Improve the U.S. Department of Education's national data collection regarding what students know and are able to do in the arts and the conditions for teaching and learning in arts education.
- **Reauthorize the Arts in Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education:**
 - Retain a direct, national funding program that ensures dedicated resources to support large-scale model arts education projects that improve teaching in the arts, are inclusive, and leverage the power of the arts to support comprehensive school reform.
- **Conduct dedicated hearings on how arts education develops skills in creativity and innovation.**

TALKING POINTS

- **The arts prepare students for success in the 21st century and contribute to an innovative and competitive workforce.** According to the 2008 *Ready to Innovate* report from the Conference Board, there is overwhelming consensus from superintendents (98 percent) and corporate leaders (96 percent) that “creativity is of increasing importance to the U.S. workforce.” Of those corporate respondents looking for creative people, 85 percent said they were having difficulty finding qualified applicants with the creative characteristics they desired.
 - **The arts are designated as a "core academic subject" in federal law.** In this respect, the arts have equal billing with reading, math, science, and six other disciplines. This designation is an acknowledgement of the relevance of the arts in a complete education and means that for federal education programs (such as teacher training, school reform, and technology programs) targeted to core academic subjects, the arts may be an eligible expenditure of funds.
 - **Implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) has led to the erosion of arts education in the schools.** A 2011 national survey by Common Core and the Farkas Duffett Research Group of 1,001 3rd to 12th grade public school teachers found that according to most teachers, schools are narrowing curriculum, shifting instructional time and resources toward math and language arts and away from subjects such as visual art, music, foreign language, and social studies. Two-thirds (66 percent) say that other subjects “get crowded out by extra attention being paid to math or language arts.” As Congress advances discussions on reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it must address the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act, which has diminished the presence of arts education in our schools.
 - **The Secretary of Education has repeatedly identified the narrowing of the curriculum as the top concern expressed to him by parents nationwide.** In the 2010 National Art Education Foundation-funded study, *NCLB: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education Programs*, 3,412 respondents revealed the impact of NCLB in the following areas: staffing, teaching loads, enrollments, funding, scheduling, curriculum, teaching and instruction, and assessment. Sixty-seven percent of the arts educators surveyed reported that art schedules had been impacted by NCLB, and 47 percent of the respondents reported that their art schedules had increased interruptions, conflicts, and problems.
 - **Flexibility should not absolve charter schools from presenting a full, balanced education for every child.** With the prevalence of charter schools increasing, federal leadership is needed to ensure that all students attending charter schools be provided with a full and balanced education in all core academic subjects.
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TALKING POINTS (CONTINUED)

- **The arts are a model of beyond-the-bubble assessments of student learning.** Comprehensive national standards for what children should know and be able to do in the arts were created for dance, music, theater, and the visual arts in 1994. These standards provided the basis for the National Arts Education Assessment Framework, which was adopted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment Governing Board and demonstrates that schools can and should measure student progress in creating, performing, and responding to works of art. The arts can not only be a part of the emerging assessment reform conversations, but can lead the way with knowledge and experience regarding the performance and portfolio-based measurements envied by other core academic subjects.
- **Arts educators should be evaluated upon how well their students learn and perform in their respective subject area.** New evaluation systems are causing arts teachers to be evaluated unfairly based on standardized test scores in reading and math. The U.S. Department of Education should support a system where arts educators are evaluated (when possible) on how well students acquire skills germane to their respective disciplines, with accountability directly attributable to individual teachers. New evaluation systems should be developed and applied in the context of the number of students taught and the instructional time available, limiting the use of data to valid and reliable measures. Likewise, observation-based teacher evaluations should be limited to those conducted by individuals with adequate training and expertise in the arts.
- **Efforts to improve afterschool and extended day learning opportunities should not displace teaching of the arts from the core school day.** As a core academic subject of learning, the arts have a rightful place in the main instructional day. While a complete education in the arts can be supplemented with afterschool and extended day offerings, those programs should not replace a complete arts education.
- **Collecting and publicly reporting the status and condition of arts education and other core academic subjects on an annual basis at the state level is critical to ensuring equitable access to a comprehensive education for all students.** States such as Arizona, California, Wyoming, New Jersey, Ohio, Washington, and others have produced significant reports on the status and condition of arts education. Sample data points should include the number and range of course offerings, student enrollment in each of the core subjects, pupil/teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, budget allocation, subject teacher certification, full-time equivalent teacher employment, amount of professional development in each of the core subjects, and other measures chosen by the state and significant in the subject area.
- **The Department of Education's research efforts must be strengthened by systemically including the arts in studies conducted on the condition of education, practices that improve academic achievement, and the effectiveness of federal and other programs.** When the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the nation's "report card," was administered in 2008, it only partially measured learning in music and the visual arts—dance and theater were both omitted. Ten years have passed since the U.S. Department of Education has published a Fast Response survey regarding the status of arts education in our nation's schools. While that survey was released April 2012 (with limited data in dance and theater), such data should be gathered and published more frequently and comprehensively.

BACKGROUND

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the update of the 1965 Elementary & Secondary Education Act, expired in September 2007 (an automatic one-year extension occurs annually). The Senate education committee has approved a comprehensive reauthorization bill, which includes a provision to address a number of subjects that comprise a "well-rounded education," including the arts. The House education committee has drafted a markedly different reauthorization bill that is under consideration.

Attached to this issue brief is a paper titled *Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life*, which is a statement supported by national arts education and education organizations. This unified statement and the specific legislative recommendation one-pager that follows serve as a tool for communicating the benefits of arts education to policymakers at all levels as federal lawmakers begin the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.