

ARTS EDUCATION

Creating Student Success In School, Work, and Life

A child's education is not complete unless it includes the arts. In fact, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) lists the arts among the core academic subjects, requiring schools to enable all students to achieve in the arts and to reap the full benefits of a comprehensive arts education.

In spite of this federal direction, access to arts education in our schools is eroding. A report from the Center for Education Policy concludes that, since the enactment of NCLB, 22% of school districts surveyed have reduced instructional time for art and music. This is happening at a time when parents, employers, and civic leaders are demanding improvements to the learning environment that will make our schools places where all learners will access a complete education and opportunities to succeed. These demands cannot be met without comprehensive arts education in our nation's schools.

The Arts Prepare Students for School, Work, and Life

As this country works to strengthen our foothold in the global economy, the arts equip students with a creative, competitive edge. To succeed in today's economy of ideas, students must masterfully use words, images, sounds, and motion to communicate. The arts provide the skills and knowledge students need to develop the creativity and determination necessary for success in today's global information age.

The Arts Strengthen the Learning Environment

Where schools and communities are delivering high-quality learning opportunities in, through, and about the arts for children, extraordinary results occur. A recent study by the Arts Education Partnership, *Third Space: When Learning Matters*, finds that schools with large populations of students in economic poverty - too often places of frustration and failure for both students and teachers - can be transformed into vibrant hubs of learning when the arts are infused into their culture and curriculum.

The Arts Can Retain Teachers Who Love to Teach

The retention of our best teachers is a daunting challenge. It can be met, however, by ensuring schools embrace the arts. Schools, especially those struggling, can retain their best teachers by becoming havens for creativity and innovation; places where students want to learn and teachers want to teach. As we aim to improve the teaching environment, the arts can help us retain our best future and current educators in our nation's schools.

A comprehensive strategy for a complete education includes rigorous, sequential arts instruction in the classroom, as well as participation and learning in available community-based arts programs. Public schools have the responsibility for providing a complete education for all children, meeting the commitment put forth in NCLB. The federal commitment to arts education must be strengthened so that the arts are implemented as a part of the core curriculum of our nation's schools and are an integral part of every child's development.

Achievement in and through the Arts

Position: The Arts Help Close the Achievement Gap.

Argument: The arts make a tremendous impact on the developmental growth of every child, leveling the "learning field" across socio-economic boundaries. The arts reach students not otherwise engaged, uniquely bridging the broad spectrum of learning styles. Low achieving students often become high achievers in arts learning settings. Their success in the arts classroom often transfers to achievement in other subject areas. Students who participate in the arts outperform those who do not on virtually every measure. Researchers found that sustained learning in music and theater correlate to greater success in math and reading, with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reaping the greatest benefits.¹ It is now accepted that the arts are uniquely able to boost learning and achievement for young children, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged circumstances, and students needing remedial instruction.²

Students in high-poverty schools benefit dramatically from arts education. The arts teach children the skills necessary to succeed in life, including learning to solve problems and make decisions; learning to think creatively; building self-esteem and self-discipline; articulating a vision; developing the ability to imagine what might be; and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.

Ask: Academic achievement for disadvantaged students should be strengthened by integrating successful arts education models into the schools. Urge high-poverty schools to use federal funds to ensure that a comprehensive arts education is available for all students and to integrate the arts into school curriculum to improve student achievement. Provide support for local, state, and national partnerships that promote standards and strategies in support of arts education.

Educational Equity in and through the Arts

Position: The Arts Are a Core Academic Subject and Must Reach All Children.

Argument: The federal government requires that a complete education for every child must include rigorous instruction in all "core academic subjects"- a designation given to the arts in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Unfortunately, national studies have shown that the implementation of NCLB has led to the erosion of art education in the schools, with 22% of surveyed school districts reporting a decrease in instructional time for art and music.¹ U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has said, "Many educators across the country have shown that a focus in NCLB on reading and math is not mutually exclusive of the arts and music. In fact, we all know that a well-rounded curriculum that includes the arts and music contributes to higher academic achievement." A comprehensive arts education – fully integrated as a core subject of learning – fosters the creativity and innovation needed for a more competitive workforce.

Department of Education Arts in Education (AIE) programs identify and disseminate successful models of arts instruction, integration, and professional development, and support the leadership initiatives of VSAarts and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In addition, in-school and after-school learning partnerships with arts organizations which, when teamed with rigorous instruction in the arts during the school day, provide students with opportunities to achieve arts literacy. These programs decrease the frequency of delinquent behavior and school truancy, and improve overall academic performance, communication skills, and the ability to complete work on tasks from start to finish.

Ask: Congress must address the unintended consequences of NCLB that have diminished the presence of arts education in our schools; as one of NCLB's core academic subjects, preserve and strengthen the arts and improve the implementation of the arts as a core academic subject at the state and local levels. Congress should also continue and strengthen support for programs and partnerships that maximize the capacity of the arts to reach all students, including the Department's AIE program, the primary Federal initiative for developing national models in arts education and professional development.

¹ <outbind://215/#_ftnref1> Center on Education Policy. (2006). From the Capitol to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act, March 2006. (p. xi).

² Horowitz, R. & Webb-Dempsey, J. (2003). Promising signs of positive effects: Lessons from the multi-arts studies. In R. J. Deasy (Ed). *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. (p. 98-100). Mason, C.Y., Thormann, M. S., & Steedley, K. M. (2004). *How Students with Disabilities Learn in and through the Arts*. Washington, DC: VSAarts. (p. 19-25).

³ Center on Education Policy. (2006). *From the Capitol to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, March 2006. (p. xi).

Teachers and the Arts

Position: The Retention of Arts Teachers Is Crucial to Creating Powerful Learning Communities and Maximizing Student Achievement.

Argument: One-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years; half within five years.⁴ Most affected are urban, rural, and minority communities with large populations of students in economic poverty. But schools have the ability to retain their best teachers by transforming schools - especially those drowning in frustration and failure for students and teachers alike - with the infusion of the arts into their curriculum. When schools embrace the arts, they can become vibrant and successful centers of learning and community life - places where students want to learn and teachers want to teach.⁵ For schools to develop this sense of community and collaboration through the arts, arts instruction for every child must be delivered by teachers with specific and expert arts and education knowledge. To do otherwise dilutes both the benefits in student achievement and opportunities for schools to retain their best teachers.

Ask: To provide students with a complete education, the arts must be both comprehensively learned *and* rigorously taught as a core academic subject. In addition to providing students with essential skills to succeed in school, work, and life, rigorous arts education offers a methodology for learning that generates creative teaching solutions from which all teachers can benefit. Student learning will benefit by ensuring arts education specialists are the providers of rigorous arts instruction, continuing support for professional development of new and experienced teachers, and increasing federal support for the transformation of struggling schools into successful learning communities through the arts.

Improve National Measurements of the Arts

Position: The U.S. Department of Education Must Include the Arts in All Research and Data Collection Regarding the "Core Academic Subjects."

Argument: NCLB and current U.S. Department of Education policy make it clear that decisions regarding education should be made on the basis of research. Furthermore, as this nation crafts major policies regarding the future of public education, it is imperative that sound research is available on the status of learning and teaching in our schools. The U.S. Department of Education is the only entity in a position to collect essential national demographic information and to guide policy research of this kind. In the past, influential data-gathering has taken place in a manner that excludes the collection of information on the arts. For example, the Department's January 1999 study on "Teacher Quality" specifically excluded arts teachers from the study sample. Meaningful research is needed to determine the status of dance, music, theater, and visual arts education. Since the arts are designated as a core academic subject, they should be included in all research and data collection efforts by the U.S. Department of Education.

For example, the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) report, *Arts in Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*, is the only Department of Education-produced research report on the status of how arts education is delivered in America's public schools. The last FRSS report on arts education featured data collected in the 1999-2000 school year. An updated report with the next round of data collection is long overdue. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts (NAEP) - the national arts "report card" - provides critical information about the arts skills and knowledge of our nation's students. The next NAEP is scheduled to be administered in 2008, and must stay on track. The FRSS and NAEP are essential to studying and improving access to the arts as a core academic subject.

Ask: The U.S. Department of Education's research efforts must be strengthened by systematically including the arts in studies conducted on the condition of education, practices that improve academic achievement, and the effectiveness of Federal and other education programs.

⁴ Ingersoll, R. M. (2002). Teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NASSP Bulletin*. 86. pp. 16-31.

⁵ Stevenson, L. M. & Deasy, R. J. (2005). *Third Space: When Learning Matters*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. (pp. 10-11).

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National Signatories

Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, Inc.	Music for All Foundation
American Alliance for Theatre and Education	MusicFriends
American Art Therapy Association	NAMM International Music Products Association
American Arts Alliance	National A+ Schools Consortium
American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences	National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences
American Association of Museums	National Art Education Association
American Federation of Musicians	National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works	National Association for Sport & Physical Education
American Library Association	National Association of Elementary School Principals
American Music Therapy Association	National Association of Secondary School Principals
American String Teachers Association	National Association of State Boards of Education
American Symphony Orchestra League	National Dance Association
Americans for the Arts	National Dance Education Organization
ASCAP Foundation	National Education Association
Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development	National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts
Association of Art Museum Directors	National Network for Folk Arts in Education
Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design	National Parent Teacher Association
Association of Performing Arts Presenters	OPERA America
Binney & Smith, Inc.	Operation Respect
Chorus America	School Social Work Association of America
Country Music Foundation	Service Employees International Union
Dance/USA	State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education
Educational Theatre Association	The American Architectural Foundation
Educators for Social Responsibility	The Grammy Foundation
International Alliance for Invitational Education	The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
International Council of Fine Arts Deans	Theatre Communications Group
Lesley University	VH1 Save The Music Foundation
Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education	VSA arts
Literary Network	Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts
MENC-The National Association for Music Education	Young Audiences, Inc.