

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, instructional time for art and music has been reduced by 22 percent. This 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 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 Prepare and Retain High Quality Teachers Who Love to Teach

The recruitment and retention of our best teachers is a daunting challenge. It can be met, however, by ensuring schools embrace the arts. Schools, especially those struggling, retain their best teachers by becoming artistic havens; places where students want to learn and teachers want to teach. As we aim to improve teacher quality, the arts can help us train and retain our best future and current educators in all subjects, not simply the arts.

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.

A comprehensive strategy for a complete education includes high-quality, 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. 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 socioeconomic backgrounds reaping the greatest benefits (footnote *Champions of Change*). 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 (footnote *Critical Links*).

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; 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. High poverty schools should be urged to use federal funds to integrate the arts into school curriculum to improve student achievement. Support should be provided 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, implementation of NCLB has led to the erosion of art education in the schools, with instructional time for arts and music reduced by 22% (footnote CEP). 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 integration and professional development, and support the leadership initiatives of VSA^{arts} and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In addition, 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; preserve and strengthen the arts as a defined core academic subject 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.

TEACHER QUALITY AND THE ARTS

Position: The Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Arts Teachers is Crucial to Creating Powerful Learning Communities and Maximizing Student Achievement.

Argument: Experts predict in the next ten years America will need more than 2 million new teachers to meet student enrollment. In light of current trends, addressing this need appears daunting at best. One-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years; half within five years. (Footnote) 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 culture and 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 (*third space* footnote). For schools to develop this sense of community and collaboration through the arts, arts instruction for every child must be delivered by a “highly qualified” teacher with specific and expert arts education knowledge, as mandated by federal legislation. To do otherwise dilutes both the benefits in student achievement and opportunities for schools to retain their best teachers.

Ask: For student achievement to remain competitive, Congress must address the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention currently facing the American education community. This can be done by ensuring arts education specialists are the providers of arts instruction to all students, 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 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 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.