

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

STRENGTHENING ARTS EDUCATION HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress to strengthen equitable access to arts education in a Well-Rounded Education through the following provisions of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*:

- o Fully fund the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants under Title IV, Part A.
- o Make explicit the opportunity for the arts to help achieve Title I objectives.
- o Thoroughly implement the professional development opportunities for arts educators and school leaders in Title II and the expanded STEM program eligibility for the arts in Title IV, Part A.
- o Fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

TALKING POINTS

- **The arts are included as part of a “Well-Rounded Education” in federal law.** This designation—alongside reading, math, science, and other subjects - is confirmation that the arts are essential to a complete education and belong in the main instructional day. Federal education funding (such as Title I, teacher training, and school improvement) is directed to support all aspects of a well-rounded education, including the arts.
- **There are huge, persistent disparities in access to arts education in the schools.** The 2009–2010 U.S. Department of Education’s Fast Response Statistical Survey - the most recent data collected at the federal level - found that schools with a higher concentration of students in poverty were less likely to offer arts education. In the 2010 National Art Education Foundation-funded study, *NCLB: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education Programs*, 67 percent of the arts educators surveyed reported that art schedules had been impacted by NCLB. Unfortunately, 2014 University of Indiana research indicates that elementary students from urban settings, from rural areas, from low income households and students of color do not share the same access to high quality music education as their white, suburban counterparts.
- **Learning in the arts can and should be included in multiple measures of student progress.** Rigorous and varied assessments in all subject areas—including the arts—can produce high-quality learning and motivate students to stay in school. The next generation 2014 National Core Arts Standards serve as a foundation for creating reliable measures of what children know and know how to do in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. Replicable assessments in grades 2, 5, 8 and three levels of high school are embedded within the 2014 arts standards framework and serve as a resource that educators can adapt to their own curriculum and students. The arts standards’ artistic processes of Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding and Connecting are excellent models of performance and portfolio-based measurements.
- **Arts educators should be evaluated upon how well their students learn and perform in their respective subject areas.** Evaluation systems in some states and districts evaluate educators in all subject areas based on standardized test scores in reading and math. Through state implementation of ESSA, teachers should be evaluated and accountable based on their performance in their own subject areas. Evaluation systems should employ valid and reliable measures applied in the context of the number of students taught and the instructional time available, and all observation-based teacher evaluations should be conducted by individuals with adequate training and expertise in the arts.

To ensure equitable access to a Well-Rounded education for all students, state accountability plans should annually document and publicly report the status and condition of arts education and other subjects. States including Arizona, California, Wyoming, New Jersey, Ohio, Washington, and others have produced significant

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reports on the status and condition of the arts as part of a complete education often included in the development of state longitudinal data systems. Sample data points should include the number and range of course offerings, student enrollment in each subject, pupil/teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, budget allocation, subject teacher certification, full-time equivalent teacher employment, and other measures chosen by the state and significant in the subject area.

- **Congress should fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers**, allowing after-school programs to fully embrace the arts as a learning opportunity for all students in and out of the traditional school day.
- **The arts are a key component to successful early childhood programs.** Federal policy includes use of the Creative Arts Expression framework of evidence-based research as central to the implementation of early childhood education program. Similarly, ESSA implementation of Title IX should keep the arts in the definition of “Essential Domains of School Readiness” for pre-school grants.
- **Flexibility should not absolve charter schools from presenting a full, balanced education for every child.** According to the National Center for Education Statistics, overall public charter school enrollment increased from 0.8 million to 2.5 million between 2003-2014. Arts education data from Arizona and California show that students in charter schools are significantly less likely to receive an arts education than students in district schools. With the number of charter school students increasing to 5% of all public school students, federal leadership is needed to ensure that all students attending charter schools be provided with a well-rounded education in all academic subjects as envisioned in ESSA.
- **The Department of Education’s data collection efforts must be strengthened by systematically including pre-K–12 arts education in the School and Staffing Survey, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), and other data instruments.** The Department should provide more timely updates on access to all arts education at multiple grade levels—using such tools as the School and Staffing Survey and the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). The latest FRSS in the arts was released in 2012, with the next one scheduled to be in the field in 2019. Congress needs to provide funding support to fund a robust FRSS in arts education to help us track how and where the arts are taught to our nation’s students. The next NAEP, known as “the nation’s report card,” is scheduled to be released in April of 2017. Funding needs to be available for updating the NAEP Arts Framework to include more comprehensive measurements in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts that assess the condition of arts education, practices that improve academic achievement, and the effectiveness of federal and other programs at multiple grade levels.

BACKGROUND

With the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, the U.S. Department of Education and state departments of education have begun taking up the implementation process by producing new federal regulations and state accountability plans. Education leaders in Congress have pledged to provide oversight as each state sets new directions with expanded responsibilities.

A major change in the law is that, while the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* listed the “arts” as a “core academic subject,” that term was discontinued in the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*. The new law lists the “arts” and “music”—alongside reading, math, and a host of other subjects—in the federal definition of a “well-rounded education”.

Attached to this issue brief is a paper titled *Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life*. This statement is intended to serve as a tool for communicating the benefits of arts education to policymakers at all levels as ESSA’s promise is realized across 50 states.