

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY ARTS EDUCATION

Helping Children Achieve in School, Work, and Life

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress to:

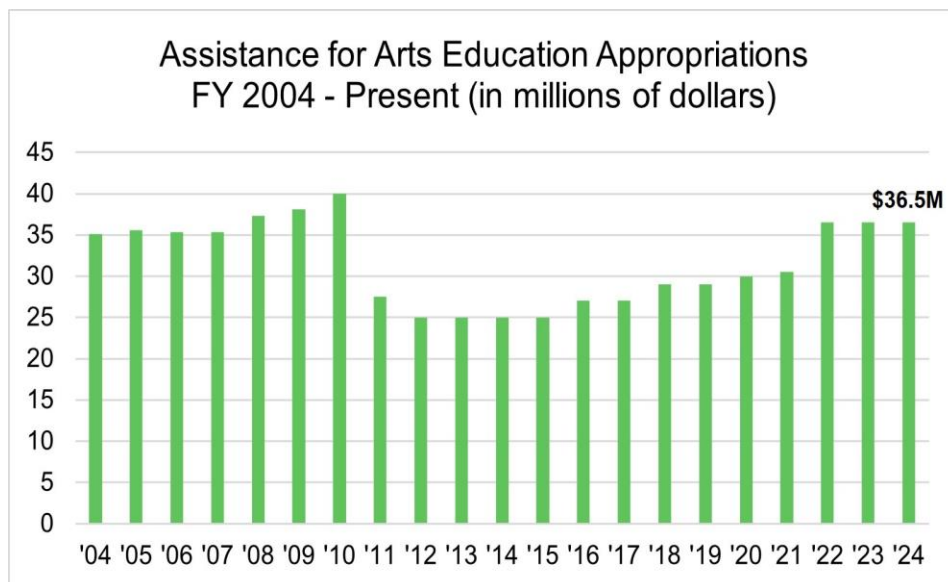
- Strengthen equitable access to arts education through the Well-Rounded Education provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Co-sponsor the “Arts Education for All” bill introduced by Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), HR 5463.
- Fund the U.S. Department of Education’s Assistance for Arts Education program at \$40 million.
- Provide \$1.65 billion in support for the Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grants under Title IV, Part A of ESSA, to support Well-Rounded Education.
- Provide \$2.09 billion in support for the Nita Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC) after-school program.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to issue policy memoranda promoting the eligibility under current law for the arts to be supported through Title I funds and through professional development opportunities for arts educators under Title II.
- Provide at least \$4 million for the Institute of Education Science (IES) to implement a Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) study in the arts and support other external efforts to collect arts education data, and include pre-K-12 arts education in the National Teacher and Principal Survey and other data instruments.
- Through both appropriations and the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), require and appropriately fund the inclusion of the arts in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), including full and robust assessments in dance, theater, media arts, music, and visual arts.

TALKING POINTS

- **The arts and music 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. Senate report language described the arts as “dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts, and other arts disciplines as determined by the State or local educational agency.” 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. As part of its commitment to equity and justice, the White House, and Congress should affirm arts education as a right for all children and encourage state and local education authorities to use federal funding to provide arts education, as is authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- **Students in our nation’s highest-poverty schools have the least access to arts education. Persistent disparities in access to arts education in the schools must be addressed.** 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. A report released by the Arts Education Data Project - a nonprofit initiative - in 2022 found that more than 2 million students in U.S. public schools have no access to any arts education. The majority of these students attend schools in major urban or very rural communities; have a high percentage of students from low-income families; and represent a student population that is majority Black, Hispanic, or Native American. As Education Secretary Miguel Cardona stated in 2023, raising the bar means that we must “pursue good pedagogy and a well-rounded education that includes and embraces the arts and rejects school experiences that are narrow to only what is tested.”
- **Federal data that transparently and comprehensively reports on arts education is long overdue.** The Fast Response Statistical Survey measuring access to arts education has not been administered since 2010.

The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) has removed the arts from the schedule of NAEP assessments, which measures what students are learning in the arts and is the only nationally recognized assessment in the arts outside of limited Advanced Placement assessments. With little notice to the arts education community, or to Congress, the arts, along with economics, geography, and foreign languages, were removed from the 10-year calendar of assessments beginning in 2020. The 2014 National Core Arts Standards can serve as a foundation for creating reliable measures of what children know and are able to do in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. Since their release, 39 states have adopted or adapted the Core Standards. Data collection must be immediately reinstated to inform opportunities to improve access to and advancements in arts education.

- **Students are increasingly in need of environments that support active engagement in learning and student wellness.** Access to arts learning can motivate students to attend school and has been shown to significantly reduce chronic absenteeism rates, which have significantly increased across the nation following the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that a welcoming school environment that nurtures student wellness can help students cope with social isolation and encourage self-expression in a safe and positive way. The arts, through a rich partnership among certified arts educators, teaching artists, and community providers, play a valuable role in helping students and their families build and sustain community and cultural connections.
- **Federal resources should support the many schools that are struggling to recruit and retain arts educators, which will impact the quality of these programs and their availability in the future.** According to IES, 35 percent of all public schools that had teaching vacancies during the 2022-23 school year found it very difficult or were not able to fill vacancies in music or art. Greater challenges were experienced by schools serving a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.
- **Education leaders at the national, state, and local levels are calling on policy makers to recognize that arts education is a key to igniting students’ learning.** The Arts ARE Education campaign affirms: arts education helps nurture healthy, inclusive communities where all points of view are respected and help students understand their own cultural roots and appreciate others’ cultural roots and traditions; arts education supports the social and emotional well-being of students.
- **Title IV-A funds are making a difference.** A pre-pandemic non-scientific survey found that more than \$30 million of Title IV-A funds were helping increase access for students to music and arts education in 26 states. With the ESSER funding being obligated by September 2024, these Title IV-A funds will be needed even more to support Well-Rounded Education activities and avoid transfers into other programs.
- **Congress should fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers at \$2.09 billion,** 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 U.S. Department of Education provides grants through the Assistance for Arts Education (AAE) program to strengthen the arts as part of a well-rounded education. The AAE program at the U.S. Department of Education is authorized under Title IV of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), and has received consistent bipartisan support from Congress year after year. A newly-launched [U.S. Department of Education resource center](#) highlights funded projects.

Issue brief prepared by the Cultural Advocacy Group, a collaboration of arts and culture stakeholders working collectively to advance federal policy. Updated 2024.