

# STRENGTHENING ARTS EDUCATION IN THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

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## ACTION NEEDED

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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:**
  - Improve the U.S. Department of Education's national data collection and research regarding what students know and are able to do in the arts and the conditions for teaching and learning in arts education.
  - Require states to report annually on student access to, and participation in, all core academic subjects.
  - Improve student success in school, work, and life by strengthening arts education in provisions relating to afterschool/extended learning, teaching effectiveness, school turnaround, charter schools, and student assessment.
- **Reauthorize the Arts in Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education and its programs:**
  - Model Development & Dissemination Program in the Arts
  - Professional Development in the Arts
  - VSA and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts National Initiatives
- **Conduct dedicated hearings on how arts education develops skills in creativity and innovation.**

## TALKING POINTS

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- **The arts prepare students for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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, but implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has led to the erosion of arts education in the schools.** A 2007 study from the Center for Education Policy concludes that, since the enactment of NCLB, *30 percent* of districts with at least one school identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring have decreased instruction time for art and music. These are the districts whose students are most responsive to the benefits of the arts, as demonstrated through numerous research studies. As Congress advances discussions on reauthorization of 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.
- **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.

## TALKING POINTS (CONTINUED)

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- **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.
- **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 should be required annually to collect and report comprehensive information about the status and condition of all core academic subjects for which challenging academic standards apply. 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.
- **Timely and comprehensive national data collection from the U.S. Department of Education regarding arts education is long overdue.** 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. The report has the potential to provide critical information about the arts skills and knowledge of our nation's students. Future NAEP arts tests should include comprehensive information about the status and condition of music, visual arts, dance, and theater education. Likewise, more than 10 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 the survey is set to be released this fall, such data should be gathered more frequently.

## BACKGROUND

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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). Congress has begun the process of reauthorizing this law which recognizes the arts as a core academic subject, making them eligible for federal funding through broad categories administered by states such as Title I, teacher training, school reform, technology, and afterschool programs.

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 Act.