



Federal Policy Developments in Arts Education: Opportunities at the Local Level

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Leadng and engaging in advocacy efforts for arts education never ends. It is an ongoing process of staying abreast of the status of arts education, including both school and community-based settings. Staying informed requires attention to the homework. That means building a foundation for effective advocacy: gathering facts, analyzing policy and legislative developments, preparing information updates for various audiences, and strategizing the best approaches for addressing both short and long term developments that have the potential to impact (both positively and negatively) arts education programs and resources.

You are not working alone. As advocates, we know that our efforts must be sustained at the local, state, and national levels, as each affords different opportunities for furthering a collective agenda to ensure students have access to a comprehensive arts education.

In both local and national (federal) scenarios, timelines for acting on developments can often be far in advance of the moment when budgets, policies, or legislation will actually be finalized. The vigilance of arts education advocates is often "the make or break" effort. This careful monitoring and vigilance can result in reinstatement of a program or class by arts advocates prior to adoption.

With various federal budget proposals recommending cuts in all of the federal agencies focused on culture (i.e., National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Corporation for Public Broadcasting), it is timely to revisit the ways that individuals can monitor developments and be effective advocates for arts education on an ongoing basis.

Likewise, a crisis can require fast action with an uncertain likelihood that your message will even be heard or understood in time to turn the tide in favor of arts education. Given this uncertainty with many variables, how can local leaders know which national policy developments genuinely warrant their precious time and attention?

Leaders in advocacy efforts always want to be in a position to "be at the table," especially in forums regarding issues which might intentionally or unintentionally impact the arts and arts education. Sometimes "just showing up"

provides unanticipated opportunities for furthering the vision and agenda for arts education and presents a wonderful opportunity for all parties to get to know one another—and to welcome newcomers to the process, an invaluable resource.

Through participation in the **Arts Education Legislative Working Group**, the staff members of the national arts education and national arts associations actively work together to monitor all of the policy, legislation, and appropriations developments at the national level which have the potential to impact or expand opportunities for arts education. The group has been in place for over a decade, enabling these associations to work together as a united voice for arts education. This collaborative organization created the **National Arts Education Advocacy Statement**, which many national arts organizations signed as their show of support, including

MENC and OMEA. That statement is the final article of this Special Focus section, on page 71. The Arts Education Legislative Working Group members have collaborated on developing useful documents for understanding the status of reauthorization and appropriations:

- ESEA Reauthorization Briefing Paper for Arts Advocacy Day 2010 online link: www.artsusa.org/pdf/get_involved/advocacy/congressional_arts_handbook/issue_briefs/2010/eseabrief_2010.pdf
- Arts in Education Appropriation Briefing Paper for Arts Advocacy Day 2010 online link: www.artsusa.org/pdf/get_involved/advocacy/congressional_arts_handbook/issue_briefs/2010/aiebrief_2010.pdf

At the Federal level, we can prepare for predictable benchmarks, as they will definitely require monitoring, sharing of information, and probable action. These predictable events include:

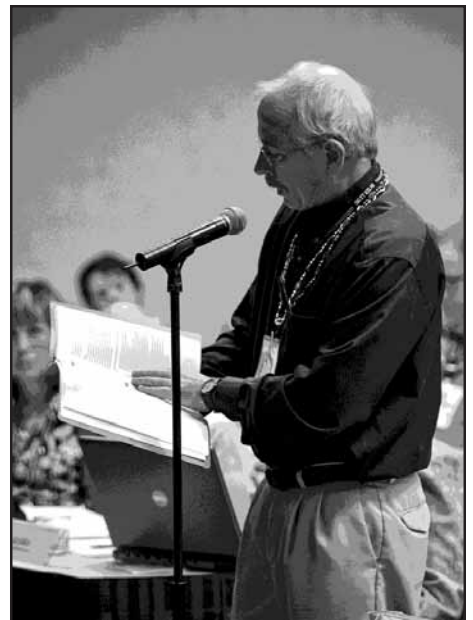
- The reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
- The cycle for determining annual appropriations
- The leadership transitions at local, state, or federal entities that naturally mark potential shifts in priorities for both the arts and school improvement efforts.

Following are actions or possible federal actions or initiatives which can be opportunities for local music education advocates:

1) The reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The reauthorization of ESEA is always an opportunity for reinforcing the importance of arts education at all levels. Reauthorization stirs discussion and debate at all levels (federal, state, local/ grassroots), as well as in the press, about what American education should look like and what improvements should be prioritized.

- **Meet with local school district leaders**, including the superintendent, school board members, and principals to understand their perspective about reauthorization, the priorities and concerns they have about reauthorization, and what they would like to see changed in ESEA with reauthorization. Remember that they are engaged in this conversation with other colleagues outside of arts education, so they



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can inform others, as well. Be sure to include dedicated arts personnel in the conversation, especially an arts coordinator.

- **Meet with Congressional representatives** from your state and local district in their home offices to share your concerns and ideas about reauthorization.
- **Convene a follow-up conversation** after the reauthorization has occurred and becomes law, so you can discuss how the final legislation supports art education—both positive and negative consequences.

2) The cycle for determining annual appropriations

Budget cycles can be a cause for confrontation when decisions need to be made regarding the competing demands for available resources. However, the budget cycle and appropriations process also provide opportunities for reinforcing the value of the arts and arts education programs. Local advocates know that this is when the presence of parents, students, and community advocates has often realized the reinstatement of a program in danger of reduction or elimination.

- Local advocates are encouraged to **invite policy makers**, including local staff members from their Congressional delegations, to visit schools and cultural organizations to see programs in action and meet with students and others who have been impacted by their participation in funded programs. This helps those who are in a position to vote for these budgets to have a clear understanding of how the funds make a difference in their own community and/or communities throughout their district or state.
- **Tell stories** about how students, schools, and cultural organizations in your community have effectively used funds to build programs, and talk about the impact of these programs with other advocates.

3) The leadership transitions at local, state, or federal entities that naturally mark potential

shifts in priorities for both the arts and school improvement efforts.

Savvy advocates know that educating new leaders begins during the candidacy and continues through the terms of office or service. In recent years, candidates at all levels have come to realize that the arts and arts education sector at all levels—from the grassroots to the national level—are engaged in a myriad of issues in domestic policy from education through economic development and more.

- **Ask candidates** about their position regarding education and the arts.
- **Convene candidate forums** about the arts and all of the ways in which the arts impact civic life, including education. Get to know the candidates' points of view on a variety of these issues to find potential allies as well as adversaries.
- **Participate in public forums** to vet candidates for school superintendent. Identify ways to communicate your vision for arts education while ensuring that the dialogue supports the professional art educators in your school and school district.

How to Keep Informed of Important Developments at the State and National Levels

- OMEA—through your state affiliate [of NAEA]
- Ohio Alliance for Arts Education: www.OAAE.net
- Ohio Citizens for the Arts: www.OhioCitizensForTheArts.org
- Stay in touch with national efforts by:
 - Subscribing to the Arts Education Partnership's ArtsEd Digest (www.aep-arts.org)
 - Joining the Americans for the Arts' Arts Education Listserv (AFTAAIE-L@LISTSERV.ARTSUSA.ORG)
 - Subscribing to Arts Watch, a free weekly cultural policy publication of Americans for the Arts (www.artsusa.org/go/artswatch)



The national, state, and local discourse collectively matter—as each level informs the others. Leadership for arts education all comes down to the human factor. A critical mass of individuals caring about and engaging in this work builds a collective and collaborative leadership team working to ensure that all children have access to high quality arts education in schools and communities. ■

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