



## Recommendations for Policies That Support High-Quality Visual Arts Education

**There** is substantial evidence that high-quality education in the arts provides students with opportunities to develop a number of capacities that are not well addressed in other areas of the curriculum such as visual-spatial abilities, self-reflection, and experimentation. In addition, visual arts education has been shown to create a dynamic school culture and to motivate students who might otherwise be at risk of dropping out of school.

However, there is growing evidence that despite the inclusion of the arts as a core subject in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the largest federal legislation which provides policy guidance and funding for education in the United States—the implementation of this legislation when it was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act led to an erosion of arts education in some schools. A Center on Education Policy survey found that 16% of districts had reduced time for art and music instruction by an average of 57 minutes a week, or 35% of instructional time devoted to those subjects. The data also shows that the loss of instructional time in the arts has been concentrated most in low-performing and high-poverty schools.

Bolstering the knowledge base about art education and strengthening practice for every student will require policy changes at all levels: federal, state, and local. With the December 2015 reauthorization of ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act, there are opportunities for furthering policies that can support arts education and enhance understanding of the value of arts learning. To bring those policy changes about, NAEA recommends the following:

### **1. The continued importance of the arts within a well-rounded curriculum to build understanding of the value of arts learning.**

Having the arts in the list of well-rounded (formerly “core”) subjects in each reauthorization of ESEA since it was first included in the 1993 reauthorization sets the tone at the federal level that the arts are important subjects of learning. It is equally important that the arts are recognized for their value at the state and local district levels if the arts are to be valued in both schools and communities, and if all students are to have access to a high-quality arts education. The identification of the arts within important legislation at all levels often means that these subjects are assessed, that there is broad access to the range of disciplines within each of these subjects, that educators are trained to teach these subjects at the state’s colleges and universities, and that additional project funding for arts education is available at the federal, state, and local levels from government, foundations, and local funding agencies, including local arts councils.

### **2. The need to gather data about the visual arts in parity with other subject areas.**

In order to understand access to the visual arts, we need to be diligent at all levels to see that data about access to the arts—the number of faculty members, the number of students enrolled in courses, the number of courses offered, the frequency and length of instruction provided at specific grade levels, and the dollars allocated to resources for the arts—is gathered and built into data-gathering systems.

Without reliable data, claims that access to the arts is limited, being cut, or actually expanded are not validated. Given that the arts encompass several disciplines, we, as a field, need to be thoughtful about what data is absolutely essential to know, rather than insisting that large amounts of data be gathered.

### **3. The need for graduation requirements in the arts.**

State-level graduation requirements are frequently dependent upon the elected officials in the state house and/or at the state department of education and can change with leadership transitions in these offices. As the arts are important to developing human potential and a culturally diverse, visually literate citizenry, having high school graduation requirements include study of the arts—as defined by individual states—provides the kind of direction which will enable many students to experience arts learning who otherwise might not have the opportunity to do so.

### **4. The need for an ongoing arts education committee to create a strategic vision for arts education and to support efforts to ensure funding and other resources for the visual arts.**

The need for resources is often a major stumbling block to offering a high-quality, comprehensive art education program. Gathering data and having a plan championed by an ongoing art education committee comprised of both in-school and community-based cultural leaders can provide a voice for not only maintaining but also expanding these resources based on a strategic vision for arts education which can be adopted by the local school board. Having a local committee which understands access to the arts in the context of overall educational goals ensures that the arts

community is engaged in the work on an ongoing basis, not only when there is a crisis.

### **5. The need to support certified/licensed art educators.**

At the heart of a high-quality visual art education program in schools are the certified/licensed art educators who form the backbone of a teaching force dedicated to standards-based art education curriculum for our students. While these programs can include museum education experiences; community-based teaching artists; and arts integration units which support collaborations among classroom teachers, other subject area teachers, and arts educators in addition to other types of partnerships, the foundation of a high-quality program depends on those art educators dedicated to the day-to-day development of their students.

### **6. The need to support strong community partnerships which in turn support the role of museums, other community cultural organizations, and higher education in building high-quality arts education.**

Community partnerships are complementary experiences that enable students to learn about the full scope of access to and understanding of the arts. They help students to see career options in the arts and provide opportunities to interact with professional artists. Optimally, these partnerships should also intersect with the National Visual Arts Standards, which include outcomes related to these experiences, especially within the areas of presenting, responding, and connecting. These experiences do not replace access to high-quality art education programs in schools taught by certified/licensed art educators.

### **7. The importance of the arts in supporting creativity and innovation efforts in schools and communities.**

Many individuals and organizations engaged with school improvement efforts at all levels—federal, state, and local—speak about the importance of educating today's students in ways that build their knowledge and skills in creativity and innovation, both of which are highly valued in the workforce as well as in life. Study of the arts can be masterful in creating a context and environment for both creativity and innovation. The arts are not the only subject areas which promote creativity and innovation, but they are certainly among the best ways of instilling an interest in looking at the world and solving problems in new ways in this visual age.

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