

# 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 definition of core academic subjects including the arts and strengthen equitable access to arts learning through the following actions:**
  - Require states to report annually on student access to, and participation in, all core academic subjects.
  - Retain the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which supports afterschool, out-of-school programs and expanded learning time in schools.
  - Strengthen arts education in provisions relating to early childhood education, Title I, student with disabilities, teaching effectiveness, school turnaround, charter schools, national data collection, and student assessment.
  - Improve the U.S. Department of Education's national data collection regarding what students know and are able to do in the arts and the conditions for teaching and learning in arts education.
- **Maintain arts education grant support at the U.S. Department of Education:**
  - Administer a direct, nationally funded competitive program that ensures dedicated resources to support large-scale model arts education projects that improve teaching in the arts, are inclusive, and leverage the power of the arts to support comprehensive school reform.
- **Conduct dedicated hearings on how arts education develops skills in creativity and innovation.**

### TALKING POINTS

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- **The arts are designated as a “core academic subject” in federal law.** In this respect, the arts have equal billing with reading, math, science, and six other disciplines. This designation is an acknowledgement of the relevance of the arts in a complete education and their rightful place in the main instructional day. Federal education funding (such as Title I, teacher training, and school improvement grants) are targeted to core academic subjects, and as such, the arts are an eligible expenditure of these funds. While a complete education in the arts that is supplemented with afterschool offerings may benefit some students, those programs cannot replace the arts education the school is responsible for providing to all students. However, high-quality expanded learning time schools, which provide significantly more time for all students, are an effective way to ensure that all students have access to arts education as part of the core instructional day.
- **Implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) has led to the erosion of arts education in the schools.** In 2011, Common Core and the Farkas Duffett Research Group conducted a national survey of 1,001 3rd–12th grade public school teachers and found that schools are narrowing curriculum, shifting instructional time and resources away from subjects such as visual art, music, foreign language, and social studies toward math and language arts. Two-thirds (66 percent) say that other subjects “get crowded out by extra attention being paid to math or language arts.” The 2009–2010 U.S. Department of Education's Fast Response Statistical Survey 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. The Secretary of Education has repeatedly identified the narrowing of the curriculum as the top concern expressed to him by parents nationwide.
- **Learning in the arts can and should be included in the multiple measures of student progress.** Rigorous and varied assessments in all subject areas—including the arts—can produce high-quality learning and provide incentive for students to stay in school. The new 2014 National Core Arts Standards, a re-imagining of the 1994 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 core arts standards framework. The 1994 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 demonstrated that schools can and should measure student progress in creating, performing, and responding to works of art. The 2014 Core Arts Standards include “Connecting” as a fourth measure of student progress. The arts have clearly demonstrated that they are a model of the performance and portfolio-based measurements envied by other core academic subjects.

## TALKING POINTS (CONTINUED)

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- **Arts educators should be evaluated upon how well their students learn and perform in their respective subject areas.** New evaluation systems are being used to evaluate arts teachers based on standardized test scores in reading and math. The U.S. Department of Education should support a system in which individual arts teachers are evaluated and accountable based on their performance in their own subject areas using a range of criteria, including observations, peer reviews, parental or student input, and analysis of agreed-on student learning evidence. New evaluation systems employing valid and reliable measures should be developed and 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.
- **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 including Arizona, California, Wyoming, New Jersey, Ohio, Washington, and others have produced significant reports on the status and condition of arts education, often included in their developing state longitudinal data systems. 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, and other measures chosen by the state and significant in the subject area.
- **Flexibility should not absolve charter schools from presenting a full, balanced education for every child.** According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “From 1999–2000 to 2009–2010, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools more than quadrupled from 0.3 million to 1.6 million students.” 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.
- **The Department of Education’s data collection efforts must be strengthened by systemically including pre-K–12 arts education in the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).** NAEP, known as “the nation’s report card,” needs to include comprehensive measurements in dance, 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. The Department should also be encouraged to provide more timely updates on access to arts education using such tools as the Fast Response Statistical Survey (FRSS). The latest FRSS in the arts was released in 2012—the first time in a decade since such data was collected.

## 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, as the Senate and House reauthorization proposals make their way through Congress. In the meantime, 42 states and the District of Columbia are operating under waivers issued by the U.S. Department of Education, allowing heightened flexibility in administering education policy.

As of this publishing, H.R. 5, the “Student Success Act” in the House and draft Senate committee legislation were under consideration.

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 Education Act.