

What role can arts education play in enhancing the effectiveness of the American education system?

Improve Arts Education through National Data Collection and Research

In order to increase the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the US educational system, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act designates ten core academic subjects. The arts are one of the ten core academic subjects, but have no direct accountability as there is for reading, math and science. Arts instruction has substantially decreased in many districts in order to prepare students for reading and math tests. The arts are being ignored, yet they are essential because they effectively reach high-risk students by increasing self-efficacy, motivation, and creativity.¹ With careful evaluation of its benefits and technical assistance for schools, arts education can help provide the innovation our current education system is lacking.

BACKGROUND:

The arts can boost learning and achievement for young children, students with disabilities, students from under-resourced environments, and students needing remedial instruction, leading to better grades, less likelihood of dropping out by grade 10, positive attitudes about school, and college advancement.² Sustained learning in music and theater are correlated with greater success in English/Language Arts and Math, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reap the greatest benefits.³ Yet research shows that when school districts increase instructional time for English/Language Arts or Math, art education is replaced commensurately.⁴ Greater access to arts education can help close the achievement gap and increase the number of high-achieving, underserved students graduating from high school.

PRE-EXISTING POLICIES:

Elementary and Secondary Education Act - Title V, Part A, Subpart 15, Section 5551: *helps ensure that all students meet challenging State academic content standards and challenging State student academic achievement standards in the arts and supports the national effort to enable all students to demonstrate competence in the arts.*

Elementary and Secondary Education Act - Title IX, Part A, Subpart 11, Section 9101(1)(D): defines “core academic subjects” as “English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography.”

POLICY OPTIONS:

The following provisions should be considered when reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):

- Retain the arts in the definition of core academic subjects of learning.
- Reauthorize the Arts in Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education.
- Sustain the Model Development & Dissemination Program in the Arts and evaluate the effectiveness of current and prior Model Development & Dissemination Programs in the Arts in order to determine best practices for arts program funding.
- Utilize knowledge garnered by Model Development & Dissemination Program in the Arts evaluation in order to make recommendations for statewide curriculum integrating the arts as a method of improving the effectiveness of teaching the Core Subjects.

¹Catterall, James S. and Pepler, Kylie A. “Learning in the Visual Arts and the Worldviews of Young Children: Lessons from Skid Row” University of California, Los Angeles

²Horowitz, R. & Webb-Dempsey, J. (2003). Promising signs of positive effects: Lessons from the multi-arts studies. In R. J. Deasy (Ed). *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. (p. 98- 100). Mason, C.Y., Thormann, M.S., & Steedley, K. M. (2004). *How Students with Disabilities Learn in and through the Arts*. Washington, DC: VSAarts. (p. 19-25).Catterall, J. (2009). *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*. I-Group Books.

³Center on Education Policy. (2006). From the Capitol to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act, March 2006. (p. xi).

⁴Center on Education Policy, “Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects,” February 2008, accessed November 15, 2010

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improve national data collection and research in arts education as a measurable and low-cost first step toward increased accountability for arts as a core subject.

- Amend the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 Public Law 107-279, Title III, Section 303 to require a National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts once every five years, in grades 4, 8, and 12.
- Amend the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 to require the National Center for Education Statistics to collect and disseminate full and complete statistics on the condition and progress of education at the preschool, elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and adult levels in the United States in all core academic subject areas.
- Amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include language that requires States to collect and report comprehensive information about the status and condition of *all* core academic subjects, including the arts, on an annual basis. This comprehensive information could include student enrollment, pupil/teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, budget allocation, teacher subject certification, full-time equivalent teacher load, or other such measures chosen by the State to be significant in the subject area.
- Amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title V, Part D, Subpart 15 to require comprehensive evaluation and dissemination of data collected on current arts programs supported by the Model Development & Dissemination Program in the Arts.