

10 Ways to Improve Arts Education for All Students in Your Community

By Victoria Saunders and John Abodeely

Education is often a political issue. Thousands of adults from the feds to the states to school districts and school buildings make decisions every day that determine what a child learns—or doesn't—in the classroom. Because of this complicated pathway, No Child Left Behind, and the

perception that the arts aren't "core subjects" (which they are), students often need our help to get access to arts education.

Here is a list of 10 things you can do to help the children and youth in your community gain and retain access to a great arts education.

1. Be counted.
2. Speak up!
3. Get the facts!
4. Show; don't tell.
5. Enlist the support of others.
6. Communicate!
7. Many people make it work.
8. Know your audience.
9. Do Your Homework.
10. Start Now.

1. Be counted. The Arts Action Fund of Americans for the Arts is recruiting one million members to lend their voices to a grassroots change campaign. With one million members signed up, our discussions with federal legislators, the president, and others will have the type of credibility that elected officials respond to. Sign up for free today at www.ArtsActionFund.org.

2. Speak up! There is an easy way to participate in both state and national efforts to improve students' access to arts education in schools around the country. Tell the people who make decisions that the arts in schools matter. Take action with a click of a button at the E-Advocacy Center for Arts Education at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEducation/Advocacy.

- 3. Get the facts!** Tons of research exists about the value of arts education to students' academic, emotional, and behavioral success. Combine this research with personal stories—yours or a child's—to make the strongest case for including the arts in public schooling. [Find the research online.](#)
- 4. Show; don't tell.** Stories about kids in arts classes, children's artwork, and the kids themselves are the greatest advocates for arts education. Parents who can speak to decision makers about how the arts positively impacted their own children are also great spokesperson for the cause. Rely on these firsthand accounts to help emphasize the value of the arts in a child's life.
- 5. Enlist the support of other, caring individuals.** Research shows that the #1 indicator of the sustainability and quality of arts education in schools is a diverse set of caring, involved adults. By talking to others, emailing your friends, asking for referrals to others who care, you can create a network of arts education supporters that can make real change happen.
- 6. Communicate!** Once you learn who in your community also cares, keep the lines of communication open by starting a Facebook page, Google group, or other online community where you can share news, send group emails, and keep folks connected and engaged.
- 7. Many people make it work.** Teachers and parents aren't the only ones who have a role to play in providing arts education. Many different people determine what kids learn, when, and how. Principals, superintendents and their staff, school board members, and community arts organizations each have a unique ability to help children learn in and through the arts. Often, just talking to a principal about arts education—what's happening in her school, what she thinks, if she feels her students have enough—will help to make leaders conscious of children's need for it. Talk to a diverse set of individuals who can help to show them people care and to keep it in the forefront of their concerns.

- 8. Know your audience.** When you ask someone to take action, you're likely to get a "yes, I will" answer if you ask the right question. Here are some ideas of what to ask and to whom. *Parents:* Will you talk to your principal or call your superintendent to assure them that the arts matter to you and to your children? Would you visit a school board meeting to say the same thing and to ask what the school is doing to ensure the arts are part of the school day? *School Boards:* Are you willing to pass a policy requiring arts instruction? Will you dedicate one school board meeting to reviewing the arts education in your district, to ensure it is high-quality and accessible to all students? *Superintendents:* Do you have a budget for partnering with arts organizations? Do you employ an arts coordinator or anyone to oversee and support the arts throughout the district? *Principals:* Will you partner with local arts organizations to provide professional development training in arts integration for all teachers?
- 9. Do Your Homework.** Learn all you can about the issues facing your community or your local school district that are impacting arts education. By asking the questions in Tip 8, you can also become more knowledgeable about what your decision-makers are facing and how you can best strategize your steps and create your talking points. How are the arts funded currently and why is that changing? Is it the whole budget or part of it? How many arts positions will be lost and which ones? How many students will be affected? Will it affect every school? It is important that you let them know you understand and that you've done your homework.
- 10. Start Now.** We often wait until there is a crisis to take action. If you begin to get to know your decision makers, follow the issues, learn about your audience, gather your stories, build your team, and do your research now, you may be able to create a presence that discourages decision makers from cutting your programs when budget reductions are taking place.

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