



Kristen Engebretsen

10 WAYS TO SUPPORT ARTS EDUCATION

This week I got an email from someone concerned about the budget cuts to arts education and inquiring about what they could do to help keep the arts in schools.

In the spirit of my colleague Randy Cohen's popular post ([Top 10 Reasons to Support the Arts](#)), I am presenting my own **Top 10 Ways to Support Arts Education**.

10. Volunteer your time, resources, skills: Many schools would appreciate your time as a chaperone, your skill as a teaching artist, or your donations of money, costumes, rehearsal space, etc.

9. Know the facts: Stay on top of current arts education research, trends, and news articles. Start with [Reinvesting in Arts Education](#), which summarizes research on the topic. Use this data in your messaging when you speak to elected officials or school leaders.

8. Get involved politically: Tell your elected officials why arts education is important. [Ask your members of Congress](#) to keep the arts listed as a core subject during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

7. Pack a one, two punch: Your message to elected officials and school leaders should contain both a warm and fuzzy anecdote AND hard hitting data. Practice your message. Keep it brief. Know who your audience is, and tailor your message to them.

6. Increase visibility of the issue: Host a community conversation or speaker series on the topic, coordinate community fundraisers, write an Op-Ed piece for your local paper, screen a documentary about arts education, and include the arts in school communications (newspapers, newsletters, displays, letters to parents, etc.).

5. Assess your school/community strengths and gaps: First assess your needs: No fourth graders receive music instruction, no dance is offered, high school theater has been cut in half, etc. Then, take stock of your resources: parent volunteers, afterschool programs, teachers with talents or degrees in the arts, schools with unused stages in the cafeteria, nearby museums or cultural institutions, etc. Now, utilize your assets to strategically address your needs.

4. Forge partnerships: With [93% of Americans](#) agreeing that arts education is important, you are likely to find allies. Create a community team to come up with a plan for arts education based on the above strengths/gaps assessment. Include business leaders, teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, parents, students, arts organizations, etc. See how

the [TakePART program](#) benefits students and families across an entire region—beyond what can be accomplished within individual schools.

3. Talk to school leaders: Testify at school board meetings. Request meetings with superintendents and/or principals. Use these brochures to start conversations: [What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education](#) by the Arts Education Partnership and [My Child, the Arts, and Learning](#) by the Center for Arts Education.

2. Measure your school district's infrastructure: Arts education in a school district needs a sound infrastructure and can be measured by these 5 indicators:

- 1) an arts education policy adopted by the school board
- 2) a plan for arts education
- 3) 5 percent of the general budget to implement the plan
- 4) a district level arts coordinator to oversee, implement, and evaluate the plan
- 5) a student to art teacher ratio no higher than 400 to 1

Advocate for these five things. Use these indicators as goals. Measure progress by these goals. Thanks to [Arts for All](#), for their extensive, research-based, ground-breaking work on this front, and for shaping how I think about supporting arts education.

1. Be the solution: As you approach school leaders with your message in support of arts education, don't just insist that principals offer arts education overnight. School leaders are facing tough situations. Offer solutions that help solve these problems. Is the principal having an attendance issue at her school? Show her [research](#) that says that the arts can be her solution because they increase student engagement. Offer concrete ways that the arts can be a tool in improving overall education.

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