ARTS EDUCATION
Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life
March 2021

A child’s education is not complete unless it includes the arts. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the current iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), lists the arts and music in a definition of a “well-rounded education,” including all arts disciplines (dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts) as subject areas eligible for Title I and Title IV funds and other federal resources administered by state and local education agencies. A comprehensive strategy for a complete education includes rigorous, sequential, standards-based arts K-12 instruction in the classroom, arts integration programs, as well as participation and learning in community-based arts programs. The federal commitment to arts education must be affirmed at the state and local level so that the arts are part of the well-rounded curriculum of our nation’s schools and are an integral part of every child’s development.

THE ARTS CAN TRANSFORM THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
• When schools embrace the arts, they can become vibrant and successful centers of learning and community life.  
• The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing teacher shortages, especially in high-need fields and high-need schools. Involvement in arts-focused professional development results in teachers who are more enthusiastic and confident about teaching, feel more connected to their teacher peer group, and have higher attendance rates.
• A study by the Arts Education Partnership, Third Space: When Learning Matters, finds that schools with large populations of students in economic poverty—too often places of frustration and failure for both students and teachers—can be transformed into vibrant hubs of learning when the arts are infused into their culture and curriculum.  
• Teacher turnover within five years is 46% and recent data shows that fewer college students are pursuing teaching careers. Having the arts in schools has been found to improve teacher morale, satisfaction, and attendance by fostering havens for creativity and innovation—places where students want to learn and teachers want to teach.

ARTS EDUCATION CAN HELP CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
• Studies have found that high school students from under-resourced environments who are highly involved in the arts have better grades, are less likely to drop out, and are more likely to go on to college.  
• The arts play a unique role in boosting learning and achievement for young children, middle school students, students with disabilities, students from under-resourced environments, and students needing remedial instruction.  
• The College Board’s National Task Force on the Arts in Education recommends that “greater access to arts education can serve as an effective tool in closing the achievement gap, increasing the number of underserved students that achieve at the highest level in education.”

3 Lamont (2010), Barry (2010), Burnaford (2009), Arts Education Partnership, ArtsEdSearch
5 Aragon, S. (2016). Teacher Shortages: What We Know (pp. 2-3).
THE ARTS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

As this country works to strengthen our place in the 21st century global economy, the arts equip students with a creative, competitive edge. The arts provide the skills and knowledge students need to develop the creativity and determination necessary for success.

The arts teach children the skills necessary to succeed in life, including learning to solve problems and make decisions, learning to think creatively, building self-esteem and self-discipline, articulating a vision, developing the ability to imagine what might be, and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.

Multiple research studies suggest the arts play a critical role in preparing students for work and life. A comprehensive arts education fosters the creativity and innovation needed for a competitive workforce.

ARTS EDUCATION MUST BE PROVIDED TO ALL STUDENTS

The 2009–10 U.S. Department of Education Fast Response Statistical Survey (FRSS) found that schools with a higher concentration of students in poverty were less likely to offer arts education. The results of the study were alarming enough to prompt the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to declare the status of arts education “an equity issue and a civil rights issue.” The 2016 NAEP Arts Assessment similarly found that 13% of students attend schools that offer music classes less than once a week or not at all and 21% of students attend schools that offer visual arts classes less than once a week or not at all.

A 2011 national survey of 1,001 3rd to 12th grade public school teachers found that, “according to most teachers, schools are narrowing the curriculum, shifting instructional time and resources toward math and language arts and away from subjects such as [visual] art, music, foreign language, and social studies. Two-thirds (66%) say that other subjects ‘get crowded out by extra attention being paid to math or language arts.’”

Parents, educators, policy leaders, and the public should have full access to information about the availability of arts education in our nation’s schools and ESSA requires states to provide accountability data in state report cards at the school and district level. Federal and state governments should collect data on a more frequent and complete basis. Statewide longitudinal data collection efforts should include all well-rounded subjects, including the arts, as stated in a recommendation by the Education Commission of the States. The 15 states that publish enrollment data for arts courses are Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin. An additional 29 states likely collect the data but don’t report on them.

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10 U.S. Dept. of Education. Progress and Promise: 10 Years of the Arts Education Model Development & Dissemination Program. (p. 13).
18 Education Commission of the States, Arts Education Data Collection and Reporting, 50 State Comparison April 2019.