

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress to:

- Strengthen equitable access to arts education through the Well-Rounded Education provisions of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*.
- Co-sponsor the “Arts Education for All” bill written by Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR).
- Fully fund (\$1.6 billion) the Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grants under Title IV, Part A, to support Well-Rounded Education.
- Make explicit the eligibility under current law for the arts to be supported through Title I funds and through professional development opportunities for arts educators under Title II.
- Fully fund (\$1.1 billion) the 21st Century Community Learning Centers after-school program.
- Fund the Assistance to Arts Education program at \$40 million, as outlined in a separate issue brief.
- Include pre-K–12 arts education in the School and Staffing Survey, provide at least \$4 million for the Institute of Education Science’ Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), and other data instruments, and restore and appropriately fund the arts in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), including full and robust assessments in dance, theater, music, and visual arts.

TALKING POINTS

- **The arts and music are included as part of a “Well-Rounded Education” in federal law.** This designation—alongside reading, math, science, and other subjects—is confirmation that the arts are essential to a complete education and belong in the main instructional day. Federal education funding (such as Title I, teacher training, and school improvement) is directed to support all aspects of a well-rounded education, including the arts. Federal administration of ESSA and pandemic relief funds to address learning loss must enable support for *all* Well-Rounded subjects.
- **Before the pandemic there were huge, persistent disparities in access to arts education in the schools—now it’s likely worse.** The 2009–2010 U.S. Department of Education’s Fast Response Statistical Survey—the most recent data collected at the federal level—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% of the arts educators surveyed reported that art schedules had been impacted by NCLB. A 2014 Indiana University research study indicates that elementary students from urban settings, rural areas, low-income households, and students of color do not share the same access to high quality music education as their white, suburban counterparts. As Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated in 2012, “This is absolutely an equity issue and a civil rights issue.”
- **Students are returning to school increasingly in need of environments which support their social and emotional development.** Research demonstrates that arts education has a multitude of benefits to support students’ emotional well-being and help students cope with social isolation and the rapidly changing reality.
- **Students in our nation’s highest poverty schools have the least access to arts education.** As part of its commitment to equity and justice, the White House, and Congress should affirm arts education as a right for all children and encourage state and local education authorities to use federal funding to provide arts education, as is authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- **Title IV-A funds are making a difference.** A non-scientific survey found more than \$30 million of Title IV-A funds were helping increase access for students to music and arts education in 26 states. These Title IV-A funds need to be used for their authorized purpose to assure specific outcomes and support Well-Rounded Education activities and avoid transfers into other programs.

TALKING POINTS (CONTINUED)

- **Congress should fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers at \$1.1 billion**, allowing after-school programs to fully embrace the arts as a learning opportunity for all students in and out of the traditional school day.
- **The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) has removed the arts from the schedule of NAEP assessments.** With little notice to the arts education community, or to Congress, the arts, along with economics, geography, and foreign languages, were removed from the 10-year calendar of assessments beginning in 2020. The NAEP measures what students are learning in the arts and is the only nationally recognized assessment in the arts outside of limited Advanced Placement assessments and needs to be continued. The 2014 National Core Arts Standards can serve as a foundation for creating reliable measures of what children know and are able to do in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. Since their release, 38 states have adopted or adapted the Core Standards.
- **A review of the ESSA state accountability plans found that 19 states address access and participation rates in the arts as part of their state accountability reporting systems. To ensure equitable access, all state accountability plans should annually document and publicly report the status and condition of arts education and other subjects.** These state longitudinal data systems should include the number and range of course offerings, student enrollment in each subject, 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.
- **The arts are a key component to successful early childhood programs.** Federal policy includes use of the Creative Arts Expression framework of evidence-based research as central to the implementation of early childhood education programs. Similarly, ESSA implementation of Title IX should keep the arts in the definition of “Essential Domains of School Readiness” for pre-school grants.
- **Arts education nurtures the creation of a welcoming school environment where students can express themselves in a safe and positive way.** Celebrating the ability to come together as educators and students is vital to creating a healthy and inclusive school community. The arts, through a rich partnership among certified arts educators, teaching artists, and community arts providers, play a valuable role in helping students and their families build and sustain community and cultural connections.

BACKGROUND

While the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* listed the arts as a core academic subject, that term was discontinued in the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*. The new law lists the arts and music—alongside reading, math, and a host of other subjects—in the federal definition of a Well-Rounded Education. Senate report language described the arts as “dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts, and other arts disciplines as determined by the State or local educational agency.” The U.S. Department of Education and state departments of education administer ESSA through federal regulations and state accountability plans.

Catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Arts ARE Education campaign at the national, state, and local level calls on policy makers to recognize arts education is a key to reigniting students’ learning in a post-COVID-19 world. The campaign centers on points such as: arts education helps nurture healthy, inclusive communities where all points of view are respected and help students understand their own cultural roots and appreciate others’ cultural roots and traditions; arts education supports the social and emotional well-being of students.

Following this issue brief is a paper titled *Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life* to communicate the benefits of arts education to all policymakers as ESSA’s promise is realized across 50 states.