STATE POLICY PILOT PROGRAM

A CASE STUDY FROM

Massachusetts
About Americans for the Arts

The mission of Americans for the Arts is to serve, advance, and lead the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America.

Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation’s leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education. From offices in Washington, DC and New York City, we provide a rich array of programs that meet the needs of more than 150,000 members and stakeholders. We are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and to creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.

About the State Policy Pilot Program

The State Policy Pilot Program (SP3) was a three-year initiative of Americans for the Arts focused on a three-pronged approach of data collection, technical assistance, and knowledge exchange to work toward influencing implementation of federal mandates or programs at the state level; expanding state support of arts education in policy and appropriations; and impacting local access to arts programs and instruction for students. Through annual grants and technical assistance, Americans for the Arts empowered leaders and stakeholders from 10 state teams seeking to strengthen arts education by advancing state policy in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.

Visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/SP3 for more info!

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Executive Director at Arts|Learning

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President, Board of Trustees at Arts|Learning

Matt Wilson  
Executive Director at MASSCreative

Tracie Konopinski  
Senior Campaign Organizer at MASSCreative

Andre Green  
Past Political Director at MASSCreative

Diane Daily  
Education Programs Manager at Massachusetts Cultural Council

Gregory Liakos  
Communications Director at Massachusetts Cultural Council

Myran Parker-Brass  
Executive Director for the Arts at Boston Public Schools

Lurline Muñoz-Bennett  
Arts Education & Equity Coordinator at Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Marinell Rousmaniere  
Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at EdVestors

Ben Forman  
Research Director at MassINC

Julie McConchie  
Executive Director at Young Audiences of Massachusetts

Jason Rabin  
Marketing & Development Manager at Young Audiences of Massachusetts

Gail Zarren  
Program Director, Expanded Arts Access & Healing Arts For Kids at Young Audiences of Massachusetts

L Z Nunn  
Executive Director at Project LEARN, Inc.

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• influencing implementation of federal mandates or programs at the state level;
• expanding state support of arts education in policy and appropriations; and
• impacting local access to arts programs and instruction for students.

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The results of this program include numerous reports, case studies, and a network of state leaders ready to enact policy change and advocacy initiatives to advance arts education across the nation.

NATIONAL THEMES

Throughout the 3-year State Policy Pilot Program, several themes were observed across all case studies, which support the trends in policy development and advocacy infrastructure.

1. Employing the Federal-State-Local Policy Pipeline: establishing a pathway to link federal policy frameworks and federal guidance to state-level education policy development to impact local implementation of educational resources.

2. Utilizing Data to Support Policy Development and Advocacy Efforts: research and analysis will both inform and influence the path toward devising an effective policy or advocacy strategy.

3. Embracing the Power of Convening: coming together as diverse stakeholders, whether at the national, state, or local levels is an essential part of relationship building, plan crafting, and policy development.

4. Sharing Knowledge Among State Leaders: documenting and disseminating the good, the bad, and the innovative concepts from your work is key to have ownership and a stake in the shared advancement of the field of arts education.
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*Look for these icons throughout the SP3 series!*
Status of Arts Education Advocacy in the State in Fall 2014

One must consider the history of arts education in Massachusetts within the context of overall education policy in the Commonwealth. First, state law and two centuries of historical practice dictate district divisions based upon the concept of “local control.” Unlike many states that divide school districts along county lines, Massachusetts assigns each and every town (312) and city (39) as separate school districts. Additionally, the Commonwealth has several regional districts in which one high school serves two or more towns (while K–8 education remains the responsibility of each member town separately). Additionally, there are numerous regional vocational high schools across the state that draw from several towns. The development of independent charter schools, starting in the 1990s, further complicates this picture, since the Commonwealth considers each charter school as a separate district. Because of this deep, historical way in which each community developed its own schools, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) claims that it is unable to mandate any education program statewide, including the arts. Thus, arts education has always been at the discretion of each individual town and city.
The Education Reform Act of 1993

The passage of Massachusetts’ Education Reform Act of 1993 occurred as a result of the landmark civil case *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education* (1993). In McDuffy, the Supreme Judicial Court held that the Commonwealth is under a constitutional obligation to provide all public-school students with an adequate education. In defining an adequate education, the Court set forth seven capabilities that an educated child must possess. The Education Reform Act of 1993 was the legislative mechanism for carrying out the equitable access to education instruction of the McDuffy decision. Through extensive advocacy by the Massachusetts Alliance for Arts Education and others, the arts are named in this act as a core-curricular subject. The Act also mandated the development of curriculum frameworks in all core subjects.

An ESE-appointed panel completed the first MA Arts Curriculum Framework in 1995. Statewide assessments in all core curricular subjects began to be developed a year later, including the arts. However, the arts framework was extremely weak due to an ESE decision not to have domain-specific learning standards, but rather overall
standards that applied to all four arts areas: dance, theatre, music, and visual art. It simply was not possible to assess the so-called “standards” in that document. The ESE discontinued the arts assessment work and convened a new panel of arts educators to develop revised arts frameworks, with domain-specific strands and measurable standards which it completed in 1999.

However, the ESE never continued to develop a state approved assessment in the arts. Without any requirement to assess the arts or state exemplars for arts assessment, and given the Commonwealth’s long history of local control, the ESE gave each district license to do whatever it pleased in this area. To this day, there has been no state mandate or supervision of equitable access and participation in arts coursework. This has led to substantially different arts education programs in the nearly 400 school districts across the Commonwealth.

**MassCore-Recommended High School Sequence**

In 2007, the ESE approved a suggested sequence of high school coursework called MassCore. Again, due to the diligence of the arts education community, and the favorable viewpoint of the Massachusetts Secretary of Education at the time, this sequence included one year of the arts. Due to “local control,” however, the ESE “suggests” this sequence, but does not mandate it.

Since the adoption of MassCore, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) has kept data on graduation rates and success in the state’s university system. The BHE data show a higher public university graduation rate for students who have completed MassCore in high school than for those who did not complete MassCore.

**Other Factors**

By Fall 2014, Massachusetts had experienced a period of upheaval regarding arts education advocacy as well as arts and cultural advocacy. Arts|Learning, Inc. (A|L), the state’s arts education alliance, was facing the withdrawal of all support from their national sponsor (which two years later completely dissolved its network of state arts education alliances). A few years earlier, Massachusetts Advocates for the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities (MAASH), the state’s arts and culture advocacy organization, had folded. Through funding from the Boston Foundation, a two-year project to develop a new state arts and culture advocacy organization resulted in
the founding of MASSCreative (MC) in 2012. Jonathan Rappaport, A|L executive director, became an MC board member. Once MC hired a director, Matt Wilson, the two organizations began to work collaboratively to develop and lead a comprehensive arts education platform.

**Origin of the State Policy Pilot Program (SP3) Project**

In 2013, MC and A|L began working on a proposal to have the BHE require one year of arts education as an admission requirement to the state university and University of Massachusetts systems, which would then align the MassCore sequence with state university requirements. In April 2014 the two organizations submitted a detailed proposal to the BHE to this end, with assistance from partners in the Boston Public Schools (BPS), the ESE Arts and Equity Coordinator, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC). With the opportunity to apply for the SP3 grant, the two lead organizations formally asked the other organizations to become official partners and to expand the work they had started.

**Intended outcomes of SP3 projects**

The initial plan had three distinct goals:

- Passing a Department of Higher Education policy that would require one year of high school arts education as an admission criterion to Massachusetts’ public four-year universities, aligning with the existing MASSCore recommended high school graduation sequence, as is the case for English, math, and science.
- Including the arts in education policy and practice for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM to STEAM).
- Developing and implementing a “Creativity and Innovation Index” that would measure and track progress in the teaching and learning of creativity and innovation across all subject areas.

As this report reflects, the team put these goals largely on a back burner in Year 3, to focus all of its energies towards a new opportunity: including arts education in the new Massachusetts accountability and assistance plan. The new federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) required a revision of the accountability and assistance plan of every state in the nation, and specifically named the arts as part of an essential well-rounded education for every student.
The Changing Political and Educational Environment for Advocacy

November 2014 saw the election of a Republican governor, who then appointed a new Secretary of Education and new Board of Elementary and Secondary Education members who oversee K-12 educational policy for the Commonwealth. Their backgrounds and educational orientations were vastly different from those of the previous administration. Both the new Secretary of Education and the Chair of the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education strongly supported the maintenance of the status quo of high-stakes testing as the primary measure of school accountability, and demonstrated strong support for charter schools.

In 2015, State Senator Stanley Rosenberg was elected as the new State Senate president. Rosenberg was an important voice in the state legislature having a long record of support for arts, culture, cultural facilities, and arts education. This was at least one piece of good news for the arts and arts education.
Creativity and Innovation Index

Senator Rosenberg had successfully put into the state budget financial support to develop the Creativity and Innovation Index over a three year period. However, the ESE placed this financial investment into a weak initiative under “college and career readiness.” The ESE used the money to grant 10 schools project-based learning projects to develop units of study that would encourage creativity or innovation. Most of the projects had minimal impact, and nothing was done to develop an index for use across the state when these projects concluded in 2016. The ESE did develop a rubric to assess creativity and innovation in the units of study; the Arts for All coalition shared this in various meetings across the Commonwealth.
STEM to STEAM

Members of the state’s STEM Advisory Council asked Jonathan Rappaport, All’s executive director, to be a member of a subcommittee to examine the role of the arts in STEM education. Unfortunately, given the political changes to the state’s executive branch in January 2015, this work came to a standstill and the STEM Advisory Council and subcommittees did not meet for a year. A year later the Chairs of the STEM Advisory council announced a completely different direction for STEM work in the state. The new Secretary of Education disbanded the STEM and the Arts subcommittee along with several other subcommittees.

Arts Advisory Council

Several partners of Arts for All, including Jonathan Rappaport and Charles Combs (All), Diane Daily (MCC), and Myran Parker-Brass (BPS), were members of the ESE Arts Education Advisory Council. The ESE essentially discontinued all advisory council meetings (which had been founded through legislation and signed into law in 1993) and deferred any revision to the Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework despite the release of the National Core Arts Standards in 2014. The Arts Curriculum Framework was last revised in 1999 and long overdue for review and revision.

Key Facts about Major Arts Education Policies in Place at the Outset of SP3 Grant

As frustrating as these actions were for the group, a major opportunity occurred with the passage of the federal ESSA, which President Obama signed into law in December 2015. Given that it required each state to revise its accountability and assistance plans, the arts education community in Massachusetts saw the possibility to get the “arts into the mix” of this new accountability plan, in accordance with the strong federal language that includes the arts as an essential part of a “well-rounded” education.
Another important victory for arts education occurred in the state’s 2016 elections, when a voter referendum to lift the cap of charter schools was on the ballot. It would have allowed for 12 new charters annually. This issue brought the largest amount of out-of-state financing in support of any ballot question in the state’s history. Despite these outside resources, the public resoundingly defeated the question by a margin of nearly two to one, seeing this question as a way to further drain resources from traditional public schools. Budgetary concerns tend to be a driving force with arts education in many school districts, and fewer resources would have resulted in deep arts education cuts in many districts.

Massachusetts, as a “local control” state, has virtually no mandated requirements regarding arts education in its public schools. The state’s 1993 Education Reform Act did specify the arts as part of the common core of learning. An Arts Curriculum Framework, written in 1995, was completely revised in 1999 (Appendix, Attachment 2) with rich sections in dance, drama/theatre, music, and visual arts. Most schools, however, ignore dance education, and significant numbers of schools also have no theatre education. In November 2007, the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved the recommended high-school core program of study (MassCore). This included one year of high school arts for students to be “college and career” ready following graduation, but it is not mandated by state law or policy. There are licensure requirements for arts teachers in music, art, dance, and theatre.

Despite these advances in policy, state law did not mandate anything; in fact, many schools and district ignored these “recommendations.” As of March 2017, there have never been any accountability measures in the state to ensure equitable access, participation, or quality of arts education. There is no testing of the arts statewide. Some individual school districts may have an arts graduation requirement, but this is far from uniform statewide. There continues to be districts with rich arts offerings, and other districts with next to none, and everything in between — causing huge disparities in arts education across the Commonwealth.
Building a Coalition and Leadership Team

A key part of Massachusetts’ ESSA advocacy strategy was developing the Arts for All coalition to broaden the support for arts education beyond A|L and MC. Each of the members brought different assets to the campaign as well as staff members to help organize and implement strategies. As stated above, the original five partners increased to nine organizations in 2016, when the coalition began work on promoting the arts as part of the state’s ESSA accountability plan. One of the precipitating factors for enlarging the coalition was an opportunity that the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy offered. The Rennie Center is an education think tank with the mission to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. They requested that organizations statewide provide posters supporting a particular indicator to add to the state’s accountability plan. The SP3 team decided to enter this contest, and several other organizations joined this effort.
The Arts for All coalition members include:

- **Arts|Learning (A|L):** This statewide arts education alliance (founded 1982) brought deep roots in the state’s education community, strong connections to professional statewide arts education organizations and the state’s superintendent and school committee associations, and extensive content expertise, as well as a 5,000-person mailing list.

- **MASSCreative (MC):** A statewide arts and culture organization (founded 2012), MC brought experience with field grassroots mobilization, lobbying, and a 15,000-person mailing list.

- **Boston Public Schools Arts Department (BPS):** As the state’s largest school district, it brought both unmatched clout as well experience in expanding quality, sequential arts education, and vocal community support of the arts.

- **ESE’s Arts and Equity coordinator.** This role provided many important contacts and advice.

- **EdVestors:** This well-respected, Boston-based organization, known for its work as a “school improvement organization,” gave outside credibility to the coalition’s efforts. It worked with the BPS as the lead external partner for the successful BPS Arts Expansion initiative, which used data-driven strategies to substantially increase access to quality arts education for students in Boston.

- **Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC):** The state arts agency brought a huge network and mailing list as well as expertise in messaging and supporting out-of-school-time arts programming in districts across the Commonwealth.

- **Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC):** Arguably the state’s preeminent think tank, it (like EdVestors) brought intellectual credibility to the coalition’s arguments, with both decision makers and the larger public. Through Commonwealth Magazine, it also provided a key venue to share ideas with decision makers.

- **Project LEARN:** This is a collaboration of business, educational, and community leaders that work together to improve schools in Lowell, one of the state’s “gateway” cities.

- **Young Audiences of Massachusetts (YA MA):** This is a statewide provider of arts education and an affiliate of Young Audiences, the largest nonprofit arts education provider in the country.
As mentioned above, the coalition’s initial project was to produce a poster for the Rennie Center. This poster, named “Arts in the Mix,” was one of twelve finalists displayed in downtown Boston in July 2016 for a special meeting of the Rennie Center, which invited over 150 educational and business leaders. After roaming the exhibit, viewing the posters, and asking questions, invitees voted on the top three posters for which they wanted more information. “Arts in the Mix” was in the top three, so the coalition gave a PowerPoint presentation to the entire group, including the ESE commissioner and most of his senior staff. Following these presentations, invitees and presenters sat at tables to discuss the final three posters. Coalition members placed themselves strategically at various tables around the room where ESE leaders and staff were sitting, to promote its point of view.

Following this great success, each Arts for All coalition organization designated at least one staff member to the coalition leadership team, which met frequently. One of the primary factors in managing the coalition towards a common end was dedicating significant time. In part, due to the SP3 funding, MC and A|L were able to devote substantial hours to staff the coalition. Additionally, the coalition met regularly by telephone, initially with monthly calls. As advocacy work around the state’s ESSA accountability plan increased in intensity, these coalition calls became weekly, with e-mail correspondence in between, from October 2016 through March 2017.

For the ESSA accountability plan process, the ESE (to their credit) included multiple stages of public comment. At each stage, MC put its VoterVoice email tool to use, generating almost 600 letters to ESE calling for arts education to be part of the ESSA-mandated accountability standards in summer 2016, and sending another 400 emails to support inclusion of the arts during the period of official public comment in winter 2017, after the draft plan had been released to the public.

Additionally, the SP3 team was able to broadly share the ESE’s schedule of five public forums through the arts community, ensuring participation by arts supporters at each one. A|L, MC, and EdVestors developed and shared a set of “talking points” with the public prior to attending one of the ESE forums. EdVestors and A|L especially brought deep content knowledge, which the MCC and MC were able to collectively shape into a unified messaging and talking points. The coalition’s outreach helped to turn out over 40 arts education advocates to the five events. The coalition sent e-mails, recruited VIP endorsers, met with legislative champions and ESE Board members, and organized attendees to the public forums, coordinating all its members to make the same fact-based arguments.
The coalition cultivated key allies to generate support for its position, including the executive directors of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Education of the state legislature, several school superintendents, higher education administrators, leaders of a number of the Commonwealth’s cultural institutions, and a few business leaders. The coalition also developed successful relationships with some members of the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.
Advocacy Strategies

The Arts for All coalition worked together on a “high-touch” advocacy strategy. Currently, the ESE Board makes all decisions, though in practice a consensus—among the commissioner of education, the chair of the ESE Board, and the secretary of education—drives those decisions. As the ESE team drove the 10-month process to develop an ESSA state plan, the commissioner was the primary focus of the coalition’s advocacy efforts. Fortunately, between BPS, EdVestors, A|L, and staff at the MCC and MC, the coalition started with an educated sense of political pressures and issues within the ESE. Further, ESE (to their credit) developed a robust and relatively transparent approach to public comment that made the official channels easy to navigate.

As noted above, the coalition was able to mobilize members of its respective mailing lists to be active during the public comment period. In addition to generating a large quantity of comments in support of arts education, which the ESE’s own draft proposal acknowledged, the coalition also pursued a strategy of getting VIPs from multiple sectors to send letters to the ESE commissioner directly. Representatives of the education, arts, and business communities participated.

The Arts for All coalition received wide support from the state legislature. The coalition developed a “Dear Colleague” letter for the legislature to support the inclusion of arts education in the ESE accountability plan which gathered the signatures of 60 legislators (out of 200) from both parties. This initiative was led by the chairs of the state legislature’s Joint Committee on Education as well as of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development, with strong support and assistance from the Senate president’s office. Through these actions by the state legislature, it became clear that the Arts for All coalition was the only advocacy coalition to receive such wide legislative support for a specific area to be included in the accountability plan.

Finally, the coalition partnered with BPS, EdVestors, AFTA, and a local arts education organization to host a Twitter chat on the importance of arts education.

For the ESE’s five public forums through the state, people affiliated with the coalition’s networks attended each session, which proved to offer a significant advantage.
Because ESE opted to have breakout group discussions at each forum, rather than a traditional public comment period, a number of people could participate in each small group to magnify the collective voice of the coalition. As a result, the facilitators (who were generally the same at all sessions) grew to expect the arts to be part of the conversation, and at least two of them mentioned arts education as a sample topic in introducing the format.

Another part of the ESE process was that, for the first time in two years, the commissioner called a meeting of its Arts Education Advisory Council, to comment on the role of the arts in the accountability plan (probably due to pressure from the co-chairs of the legislature’s Joint Committee on Education). The meeting, held in December 2016, featured ESE leaders that were mid-level staff members. Both meetings provided important ESE contacts for the coalition in the ensuing months.

While the coalition was engaging ESE during their public comment period, it was also leveraging networks to engage directly with the Board of the ESE members. Even though convention and practice limits their ability to exercise power, these members remain incredibly influential in setting the terms of the conversation. Coalition members or representatives spoke directly with six of the 11 board members, as well as presented testimony at a number of monthly Board of ESE meetings. The coalition also used its presence to cultivate relationships with a number of mid- and high-level ESE staffers, providing additional insight to the department’s decision-making process.

In keeping with the coalition’s collective work on messaging, it created a template for each member organization to use to share its own version of comments, sometimes (as with EdVestors) as part of larger public comment on the entire ESSA plan.

The coalition also reached out to the media to broadcast its case. The Berkshire Eagle printed an op-ed by the mayor of North Adams, Commonwealth Magazine printed an op-ed coauthored by Berklee College of Music President Roger Brown and EdVestors CEO Laura Perille, and the Boston Globe editorialized in favor of including arts education standards in the new accountability system.
Roadblocks

While initial conversations with ESE were exceedingly positive, and the draft accountability plan included the arts as a possible indicator, resistance came as the coalition moved to discussing the plan itself. The state's draft plan proposed ambitious guidelines on arts education as well as “school culture,” which the state secretary of education and the ESE board chair immediately pushed back against at the monthly ESE public board meeting in late January 2017.

Massachusetts ranks number one in standardized test scores across the U.S., and there was reluctance (couched in other issues) to adopt systems that moved away from test scores as the primary (and most important) measure of school quality. Despite support from the MASC and the MASS, there were still concerns about “mandates,” since Massachusetts is technically a local-control state. Another unspoken reason may likely have been a lack of strong arts education programs in a significant portion of the state’s charter schools, as such an accountability measure might cause those schools to have lower accountability ratings and appear less desirable. There was a general fear that a strong arts program might mask weak academics in some schools, thus “artificially” raising the school’s accountability rating.

The coalition subsequently learned through twice-yearly meetings and ongoing contacts with SP3 and Americans for the Arts’ State Arts Action Network that Illinois was looking to adopt the Massachusetts state plan, with the difference that the Illinois plan explicitly gave arts education a weight of zero. (At the time the Massachusetts plan hadn’t assigned it a weight.) That is, the Illinois school assessments would track arts participation and access, but not make it part of a school’s final assessment “score.” In hindsight, this was a sign of what the Massachusetts ESE had in mind for an arts indicator.
Overall Results of 3-Year Efforts

Ultimately the only required additional measure to the accountability plan that ESE proposed was “graduation rates,” which the Board of ESE passed in late March 2017. Instead, redesigned school and district profile “report cards” (listed on the ESE website) will measure arts participation and school culture. The commissioner and his senior staff informed the coalition of this during an hour-long meeting at ESE headquarters in advance of the release of the submitted plans in March, 2017. They also pledged to revise the state’s Arts Curriculum Framework for the first time since 1999.

Based on similar work in New Jersey and elsewhere, the coalition is quite pleased with this outcome. It will make transparent the strength of arts programs in every public and charter school in the state, allowing parents clear knowledge in assessing schools and districts before moving into a town or city or sending their children to a certain school. This also harks back to some of the original work on the Creativity and Innovation Index, which would have partly asked the state to report data on arts education participation. This result, which “killed two birds with one stone,” is a strong conclusion to the coalition’s work over the past three years.
LESSONS FOR OTHER STATES

1 The Importance of Engaging Mid-Level Staffers

As in any state, gaining direct access to the commissioner of education is extremely difficult—which is why the more-than-hour-long meeting the coalition was able to have in advance of the final Massachusetts plan is a testament to its organizing and campaign prowess. However, by cultivating relationships with the key ESE staff people who were leading the work, the coalition was able to get insider information about the timeline, the format, and ESE’s thinking at every step of the process. These individuals have also promised to keep the coalition up to date and involved in the upcoming work on the “report card” and the Arts Curriculum Framework.
The Centrality of Partnerships

Even though AL and MC did the lion’s share of the day-to-day work of the coalition, it would have made almost no progress if all of its partners had not stepped up to magnify its efforts, share their expertise, and activate their networks. It also ensured that ESE was listening to more than arts- and arts education professionals.
3 The Importance of Cultivating Key Stakeholders

Connections and relationships developed with the following over many years helped elicit key allies who supported the campaign: the professional arts education associations in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts; the MASC and the MASS; the state legislature and the chairs of its Joint Committee on Education; the Massachusetts PTA; the state senate president; and arts coordinators, principals, and superintendents at various school districts. These people wrote letters of support, made key phone calls to the commissioner, and applied widespread pressure. On several occasions the ESE commented on the breadth and depth of support for an arts indicator, both at numerous public meetings and directly in the accountability plan.
4 Entrepreneurship and Seizing New Opportunities

While the coalition’s original three strategies are worthy, its progress was limited due to changing political forces after year one. With the passage of ESSA, it became apparent that this was a golden opportunity that could possibly impact arts education for the next several decades, and it was imperative for the coalition to drop its original activities and pursue this unique opportunity. The SP3 twice-yearly meetings were critical to sharing national trends as well as how each state was responding to both the challenges and opportunities. The March 2016 meeting convinced coalition members its work needed a complete change of direction, and it was absolutely the right decision.