April 23, 2004

The Honorable Ralph Regula, Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
Committee on Appropriations
2358 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David R. Obey
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Obey:

We urge you to support $53 million for the Arts in Education program at the U.S. Department of Education, in the Fiscal Year 2005 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill.

Time and again, parents, educators, employers, and community leaders tell us that arts education is critical for preparing our nation’s children to succeed in school, work, and life. Years of rigorous research demonstrate that a significant link exists between arts education and students' academic performance, as well as their social development, motivations, attitudes, and disposition toward learning.

We know the arts have the capacity to improve student achievement. Now, we need to continue to identify the most effective ways to deliver arts education in today’s complex educational environment. The Arts in Education programs at the U.S. Department of Education currently support model programs that bring arts education to whole schools, school districts, and regions. The Arts in Education programs also support professional development of arts educators, and the ongoing national arts education initiatives of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and VSA arts. Model programs supported by the Department are already showing impressive results. For example:

- Mississippi’s Whole School Initiative found that schools with a high degree of implementation far surpassed other schools in their ability to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reading targets.
- In Houston, analysis showed that students in participating elementary schools outperformed their demographic peers on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and that the benefits lasted beyond graduation and on into middle school.

Buoyed by results such as these, Congress has appropriated increases each year since 2001, though the Department of Education has not requested specific funding for the program.

As you know, NCLB recognizes the arts as a core subject of learning. This commitment to quality arts education is reinforced at the state level, where all fifty states have adopted standards
in the arts or require their school districts to do so. In a 2003 report, “The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring a Place for the Arts in America’s Schools,” the National Association of State Boards of Education urges Congress to make a greater commitment to the arts. As the states work to implement NCLB, we must provide funding to sustain the national development and dissemination of promising practices through the Arts in Education program. We must also show that a strong commitment to arts education reinforces student achievement in reading and math. Unfortunately, too many schools are trying to strengthen reading at the expense of the arts, according to a 2004 report from the Council for Basic Education.

Our states, schools, and communities are poised to further strengthen arts education, but they need our help. We urge you to support the educational development of our school children and the professional development of our teachers by including $53 million in funding for the Arts in Education at the U.S. Department of Education.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Laurie Slaughter
Tim Holden
Johnson
Jay Y. Colombo
Robert J. Hasted
Eddie Berrie Johnson

[Signatures]
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