

Grantmakers in the Arts

Arts Education Funders Coalition

K-12 Education Policy Agenda

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Grantmakers in the Arts
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Overview

As Congress works to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (better known as No Child Left Behind) and the Obama Administration grants waivers of this law to states, a key opportunity exists to ensure that arts education is a funded and integrated part of federal education policy. To ensure our nation's students, especially disadvantaged and low-income students, master the skills and knowledge they need to be college- and career-ready, we must provide students with arts education. Arts education drives attainment of skills in math, reading, and science, as well as key problem-solving and critical thinking skills necessary in today's competitive global economy.

The Coalition

To respond to this opportunity, Grantmakers in the Arts has formed the Arts Education Funders Coalition, an effort by concerned arts funders to promote equitable access to arts education in all public schools. The status of funders as stakeholders in education rather than beneficiaries of policies makes this effort unique. As a group of funders who have contributed millions of dollars to the public education system or to the nonprofit arts sector to compensate for lack of arts education in public schools, Coalition members and other funders have a stake in developing effective policy that will secure the place of arts education in twenty-first century education.

Coalition K-12 Education Policy Agenda

Below are recommendations the Coalition views as critical to ensuring that our nation's students improve academically, socially, and creatively. For additional information on these recommendations or the Coalition, please visit the Grantmakers in the Arts website at www.giarts.org.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the main federal education law providing funds for K-12 education reform. The law designates the 'arts' as a core academic subject, providing support through all of its programs. The largest of these programs is Title I, which provides resources to school districts for the education of disadvantaged students, as well as many of the key education reform requirements related to standards, assessments, and accountability for results in schools and school districts.

Title I State and LEA Plans

Title I requires both states and school districts to establish plans that govern how the program's funding will be spent to help disadvantaged students. For the state

and local educational agency (LEA) plans required under Title I, we propose to direct states and local educational agencies to describe how they will:

- Offer a variety of arts education experiences to students as part of their overall strategy to improve student achievement in math and reading/English Language Arts.
- Integrate arts education into the existing curriculum and instruction, especially for disadvantaged students.
- Increase the number of arts specialists and the number of arts classes taught by arts specialists.

Title I Report Cards

Title I also requires public reporting of student achievement, school accountability, and teacher quality information through "report cards." These report cards provide policymakers and the public with the information necessary to evaluate how schools are serving their students. Under current law, no information is provided on arts education offerings. This deprives the public, as well as policymakers, of essential information needed to make decisions on how to reform and strengthen schools. To remedy this, Title I report cards, at both the state and school district level, should report on:

- The quantity of arts courses being offered to students, including number, range, and sequence of course offerings, pupil-teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, and other such measures chosen by the state to be significant in the subject area
- As a percentage of the school population, the quantity of students taking arts courses per semester, including course titles, course length, and range of courses offered
- The percentage of arts courses taught by a highly qualified/effective teacher in that subject
- Comparisons of arts course offerings and take-up rates among high- and low-poverty schools

Title I School Improvement

Title I requires schools that are not making adequate yearly progress in academic performance to adopt school improvement strategies. These strategies largely ignore the benefits of arts education as a means to turn around academically struggling schools. While both Congress and the Obama Administration have promoted a major restructuring of the current law's requirements in this area, school improvement, especially for the lowest performing schools in each state, continues to be a focus. To respond to this, we propose that any school improvement structure adopted in ESEA reauthorization must include arts education as a strategy in the overall plan to turn around a low-performing school.

School-wide programs and target assistance - using Title I funds for arts education

Significant confusion exists among states, school districts, and schools as to whether Title I funds can be used for activities, instruction, and professional development in the arts that is designed to improve student achievement. This has led to a lack of appropriate and valuable utilization of the arts, especially in Title I schools, denying low income and other students the well rounded education they need to succeed academically. To remedy this confusion, we propose to make clear that under both school-wide programs and targeted assistance programs Title I schools can use their funds to provide instruction, professional development, and other services related to the arts that will improve student achievement.

Title II

Congress and the administration are seeking to require school districts to evaluate teachers based on student achievement and other related factors. While Title II of ESEA already provides states and school districts with resources to improve teacher quality through professional development, arts teachers and those providing arts education should receive specific professional development to improve their skills and should be included appropriately in teacher evaluation efforts. Under Title II, the following recommendations are essential to strengthening the skills and impact of arts teachers and those involved in arts education:

- Any teacher evaluation systems should include a clear plan for evaluating arts teachers, giving them an appropriate amount of preparation time and professional development before implementation. In addition, arts teachers should be evaluated on the following criteria:
 - Arts teachers, as well as those integrating arts education into other subject work and curriculum, should be included in teacher evaluation systems.
 - Evaluation of arts teachers should include measures of student achievement in the arts that are directly attributable to the arts-related work of the teacher.
 - In addition to student achievement, multiple measures, such as principal and peer observation, should be a part of evaluation systems.
- Title II should require school districts to provide targeted professional development for arts teachers, as appropriate to the needs of the LEA and its schools.
- Title II should allow school districts to increase pathways to teacher licensure for arts professionals.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

This program provides funds to school districts to provide after school and extended learning time activities. Incorporating arts education into this program would provide a powerful opportunity to enhance learning through the arts. To respond to this opportunity, we recommend the following:

- Establish a priority in the 21st Century program for entities to receive a grant if they have an integrated arts component in their program.
- Establish a priority for programs that take place in community centers—theaters, art studios, art galleries, dance studios—and utilize the elements of such centers in the operation of the program.

School Improvement Grants Program

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program provides resources to turn around the most academically struggling schools in the country. This program targets funds to one of four specific school turnaround models, none of which specifically focuses on the importance of arts education. The Coalition recommends that arts education be integrated into the turnaround models used by low-performing schools under the SIG program. A powerful example of leadership on this has been the work of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, which has launched an initiative to integrate arts education into school turnaround efforts. Their work can be found at www.pcah.gov.

Other Key K-12 Education Programs and Proposals

In addition to ESEA reforms, the Arts Education Funders Coalition has targeted other key education programs that provide opportunities to advance and strengthen arts education in Federal education policy.

Well-Rounded Education Proposals

Several proposals have been advanced in Congress to provide authority and funding aimed at “well-rounded” education. This approach is being used to tie arts education, civic education, economic education, and other disciplines into a program that states and schools can use to focus on any and all of these subject areas. All proposals should include arts education as a distinct element of a well-rounded education. As Congress further considers this approach, the Coalition believes that existing proposals must be strengthened to target such programs to low-income communities.

i3

The Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) provides resources to school districts and nonprofits to scale, develop, and replicate reforms that impact student achievement. While arts education is a possible focus of i3 grantees, only a handful of the many high-quality arts education-focused applications have been funded. To remedy this, we propose that the i3 program adopt an absolute priority for arts education that requires the Department of Education to fund quality applications with an arts education focus.

Promise Neighborhoods

Promise Neighborhoods is a program that challenges applicants to develop and implement high-quality wrap-around services to communities through schools that improve education by improving the health, well-being, and atmosphere of neighborhoods and families. This program can provide essential opportunities for arts education to be utilized by community and other actors. For this program, similar to what we propose under the i3 program, the Coalition recommends an absolute priority for programs using arts, as a major factor, to improve student achievement. The Coalition also recommends that the program encourage all applicants to partner with community arts organizations.

IES research

The Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) is the education research arm of the U.S. Department of Education. As such, IES funds numerous research and other efforts aimed at improving and strengthening the knowledge and skills necessary to provide effective education programs. Little of this research, however, focuses on arts education. To respond to this, the Coalition recommends the following:

- As part of the research focus of the Institute for Educational Research, require the commissioner for education research to focus on arts education research, integrated across several research topics, as a part of the Research Center's work required under the statute.
- Redesign the research behind arts education in IES; conduct a more thorough analysis of arts offerings in schools.

JJDPA and Second Chance Act

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA) and the Second Chance Act provide opportunities for court-involved youth and those at risk of becoming court-involved to ensure they have meaningful and effective education and workforce training opportunities. Incorporating arts education as a means of serving these youth can strengthen these initiatives.

Head Start

Head Start is one of the nation's most significant investments in early childhood education. Head Start defines a set of standards and expectations for children enrolled in the program, including literacy skill acquisition and other markers of academic preparation for elementary school. To ensure Head Start programs provide children with a variety of teaching techniques that directly relate to how preschool children learn, the Coalition recommends that arts education be integrated into the Head Start standards and partnerships be encouraged between Head Start providers and community arts organizations as a means to accomplish this.