

Eight Reasons for Supporting Quality Arts Education Programs in Ohio's Schools

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How can school districts sustain or develop high quality arts education programs for students while facing budget cuts and increased pressure to meet state accountability standards?

There are no easy answers, but arts educators and advocates should know that at the state and national levels, policy makers are working hard to resolve Ohio's school funding crisis and the budget shortfalls that many districts are experiencing. Also, a recent letter sent to school superintendents from Secretary of Education Paige emphasized the importance of the arts as core subjects in the federal "No Child Left Behind Act".

This important reminder may help stem the trend to decrease opportunities in the arts for students that some districts have reported, but arts educators must also become better advocates. That is why the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education (OAAE) has prepared the following eight reasons for providing a high quality arts education program for all students. The OAAE believes that an education in the arts (dance, music, drama/theatre, and visual arts) is essential for all students. First and foremost, an education in the arts prepares students for careers in the arts. In addition, research has shown that an education in the arts also promotes the development of cognitive and creative abilities and skills that are essential for improving academic achievement in all areas. The arts also motivate students to stay in school, and promote positive social development and participation in communities. Arts education programs have also been shown to help schools close the achievement gap among students, which is one of the requirements of the federal "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB). Overall, the arts express unique ways of thinking, understanding, and participating in the world through cognitive and sensory experiences.

The following eight reasons for providing a high quality arts education program for all students may be shared at board of education meetings, posted on web sites, included in flyers, distributed at candidates' nights, and shared with parents and community leaders to build support for arts education during this critical time for the arts.

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1) Education in the arts prepares students for careers in the \$316 billion arts industry as artists, musicians, dancers, actors, museum curators, architects,

graphic artists, photographers, filmmakers, TV-radio producers, designers, teachers, and more. According to Americans for the Arts, more than 548,000 businesses nationwide are related to the arts and employ 2.99 million people. In Ohio there are 16,937 arts-related industries that employ 89,196 people. The arts mean careers and business!

2) The arts contribute to the national and state economies. The Ohio Citizens for the Arts reported in 2003 that the arts in Cleveland and Cincinnati contributed to more than \$2 billion a year in annual economic activity. In 2002 every \$1 in state funds that was allocated by the Ohio Arts Council was matched by \$33 in local funds, for a total of \$375 million statewide. The arts mean economic development!

3) The arts are recognized as a core subject in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which places arts education at the same level of importance as language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign languages. Arts education programs are also eligible for federal funding for teacher training, technology, school reform, and Title 1 school wide programs, and extended learning opportunities. The Partnership for 21st Century Schools, a public-private organization of business and education leaders, supports the expanded list of core subjects in NCLB which, more accurately reflect "...the demands of 21st century workplaces and communities." The arts are part of the core!

4) Arts education programs are an instructional opportunity to improve student achievement. The Ohio Revised Code and Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools require a curriculum that includes fine arts, including music, and elective graduation credits that may include the arts. The State Board of Education adopted Academic Content Standards for Fine Arts in December 2003. Aligning academic standards for the arts with other academic content standards will provide additional opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels, and provide instructional opportunities across the curriculum. The arts help close the achievement gap!

5) Scientific research supports the effectiveness of arts education to help students learn. Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development, Arts Education Partnership, June 2002, is a compendium that examines the effectiveness of arts education to strengthen reading and math skills, improve student behavior and reduce truancy, keep students in school, build oral language skills, enhance cognitive development, develop creative thinking skills, and transfer learning in the arts to other areas of learning. The arts improve cognitive skills!

6) Arts education is an effective way to "level the playing field" for students from disadvantaged circumstances. According to Champions of Change, The Impact of the Arts on Learning, Arts Education Partnership, 1999, the arts reach students who are disengaged with school, and often provide a reason for students to stay in school, and reach students with different learning styles. Success in the arts then transfers to learning in other areas, transforms the environment for learning, challenges students who are bored and complacent, and connects students with the real world of work. The arts reach students!

7) Arts education programs teach students a variety of workplace skills that lead to economic independence. According to the National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices, Issue Brief for May 2002, the skills and knowledge learned through the arts, including creative thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, enhance workforce preparedness for all students. These skills help students land competitive careers in the \$316 billion communication, entertainment, and technology industries. The arts prepare students for work!

8) The arts have a positive impact on students over their lifetime. According to The State of the Arts Report 2001, prepared by the Ohio Arts Council, "Research demonstrates that exposure to the arts will improve a child's creativity, self-esteem and overall capacity for learning. Further, the role that the arts play in the life of a child directly correlates to the likelihood that the child will be involved in the arts as an adult." The arts impact students for a lifetime!

For more information about the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education visit www.oaae.net or call the Columbus office at 614.224.1060, Donna Collins, Executive Director.