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Abstract

Student access to arts education, and the quality of such instruction in the nation's public schools, continue to be of concern to policymakers, educators, and families. Specifically, research has focused on the questions: To what extent do students receive instruction in the arts? Under what conditions is the instruction provided? The passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was a significant move by the Senate, as they had not considered K-12 public education legislation on the Senate floor since 2001. Under this federal law, the arts are included as part of a "well-rounded education" requiring that the arts have equal billing with reading, math, science, and other disciplines in K-12 public education. This designation is an acknowledgement of the relevance of the arts in a complete education and means that the arts may be an eligible expenditure of funds for federal education programs (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., 2015, p. 2). This research contributes to the discussion of public K-12 arts education funding and programming in the era of the *ESSA*.

Introduction

"Every child should have access to a well-rounded education that includes the arts" (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., 2015, p. 1). Student access to arts education, and the quality of such instruction in the nation's

public schools, continue to be of concern to policymakers, educators, and families. Specifically, research has focused on questions such as: To what extent do students receive instruction in the arts? Under what conditions is instruction provided?

Art education in public schools usually includes any combination of dance, music, drama/theatre, and visual arts classes. The federal, state, and local governments usually fund it. However, not all schools provide students with art education.

It is not hard to find examples of ways in which the nonprofit arts and culture community are working to fill the gaps left by the loss of a regular arts curriculum in all schools. In nearly every neighborhood, you will find dedicated groups and organizations that are working in schools or providing afterschool and summer programming. Although artists and organizations are on the ground addressing these challenges, we do not have a complete solution to meeting the needs. It is time for elected officials and policymakers to step up. State education budget cuts have devastated arts programs in the schools. State leaders must provide fair and adequate funding for schools so that principals can rehire teachers in all disciplines and integrate arts into the curriculum. The question remains, what is the U.S. government and the Department of Education doing to address the issue of arts education funding across the country?

In 2015, Senate Education Leaders met to discuss proceeding with a conference committee to resolve differences in the House and Senate bills designed to replace *No Child Left Behind*. Through the work and leadership of Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Patty Murray (D-WA) and the Senate education committee, they crafted and maintained a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., July 2015, p.1). This act ushered in a new era of federal K-12 education policy with increased local control and state-level accountability as well as new opportunities for arts education.

The Senate also is working on the new *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. The Senate has not considered K-12 education legislation on the Senate floor since 2001. This vote is a significant move by the Senate. Under this federal law, the arts are included as part of a well-rounded education. This requires that the arts have equal billing with reading, math, science, and other disciplines. This designation is an acknowledgement of the relevance of the arts in a complete education and means that the arts may be an eligible expenditure of funds for federal education programs (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., 2015, p. 2).

Background/Problems

Following the 2008 recession, budget cuts were consistent in schools across the United States. More than 95% of students attended schools with significantly reduced budgets. It is estimated that since 2008, more than 80% of schools nationwide experienced cuts to their budgets. As a short-term solution in some instances, art programs were partially or completely eliminated from the affected school districts. Dance and theatre classes, in particular, were cut. During the 1999-2000 school year, 20% of schools offered dance and theatre classes. In the 2009-10 school year, only 3% of schools allocated funds for dance classes, and only 4% of schools taught theatre classes. The number of schools that offered music classes did not change significantly during the last decade. This indicated no budget cuts in that subject area, with 94% of schools still offering music classes. In 2015, public schools in major cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, were still struggling with budget cuts, resulting in the continued elimination of art programs across affected school districts. Due to budget constraints, fewer schools offered art classes in 2017 than were offered a decade ago.

Another consequence of less money being spent due to the recession, is that various government policies, including the *No Child Left Behind Act*, placed greater emphasis on core subjects, such as math and reading. In doing so, they put arts education on the back burner. In light of these policies, school districts began re-directing funds toward subjects that require standardized testing in order to increase the test scores of the students.

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush. The act was revamped to ensure better access to quality education for all children, regardless of their religion, race, ethnicity, or class (Kline, J., July 2015). Since the emphasis was placed on core subjects, such as math and reading, funding for art programs decreased significantly, especially for those art classes that required studio materials. As a result, art education in some schools was eliminated, although children sometimes had the option to take certain art classes after school with volunteer teachers. In some school districts, art classes were still offered, but only with a limited number of seats.

In July 2015, Senate Education Leaders met to discuss proceeding with a conference committee to resolve differences in the House and Senate passed bills to replace *No Child Left Behind*. Through the work and leadership of Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Patty Murray (D-WA) and the Senate education committee, they crafted and maintained a bipartisan bill

to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) (Kline, J., July 2015). The current educational law expired in 2007 and the Senate had not considered K-12 education legislation on the Senate floor since 2001, which made this vote extremely significant and increased local control and state-level accountability, as well as, new opportunities for arts education.

During the Obama Administration, the direction was to make education policy through “creative, expansive, and controversial uses of executive power that changed the national political discourse around education and pushed states to enact important policy changes regarding charter schools, common core standards and assessments, and teacher evaluation” (McGuinn, P. 2016). The administration’s hard-hitting endeavors on school reform led to political backlash against those same reforms and federal involvement in education in general. This resulted in an ESEA reauthorization (the 2015, *Every Student Succeeds Act*) that rolled back the federal role in K-12 schooling in important ways.

Also in 2015, the Senate worked on the new *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). Under ESSA, federal education mandates would decrease, which meant states would have more flexibility and authority than they had had in decades. Under this federal law, the arts were included as part of a well-rounded education (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., 2015, p. 1). This required that the arts have equal billing with reading, math, science, and other disciplines. This designation was an acknowledgement of the relevance of the arts in a complete education and meant that the arts would be an eligible expenditure of funds for federal education programs. The State Education Agency (SEA) leaders confronted great change and opportunity as many agencies moved away from a focus on compliance with federal regulations, state statutes, and programmatically dictated uses of funds and moved toward a broader focus on supporting districts and schools in improving outcomes for all students (McGuinn, P., & Weiss, J., May 2016).

In December 2015, President Obama signed the bill into law in a ceremony attended by a number of education leaders from across the country, including Americans for the Arts President and CEO Robert L. Lynch. Lynch, stated “Arts education leaders across the country are looking for federal leadership, certainty, and support to ensure access to the arts for all students, in school and out of school. Today, we all can take pride in seeing a huge step toward achieving this goal with the Senate’s action. There is hope for an end to the current patchwork of state waivers, and advance policy to enable every child to receive a complete education that includes the arts” (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., 2015, p. 2).

The law spans Fiscal Year 2017 through Fiscal Year 2020, ushering in a new era of education in America with increased local control and state-level accountability. Also, new opportunities for arts education were noted including: “dedicated funding for arts education through the ‘Assistance for Arts Education’ grant program; inclusion of the arts in the ‘well-rounded education’ definition with over a dozen references in the bill ensuring among other things that the arts continue to be eligible for Title I funds--the largest federal funding source to local educational agencies and schools; and the integration of the arts in STEM programs--recognized in the field as ‘STEM to STEAM’” (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I. 2015).

Solution

With the *Every Student Succeeds Act* in place, arts education advocates need to work with state education leaders to ensure that the arts are part of the state’s education policies. Three areas of priority for arts education advocacy at the federal level are:

- Ensuring well-rounded arts provisions in the new law, ESSA, are fully implemented.
- Supporting funding for the Assistance for Arts Education program at the U.S. Department of Education at \$30 million.
- Supporting full funding of the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant program at its authorized level of \$1.65 billion.

Other areas we urge Congress to accomplish:

- Require states to report annually on student access to, and participation in, the arts.
- Support the Creative Arts Expression framework in early childhood program implementation, and keep the arts in the definition of “Essential Domains of School Readiness” for pre-school grants.
- Improve the U.S. Department of Education’s national data collection regarding what students know and are able to do in the arts and the conditions for teaching and learning in arts education.
- Thoroughly implement the professional development opportunities for arts educators and school leaders in the Higher Education Act of 1965 amendment Title II, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant program which includes the arts, and the expanded STEM program eligibility for the arts in the Higher Education Act of 1965 amendment Title IV.

Examples of ways in which the nonprofit arts and culture community is working to fill the gaps left by the loss of a regular arts curriculum in all schools are becoming more common occurrences. In nearly every neighborhood, you will find dedicated groups and organizations working in schools or providing much-needed afterschool and summer programming designed to fill the gaps in the public education system. However, artists and community organizations cannot be the only ones defending the value and merit of arts education.

One of the non-profit organizations for Arts Funding Programs is through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). During full committee consideration in the House, Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY) offered an amendment to boost funding for the NEA per the President's request. His interest was to scale up healing arts therapy work with veterans and provide access in more areas across the country (Davidson, B., Kahn, G., & Fitzsimons, I., June 2015). Art Works through NEA "supports the creation of art that meets the highest standards of excellence, and promotes public engagement with diverse and excellent art, lifelong learning in the arts, and the strengthening of communities through the arts" (Hutter, V. 2015). Art Works has two programs that could help with arts education funding for specific projects and activities:

- Creativity Connects: is a pilot grant opportunity that supports partnerships between arts organizations and organizations from non-arts sectors. Those sectors may include business, education, environment, faith, finance, food, health, law, science, and technology (Hutter, V., 2015). Selected projects should:
 - Demonstrate the value of working with the arts
 - Support the infrastructure for the arts to work in new ways with new sectors
 - Build bridges that create new relationships and constituencies
 - Create innovative partnership projects to advance common goals
- Challenge America: offers support primarily to small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to those populations whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability (Hutter, V., 2015).

Non-profits, communities, teachers, private individuals, and states are creating a wave of change, moving from perceiving art education as an expendable cost toward an overall realization of its benefits. The recent passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* is a promising step, as the arts are included as part of a well-rounded education. This means that the arts

may be an eligible expenditure of funds for federal education programs. This will hopefully bring arts back to the classroom.

Conclusion

The arts strengthen education. Research confirms a positive relationship between arts education and academic success for both elementary and secondary students. Benefits include improved performance in the classroom and standardized tests, higher graduation rates, increased inspiration and creativity, emphasis on child-development, and meeting the needs of at-risk youth. The arts improve educational attainment and increase the likelihood of a student attending a postsecondary institution.

As of June 2016, the U.S. Department of Education had begun a process to implement the new *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). At the same time, all fifty state education agencies had started the administration of the new law. The Appropriations Committee advanced a bipartisan bill setting Fiscal Year 2017 funding levels for a number of federal agencies and programs, including Assistance for Arts Education at the U.S. Department of Education. The bill passed.

At the beginning of 2017, educational leaders across the country began preparing for a nation-wide reeducation on the nation's education standards. "At conferences, through webinars, and in regional training sessions these next few months, state education departments will walk districts through a laundry list of changes coming their way under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*" (Burnette II, 2017). These changes standards' changes are accompanied with new forms to fill-out, new benchmarks to meet, and new penalties to pay if the benchmarks are not met. "Under the new plan, school districts would not be required to identify ineffective teachers, as the law requires, but instead would identify how much 'ineffective teaching' occurs at the school" (Burnette II, 2017). However, there is help for these teachers in ESSA that was not available before in NCLB. "The former Teacher Incentive Fund—now called the Teacher and School Leader Innovation Program—will provide grants to districts that want to try out performance pay and other teacher-quality improvement measures" (Klein, 2016, p. 4). The Program through the ESSA also includes resources to help train teachers on literacy and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) integration in the classroom.

In addition, a new Block Grant comes with the ESSA legislation. The new "\$1.6 billion block grant consolidates dozens of programs, including some involving physical education, Advanced Placement, school counseling, and

education technology” (Klein, 2016, p. 3). The idea of the Block Grant is to help districts redistribute funds based on the new education requirements, like the addition of the arts. “Districts that get more than \$30,000 have to spent at least 20 percent of their funding on at least one activity that helps students become well-rounded, and another 20 percent on at least one activity that helps students be safe and healthy” (Klein, 2016, p. 3). For some states, part of the money can be used to update technology as well. Whether or not practitioners buy into those blueprints (in the ESSA and the new arts education standards) will depend on how state officials pitch the benefits in a “for them, by them” format to local educators (Burnette II, 2017). This is a main factor that will determine if the ESSA is successful or not.

In 2017, a new administration is in the White House and little is known about how the ESSA will play out. What we do know is that in the Trump Administration’s first budget proposal, he planned to “eliminate the arts, humanities, and library agencies” (Zubrzycki, 2017). “Trump’s new budget calls for the elimination of the agencies, asserting that the endowments are not ‘core federal activities’ and that getting rid of the IMLS will likely not cause ‘a significant number’ of libraries and museums to close” (Zubrzycki, 2017). The National Endowment of the Arts, the National Endowment of the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences would shut down if Trump’s 2018 budget went through (Zubrzycki, 2017).

The budget elimination of these agencies does not “technically” affect the arts education standards in the ESSA, which is still the current education legislation. For many school districts and regions of the country, these arts agencies are the only arts education resources the entire community has and the elimination of these resources is an elimination of the arts. These agencies help provide resources to regions of need, like rural and urban areas. This does not appear to be a great start for arts education in the new ESSA. For now, with the 2018 Federal Budget proposal on hold, we can only hope that the funding allotted for K-12 education meets the needs and new standards of the bi-partisan ESSA bill, to help the reimplementation of arts education into a “well-rounded education” for all public schools and their students.

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