



**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2008 Appropriations for the
United States Department of Education's Arts in Education Programs**
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education & Related Agencies
April 17, 2007

Americans for the Arts and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission respectfully request the subcommittee to adopt an appropriation of \$53 million for the Arts in Education programs of the U.S. Department of Education. We also ask that it require the U.S. Department of Education to conduct much-needed research on the status of arts education, including the Fast Response Statistical Survey (FRSS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Before considering funding levels, members of the subcommittee need to be aware of a simple but breathtaking fact: **Students with an education rich in the arts have better grade point averages in core academic subjects, score better on standardized tests, and have lower drop-out rates than students without arts education.** This fact is demonstrated by an increasing amount of compelling research. It is not seriously contested. Further, research confirms that these results occur across the socio-economic range.

Artists believe that the arts are important for their own sake. Educators know they are rigorous and standards-based, and they are essential for supporting the learning styles of all students while providing them with the unique opportunity to develop problem solving skills, to develop critical thinking skills and to foster their creativity. In essence, the arts help students develop skills that are needed for the 21st century workforce. In fact, CEOs have stated that the MFA (Masters in Fine Arts) is the new MBA and seek employees that have had a solid arts education. You can agree or disagree with us, of course. But you can't ignore the research, which shows that the arts help kids do better in school. And for that reason, we believe that the federal government has an essential role in ensuring that all children have access to excellent arts education.

For several decades, the U.S. Department of Education's Arts in Education programs have provided funding for the national programs of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and VSA arts (formerly Very Special Arts). Since 2001 they have also run two important competitive grant programs:

- The Model Development and Dissemination program identifies, develops, documents, and disseminates models of excellence in arts education that impact schools and communities nationwide. These projects strengthen student learning through standards-based arts education and integration of arts instruction into other subject areas.
- The Professional Development grants program supports projects that serve as national models for effective professional development that improve instruction for arts specialists

and classroom teachers. State and local education agencies can adapt these models to provide rigorous arts instruction for all students.

A recent Model Development grant was given to the Los Angeles Unified School District, in partnership with Inner-City Arts, a non-profit organization providing arts learning services to students in the district, and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences. The three-year Arts in the Middle (AIM) Project will expand and rigorously evaluate an innovative, cohesive model for delivery of arts-based instruction to remedial grade six English learners. The Project's strategy will extend community resources to under-resourced urban middle schools in order to improve academic performance among English learners by integrating standards-based arts education within the core Language Arts curricula of grade six students. The Project's target population is remedial grade six students who are at extreme high risk of academic failure due to low levels of English Language Development. Assuming it is successful, the goal is to replicate it within other Los Angeles schools. This project directly supports the school district's 10-year plan for arts education.

With increased funding, the Arts in Education programs will be able to support additional such models that improve arts learning in high-poverty schools, and findings from the model projects may be more widely disseminated.

With regard to another aspect of our request: despite research showing the positive effects of arts education, there is a serious lack of empirical data on how much arts education is being delivered in our nation's schools. We do not have comprehensive, reliable information about student access to arts instruction or student performance in the arts. The last Fast Response Survey report was for the 1999-2000 school year, and the next round is long overdue.

Congress has repeatedly urged the Department of Education to implement the Fast Response Survey in the arts to no avail. In public statements, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has said, "Art, dance, music, and theater are as much a part of education as reading, math, and science." And yet, the Department has told Congress that among the "many tough choices" made in the area of research, the arts survey did not rate as a priority.

The Senate included report language in the FY 2007 appropriations bill that explicitly directed the Department of Education to conduct the FRSS, and it also provided funding for that purpose. As you know, however, the bill did not become law, and therefore the Department of Education has been able to delay implementing the FRSS for yet another year. We thank this subcommittee for taking this step last year and urge you to adopt similar language in your FY 2008 bill.

Good data does exist in some localities, but only data that is national in scope will allow Congress to make national policy. We would like to tell you about data that was gathered and used to affect policy in Los Angeles County. The task was an essential step in helping the County and community stakeholders such as school districts, arts organizations, elected officials, business leaders, foundations, and corporations strategically organize their efforts to restore K-12 arts education. We hope the story of how the information was collected, and the way it was used, will convince you of the need to compel the Department of Education to collect national data.

In 2000, the Arts Commission commissioned the Arts in Focus survey, which detailed the status of arts education for 1.7 million students in 82 school districts. These students represent 27% of all public school students in the state, and 3.4% of all public school students in the country. With 80 of the 82 superintendents in the County participating, it was found that:

- 54% of school leaders reported no adopted arts policy and 37% reported no defined sequential arts education in any discipline, at any school level.
- 64% reported no district level arts coordinator, and the current average ratio of credentialed arts teachers to students was 1:1200.
- Nearly 50% reported “lack of instructional time in students’ schedules” as their most significant challenge.
- Many districts would not have arts programs without the support of parents and partnerships with non-profit arts organizations. 78% of districts allocated less than 2% of their budget to arts education and 82.3% used partnerships with non-profit organizations to provide arts education.

100% of superintendents who were interviewed stated that they believe in the importance of the arts. However, what the data revealed was the lack of an infrastructure to support arts education and, given the three decades without sequential arts education, limited capacity of school districts to incorporate it back into the school day.

In response to the findings of Arts in Focus, Los Angeles County (the Arts Commission in partnership with the Los Angeles County Office of Education) embarked on a year-long, community-based planning process. In 2002, the County Board of Supervisors, the County Board of Education and the County Arts Commission unanimously adopted *Arts for All: Los Angeles County Regional Blueprint for Arts Education*, which presents a series of policy changes, educational initiatives, and establishment of a new infrastructure to ensure all 1.7 million students receive a high-quality K-12 arts education.

The first goal of the Blueprint is to help school districts create a sustainable infrastructure for arts education by conducting a needs assessment and utilizing district data to develop and adopt an arts education policy and long-range budgeted plan with benchmarks. To date, twenty school districts are at various stages of receiving technical assistance from a coach to strategically, and thoughtfully, identify and implement key budgeted priorities for arts education in the areas of standards-based curriculum, instruction and methodology, assessment, professional development, program administration and personnel, partnerships and collaborations, funding, resources and facilities, and evaluation.

As a key strategy in the Blueprint, the County created the Arts Education Performance Indicators report, or AEPI, to collect pertinent school district data to track the status of an arts education infrastructure based on five critical factors: an arts education policy adopted by the school board; an arts education plan adopted by the school board; a district level arts coordinator; an arts education budget of at least 5% of the district’s total budget; and a student to credentialed arts teacher ratio of no higher than 400:1. With these pieces in place, school districts can deliver sustainable arts education.

The AEPI is released every other year. It is interesting to note that for the 2005 report, those districts making the greatest progress in achieving the five critical success factors received technical assistance while those showing little to no improvement did not. AEPI is an invaluable tool in providing a County-wide picture of the status of an arts education infrastructure, target technical assistance to help school districts plan, keep arts education visible and at the forefront of policy discussions, provide a mechanism for school districts to self-evaluate and reflect on their progress in providing equal access to a quality arts education and to compare themselves to other districts, and encourage County-wide dialogue on arts education among diverse stakeholders in the community – from elected officials, to educators, to parents and students.

Access to up-to-date, accurate data is imperative to drive strategic planning and policy change. In addition, Arts for All illustrates the importance of providing customized assistance to help school districts effectively plan for the implementation of arts education based on identified needs and priorities. Without this help, we have found that it is difficult for school districts to use available funds effectively – including, for example, Federal Title I funds.

You may be aware that the FY 06-07 budget for the state of California includes \$500 million in one-time funding for arts education and physical education equipment, supplies and professional development and \$105 million in on-going funding especially for arts education personnel, supplies, materials, and professional development. As it turns out, the districts that have received technical assistance and that have established policies and plans are able to effectively and strategically utilize this funding. Seventeen County school districts have expressed an interest in receiving arts education planning assistance through Arts for All in light of the new state money. With these additional school districts, 37 districts in Los Angeles County will be planning for and implementing standards-based arts education – close to 50% of County school districts – with more school districts joining Arts for All each year.

Each level of government has its part to play, in concert with stakeholders at each level. We have described the massive commitment of Los Angeles County government to providing excellent arts education, and we have touched on the increased recognition by the state of California of its responsibility to help. The federal government needs to step up as well. It has a unique role in collecting and publishing data, and an essential role in supporting, researching and disseminating locally developed projects. Both of these roles are the focus of this testimony.

We would also like to ask you to encourage local districts to use federal education funds, such as Title I, to institute data collection and technical assistance programs similar to what was done in Los Angeles County. They should also use federal funds to hire local district-wide arts education coordinators.

Finally, we would like to mention that the NAEP – the national arts “report card” -- is scheduled to be administered in 2008, and must stay on track. It is designed to measure students' knowledge and skills in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, and it provides critical information about the arts skills and knowledge of our nation's students. The last arts NAEP was performed in 1997. Like the FRSS, the next round is long overdue.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit this testimony.