

# THE CRITICAL LINK

AEP is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic and government organizations that demonstrates and promotes the essential role of the arts in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools.

The Partnership was formed in 1995 through a cooperative agreement among the **National Endowment for the Arts**, the **U.S. Department of Education**, the **National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**, and the **Council of Chief State School Officers**.

*The Critical Link* is a quarterly newsletter featuring articles and resources on emerging issues related to arts education and promising practices from AEP's partnering organizations.

## Message from the Director, Richard Deasy

The word "assessment" may send shivers up your spine. It shouldn't. It's what arts educators do regularly as they use appropriate processes to determine and inform students of their progress in creating, performing or responding to an art form. Generally this is done at the classroom level. Good undergraduate preparation and continued professional development is needed to hone the skill. But it's an essential requirement of teaching. Anxiety escalates when assessment processes and expectations are designed and required by authorities beyond the classroom. Understanding those processes, and the rules for their construction

when large groups are involved, can calm anxiety and encourage participation in developing the assessment. It's also good to debate the merits from a strong knowledge base. It's not a good argument, for instance, that the arts are forms of personal expression that can't be measured. Knowledge and technical competence can be. Judgments can be made about quality and originality. Teachers do it every day. This issue discusses resources and activities aimed at providing solid information and support for assessments at all levels.

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(Past newsletters are stored in the archive)

## Washington Watch: Federal Arts and Education Update

The latest version of "No Subject Left Behind," a guide to the arts education funding opportunities in the federal education law, is now available. The Arts Education Partnership in collaboration with several other arts organizations worked to update this important manual which is intended to help arts educators both in and out of schools better understand the *No Child Left Behind Act* and its funding potential for arts education programs.

One notable example of federal education spending on arts education comes from Arizona, where the Tucson-based Opening Minds Through the Arts program (OMA) received a \$1 million grant under the Model Arts in Education Development and Dissemination Grant program in 2001. Due to OMA's success, it has been recognized by

the state's school superintendent, Tom Horne, who has secured \$1 million in additional federal education funding to replicate the program in several more schools across the state. This K-5 program is currently underway in nearly 30 schools, and the Superintendent praised the program in his January State of Education speech. He said that expanding the OMA program to more schools throughout the state will enable his office to study why it aids academic achievement, especially for Hispanic students.

For more information about the OMA program, visit [www.omaproject.org](http://www.omaproject.org). For a copy of "No Subject Left Behind," visit the AEP web site at [www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org) and click on Funding Opportunities.

### Targets of Opportunity:

- Nominations for the National Medal of the Arts are due to the National Endowment for the Arts by April 2nd.
- Full Arts Education Partnership meeting, June 18-19, 2004 in Washington, DC at the National Education Association.

## Spotlight on Research

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) in cooperation with the American Educational Research Association (AERA) will release in April a set of recommendations for future research on arts education. The recommendations are based on directions proposed in AEP's *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic Achievement* and on additional guidance provided by scholars and advisors from a wide variety of academic disciplines. AERA called *Critical Links* a "benchmark" in arts education studies when it was published in May, 2002. Felice Levine, executive director of AERA and Gerald Sroufe, senior advisor and director of government relations, offered to lead

a process for building on its studies and essays. A goal was to propose opportunities for future research arising from the suggestions in *Critical Links* and from other recent research that scholars from a range of disciplines would find significant and rewarding to pursue. A goal, as well, is to provide guidance to government and private funders on the investments that would advance arts education and its impact. The report will recommend opportunities for research in five areas: cognition and expression; personal and social development, teaching and learning environments; community, democracy and civil society; and the status and condition of arts education.

## News from the Field

For over a decade, the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards Arts Education Consortium (or SCASS Arts) has been addressing the development and refinement of arts education assessment materials for large-scale, district-level, and classroom-based assessment and professional development connected to the national standards in arts education. SCASS Arts is a collaboration among state departments of education led by the Council of Chief State School Officers. It is the primary network for developing and disseminating local and state assessments in the visual and performing arts and providing professional development materials and programs for teachers in

developing and using arts assessments. Several members of SCASS Arts participated in developing the framework for the 1997 NAEP Arts Assessment of 8th grade students.

The network has also been instrumental in establishing visibility for arts education by developing statewide exit exams for vocationally certified programs in the visual and performing arts (as in New Jersey), and using SCASS Arts materials in teacher workshops focused on "looking at student work" (as in Minnesota). For more information about SCASS Arts, visit [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) (click on Projects by topic, and look for arts education).

## Suggested Resources on...Arts Education Assessment

**The NAEP 1997 Arts Report Card: Eighth Grade Findings From the National Assessment of Educational Progress** [nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/arts](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/arts)

**Maryland Assessment of Fine Arts Education: State of the Art in Large-Scale Fine Arts Assessment** [www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org) (click on Evaluation and Research)

**Arts Assessments: Lessons Learned from Developing Performance Tasks** (available from [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) for \$120 for non-members)

**Ohio Arts Education Assessment Project** online workshop [www.lifecentered.com/assess.htm](http://www.lifecentered.com/assess.htm)

## Featured AEP Publication

Name: *Envisioning Arts Assessment*.

Year: 2002

Author: Nancy Pistone

Description: A guide that aids designers of large-scale arts assessments, it also provides a series of activities that will generate various strategies and assessment design options. It is intended as both a practical tool and a reference.

How to obtain a copy: Visit [www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org) and click on "Publications and Resources."

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