



**Spring 2012 AEP National Forum
Are We There Yet? Arts Evidence
and the Road to Student Success**

**Opening Remarks
Sandra Ruppert, AEP Director**

**Thursday, April 12, 2012
Renaissance Washington, DC Dupont Circle Hotel
Washington D.C.**

Good morning, everyone! I'm Sandra Ruppert, the director of AEP and I want to welcome all of you to Washington DC and the Spring 2012 National Forum of the Arts Education Partnership.

As I look out at the audience, I am excited to see so many familiar faces of friends and colleagues. Most of you are here representing your organizations, which we at AEP are proud to count among our 100 plus partners from education, arts, culture, government, philanthropy and business.

I'm also excited to see so many new faces as well. To all of you, and especially to our newcomers, I extend a special welcome and thank you for being here. I know organizational budgets are tight and there are many demands on our time, so I am especially gratified that you have chosen to be here at our Spring National Forum.

There are some 230 of us gathered here from 28 states and the District of Columbia. We represent 139 different organizations. Nearly all of us serve in some way in leadership roles in our organizations. And although our work may cover different areas or different sectors, I believe one thing that brings us together is our shared interest in the education and well-being of children and young people in this country. They are truly our #1 national priority.

AEP's mission is to secure a complete and competitive education for every young person in America. As part of that education, we believe that every child, every day must have the opportunity to create, perform, learn about and experience the arts in all its many forms.

The theme we've chosen for this Forum is arts evidence and the road to student success. It acknowledges a growing body of evidence that learning in and through the arts contributes to educational excellence—that is, to better student outcomes, to more effective practice, to stronger schools and to healthier communities.

We decided the “road” was an appropriate metaphor to convey a journey with multiple pathways leading to student success and also to ask ourselves if the arts—despite the evidence—are still generally taking a back seat in serious discussions about how to advance educational excellence in our schools.

Throughout the Forum and in our sessions we will continue to explore these questions: How can we be more *intentional* in our work and in our research? And how can we apply our knowledge to inform practice and policy, not only in the arts, but in education more broadly?

And I promise you won’t be disappointed by your experiences here—unless, of course, you are from out of town and your plans included seeing those famous Cherry Blossoms at the Tidal Basin. This year marks the 100th anniversary of Japan’s 1912 gift to the American people of these beautiful trees with their delicate pink blossoms. Every year at this time Washington DC rolls out the red carpet in honor of the cherry blossoms. This year, it is an extra special week because of the anniversary, culminating with the annual Cherry Blossom Festival Parade on Saturday.

Unfortunately, those famous 100-year-old trees that line the Tidal Basin didn’t get the memo. They bloomed and faded a full two weeks ahead of schedule.

Here in Washington, you hear a lot of talk about control. Democrats are in control of the Senate. Republicans control the House. And both houses of Congress need to get better control of the budget deficit and start paying more attention to education issues.

But some things simply can’t be controlled. And Mother Nature and those cherry blossoms are just two of those things. Sometimes—despite our best laid plans—the timing just isn’t right.

Other times, probably more often than not, our plans come together, the stars align, a window of opportunity opens and we manage to arrive at just the right place at just the right time.

That’s the way I feel about the timing of this National Forum. With the presidential campaign season gearing up and hopefully with education and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act some place on the agenda, our decision to focus on how the arts really can help improve education will be just the right issue at just the right time.

We also are very excited about the launch today of *ArtsEdSearch*, AEP’s new digital research and policy clearinghouse focused on the educational outcomes of arts learning.

And if that were not enough, as if on cue, we learned not long ago of plans for two new federally supported research reports to be released within days of each other and both to be available just in time for this Forum. As many of you know, major large-scale research studies, especially ones that rely on the gathering or analyzing of mounds of data from nationally representative samples of schools or students, can take years before the results see the light of day.

So, imagine. Two major reports released within the last two weeks and just in time for our Forum. Talk about good timing.

The U.S. Department of Education, through its National Center for Education Statistics, which is part of the Institute of Education Sciences, released *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools 1999—2000 and 2009—10* a little over a week ago on April 2. This long awaited study provides critical information about the status and condition of arts education in K-12 public schools and, on many questions, allows comparisons with findings from a decade ago.

The other research report was released just a few days earlier by the National Endowment for the Arts. It is entitled, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Finding from Four Longitudinal Studies*. For this study, the NEA commissioned UCLA researcher James Catterall and his colleagues to analyze the potential long term academic, career and civic benefits associated with arts involvement for at-risk youth.

Individually, these two reports are vitally important for filling critical gaps in our knowledge about access to and the outcomes of arts education, but taken together they tell an even more powerful story of how far we've yet go in securing a high quality education that includes the arts for every student and why it is so imperative that we continue to make that goal a top priority.

In addition to being significant for their findings, these research reports are important because of where they originated—that is, the federal agencies that commissioned and sponsored these studies. The U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts are the two agencies of government that we look to for national leadership on matters involving education and the arts.

The Department of Education's mission is advance educational excellence. The Arts Endowment's mission is to advance artistic excellence. Together their missions work in tandem to support and reinforce one another. The two reports, with their complementary findings, are emblematic of the shared commitment of each agency to a common goal of educational excellence that includes gaining knowledge and skills in the arts for every student.

This shared commitment between the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education is also the basis for a unique interagency agreement between the two federal agencies that led to the establishment of the Arts Education Partnership more than 17 years ago. That agreement in support of AEP has continued unabated since 1995.

The two preeminent national organizations representing state level education and the arts—the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, respectively—also have since 1995 worked in cooperation with the two federal agencies to administer the Partnership. So, as its foundation AEP is positioned strategically at the intersection of arts and education, both nationally and at the state level.

I welcome representatives here today from all four of AEP governing organizations and thank you for your continued support.

This morning, we are honored to have Rocco Landesman, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, with us. Chairman Landesman was confirmed by the United States Senate as the agency's 10th chairmen in August 2009.

Under his leadership, the NEA has continued to strengthen its commitment to high quality arts education and issued through the NEA's Office of Research and Analysis a number of ground-breaking research studies on the

topic. Prior to joining the NEA, Chairman Landesman was a Broadway theater producer. In addition to theater, his other major passions include baseball, horse racing, and country music.

I may be going out on a limb here, but my guess is the Chairman, who named his three sons North, Nash, and Dodge, can also appreciate a good road metaphor.

Please join me in welcoming NEA Chairman, Rocco Landesman.

Thank you, Chairman Landesman, for your remarks and for joining us today as we kick off the AEP Spring 2012 National Forum.

Before we get our motor runnin' and head out on the highway, to paraphrase Steppenwolf—the band, not the book—I would like to take a few minutes to survey the terrain. The recent Department of Education report—the first in a decade on the status and condition of arts education in our public elementary and secondary schools—gives us a clear view of the current environment for arts education and a context for understanding where we have been, where we are now and where we need to go from here.

The survey, part of the Fast Response Survey System or FRSS, actually consists of a set of seven surveys, and covers a wide range of topics, including the availability of arts education, characteristics of the programs, arts education instructors, their teaching load and professional development, classroom teachers' integration of the arts with other subjects, student assessment of arts learning, and high school graduation requirements.

Let's focus just on access for the moment, because, frankly, without access to arts education the other stuff doesn't even come into play. The data were gathered for the 2009-10 school year and they allow for comparisons with similar data collected in the 1999-2000 school year—essentially providing a 10-year pre- and post-NCLB implementation comparison.

When we look at the results of what has happened to access to arts education over time, we see a mixed picture, starting with elementary school:

- It is encouraging to see and important to acknowledge that music education remains strong in our elementary schools, with 94 percent of them offering music instruction in 2009-10, the same percentage as a decade ago.
- Visual arts instruction is available in 83 percent of elementary schools, down from 87 percent in 1999-2000.
- Instruction in dance and theatre are the least available in elementary schools at 3 percent and 4 percent, respectively.
- And those two art forms posted the most significant declines from 1999-2000 when direct instruction in each was available in 20 percent of elementary schools.

With the secondary school data, we see similar patterns with changes in availability of arts education over time with music education in secondary schools growing slightly from a decade ago, while visual arts, dance and theatre all posted declines.

Overall, when we look at the results in terms of percentages—94 percent of elementary schools offering music instruction and 83 percent offering instruction in visual arts—the picture doesn’t appear to be all that bleak. Unless, however, you think about it another way—that is, in terms of the students themselves—who has access to the arts in school and who does not?

Here the numbers tell a different story: What it means is 1.3 million of our nation’s public elementary school students receive no specific instruction in music, and nearly 4 million elementary school students receive no specific instruction in the visual arts. And literally, tens of millions of students will never get the chance in elementary school to receive any authentic instruction in dance or theatre.

So, who are the kids with little or no access to the arts? Disproportionately, they are the students who attend high-poverty schools, the schools that serve the lowest socio-economic levels of our population. These are also the same schools that enroll more English language learners and more special needs students. And they are the same schools most likely to produce students who eventually will leave high school before they have earned a diploma.

And, yet, on nearly every measure of access to arts education between low-poverty schools and high-poverty schools, the high-poverty schools come up short almost every time.

In his prepared remarks on the report, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the lack of access to arts education “deeply disturbing.” And on the wider opportunity gap for children in high-poverty schools, he had this to say: “This is absolutely an equity issue and a civil rights issue—just as is access to AP courses and other educational opportunities.”

An equity issue and a civil rights issue. Those are powerful words. Put another way, we must not accept that children are denied access to a complete education simply because of where they live and go to school.

I encourage you to delve deeply into the report, explore the many supplemental tables, and read Secretary Duncan’s full remarks on the findings. Links to these materials are currently available on the AEP website. In the weeks to come, AEP will be working with our colleagues from the Arts Education Working Group to develop a toolkit that will be posted on the AEP website and elsewhere to help you better understand and make use of the findings for your own work.

When the Secretary, in his remarks, described the arts opportunity gap as an equity issue and a civil rights issue he made it clear he was basing his comments on decades of research that demonstrate the unequivocal benefits of arts education. He references the academic, economic and aesthetic outcomes of arts learning and includes a mention that the arts also are just plain fun. He cites specifically the recent NEA commissioned study by researcher James Catterall.

More than a decade ago, AEP published ground-breaking research by Dr. Catterall and his colleagues that showed students highly involved in the arts outperform students with little or no involvement. They receive

better grades, have more positive attitudes about school, and are less likely to drop out of high school. More importantly, the differences were most significant for economically disadvantaged students.

In this new study, Catterall sought to understand the relationship between early arts involvement and positive outcomes later in life for at-risk students. And here he found similar long term academic and civic benefits that accrue from intensive arts involvement into young adulthood.

So let's be clear why this opportunity gap is an equity issue and a civil rights issue: It is because the nation's poorest students, the ones who could benefit the most from arts education, are least likely to have access to it.

This recognition comes at a time when we as a field are accumulating more and better evidence about the multi-faceted and beneficial outcomes associated with learning in and through the arts for all students. Better designed evaluations and new research in the field of neuroscience are helping us to understand more fully what happens when people—especially children and young people—engage deeply with the arts, what benefits accrue above and beyond those associated directly with learning in the art form itself.

A growing body of knowledge documents that in addition to academic outcomes, an education in the arts contributes directly to the development of:

- **cognitive** outcomes such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and reasoning;
- **personal** outcomes such as engagement, persistence, and self-confidence; and
- **social and civic** outcomes such as cross cultural understanding, collaboration and arts participation.

Until now, if you wanted to gather the research comprising that body of knowledge, you would have to look far and wide to find it. And once you found it, you then might find yourself trying to make sense of it.

AEP designed *ArtsEdSearch* as a kind of online one-stop shop for research and policy information about the educational outcomes of arts learning, both in and out of school. We developed *ArtsEdSearch* because there was nothing else like it, where high quality research is available in one place, readily accessible, and easily understandable.

To date, *ArtsEdSearch* contains nearly 200 summaries of research studies that include all arts forms and all levels of education. And our plans entail doubling the number of studies available through *ArtsEdSearch* over the next two years.

Over lunch, we will take you on a test drive of *ArtsEdSearch* and talk more about what it is and what it does. It is part of our redesigned website that includes a new improved database that tracks state policies for arts education in 12 categories and allows you to generate reports by state or by policy topic.

Yet, as valuable as *ArtsEdSearch* is in providing access to summaries of high quality research on arts learning, the research by itself will not be enough to move the needle on educational excellence. In addition to the extant research, *ArtsEdSearch* also identifies where research gaps exist. One example of such a gap is the dearth of research that documents the relationship between arts education and middle school attendance patterns.

Why is information such as this important? It's important because research has found that one "early warning sign" that a student might be likely to drop out in high school begins to show up in middle school in the form of chronic absenteeism. Now, we know many middle schoolers develop a more positive attitude toward their own education when they are involved with the arts. And when you are more engaged, you also are more likely to come to school. But we need the evidence-based research that documents that finding in multiple settings and under different conditions.

The point is we don't just need more research about arts learning. We know from *ArtsEdSearch* that a great deal of good research already exists. What we need is more *targeted* research that has applications for addressing some of education's most pressing challenges—such as reducing high school dropout rates and ensuring that all students leave high school ready for college or careers. We need to be more *intentional* in our research such that it informs our practice and helps to shape education policy.

Good policy starts with good data and in our data-driven world, evidence-based research is the coin of the realm. That being said, when it comes to informing our decisions, facts, figures and statistics do not always win the day, whether it is around kitchen tables or in the halls of Congress.

When former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee made arts education the focus of his chairmanship at the Education Commission of the States in 2004, he would often remind us and his fellow state policymakers that "We must make a case for the arts, find a place for the arts, and most importantly, put a face on the arts." When we tell the story behind the numbers, when we talk about the differences the arts make in the lives of children, we put a face on the arts.

And we should never lose sight of that purpose—that the education and well-being of our children and young people are our #1 national priority.

Someone asked me recently about my outlook for the future of arts education in our public schools. And I would have to describe myself as an "optimistic realist." I'm optimistic that armed with the evidence, the arts finally can be taken seriously as a driver and not just a backseat passenger on the road to student success. Yet, at the same time, I am realistic in the knowledge that even the best laid plans can sometimes go awry when the political winds shift or the economy heads south. And that timing can mean everything.

As leaders in the arts, education, culture, government, business and philanthropy—or simply as concerned citizens—we must become more effective advocates for a complete and competitive education—one that includes the arts for every young person in America.

I believe that the time is right and the time is now. And this National Forum is the place where that journey begins.