

# THE AEP WIRE

Transmitting Research to the  
Arts and Education Field

September 2010

## No Child Left Behind: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education

Sabol, F. Robert (2010). *No Child Left Behind: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education*. Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

### Background

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was created to ensure a good education for all American students regardless of differences in religion, race, ethnicity or class. Similarly, the intent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—ESEA's 2001 reauthorization—was to ensure children fair and equal access to a high-quality education. It aimed to close achievement gaps between high- and low-performing students; minority and non-minority students; and disadvantaged and more advantaged students. The strong emphasis on assessment and performance accountability born from these intentions has affected educators in all core subject areas, including the arts, in both positive and negative ways. In this study, F. Robert Sabol, Ph.D., Professor of Visual and Performing Arts at Purdue University and Chair of Purdue's Division of Art and Design, explores NCLB's effects on visual art educators and their classrooms. Sabol is the incoming president of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), a professional membership organization for visual art educators. This study was supported by a grant from the National Art Education Foundation.

### Significance of the Study

The forthcoming reauthorization of the ESEA has sparked many conversations about the skills students need for college- and career-readiness, including skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (e.g. learning and innovation; information, media and technology; life and career skills). These conversations raise the question of how the education system will foster college- and career-readiness, and for purposes of this study, how the next iteration of ESEA will affect visual art and other

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Quantitative and qualitative study of visual art educators' opinions on the impact of NCLB on art education. A total of 3,412 responses were received.
- Respondents reported that NCLB has had negative effects on scheduling, workloads and funding for their visual art education programs.
- NCLB has had limited negative consequences on the areas of staffing, teaching loads and enrollments.
- Respondents reported that NCLB's focus on assessment has had unintended secondary consequences on student learning, including a narrowing of students' interests in learning and exploring a broad range of content.

core subject educators' ability to teach these skills, and consequently, students' opportunities to learn them. (Note: This study refers only to visual art education and educators.)

### Research Questions

1. What impact has NCLB had on art education programs' curriculum, teaching and instructional practices, assessment, staffing, scheduling, teaching loads, funding, faculty workloads and enrollments?
2. How has NCLB affected art teachers' practices related

to curriculum development, instruction, assessment, workloads and professional development?

3. How has NCLB affected art educators' attitudes and perceptions about the status of art education in schools and the effects NCLB has had on their programs?
4. What general benefits or drawbacks has NCLB had on art education programs in the United States?

## Methodology of the Study

Data were collected via a questionnaire that included Likert scales, open-ended questions and demographic items. A total of 3,412 people responded to online and mail versions of the survey. A random selection of 3,050 NAEA members from the Elementary, Middle, Secondary, Supervision and Administration, Higher Education and Museum Education membership divisions comprised 89% of the total number of respondents. Data were collected between October 2008 and March 2009.

## Summary of Findings

Sabol states the following five conclusions about NCLB's effects on education systems and individual visual art educators:

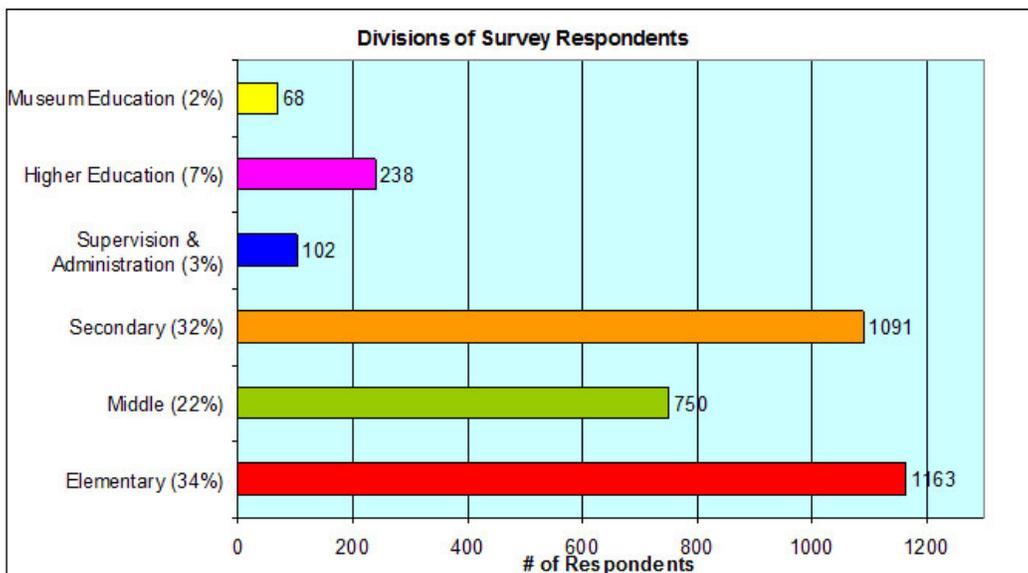
### 1. "Members of the art education teaching profession are 'highly qualified'."

As defined by NCLB, "highly qualified teachers" have at least a bachelor's degree, full State certification, and demonstrated knowledge in the core academic subject they teach. Survey respondents have taught an average of 16 years, and just over three-fourths (76%) hold graduate

degrees. The majority of respondents (91%) stated that they were highly qualified by this definition. Just over half (52%) of this 91% stated they were already highly qualified before entering the field and before NCLB took effect. Conversely, just over one-fifth (22%) reported that NCLB contributed to making them highly qualified. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents felt they had an "average" knowledge of NCLB while 37% felt their knowledge was "above average." Seven percent reported their knowledge level as "excellent." Overall, on the question of whether NCLB contributed to making visual art educators better teachers, a majority of respondents (61%) disagreed NCLB has made a contribution, while one-fifth (20%) agreed, and an additional one-fifth was undecided.

### 2. "In some areas art programs have experienced limited negative consequences because of NCLB."

Although all areas of visual art education programs covered by the study were affected by NCLB, the effects were less pronounced in some areas than in others. For example, the findings suggest that visual art education programs generally have not experienced negative consequences in the areas of staffing, teaching loads and enrollments because of NCLB. Fully two-thirds of respondents (68%) reported that the number of visual art teachers in their school districts has stayed the same under NCLB. Likewise, roughly the same percentage (65%) of respondents reported that their teaching loads (i.e. the number of classes or courses taught) have stayed the same, although over half (58%) said that individual workloads have increased because of NCLB. Additionally, nearly two-thirds (62%) reported that enrollments in their art programs have stayed the same and that NCLB has not played a role in either increasing or decreasing enrollments.



### **3. “NCLB has created a number of negative effects on art education programs.”**

Findings from the study identified a number of areas where visual art education programs have experienced significant negative effects, which teachers in those programs attributed to the restructuring of educational priorities resulting from NCLB. For example, respondents reported that NCLB has had negative effects on scheduling, workloads, and funding for their art education programs. A vast majority of respondents (84%) reported that because of NCLB, schedules in their programs either have increased interruptions, conflicts and problems, or have become more complicated. Among the 58% of respondents that reported workload increases, one reason cited was additional work required to compensate for cuts to art curriculum content as a result of NCLB. Another was additional assignments to teach remedial students or supervise non-art related activities. While just over half of the respondents (53%) reported that funding had stayed the same, 43% reported that funding had decreased in all or some areas of their programs, particularly in the area of funding for studio materials.

### **4. “Art educators generally have negative attitudes about the overall impact NCLB has had on art education programming.”**

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents disagreed that NCLB positively affected their attitudes about being an art educator. While there were no open-ended questions about educators’ attitudes, a number of respondents offered statements about feeling marginalized and devalued by colleagues, students and school administration. Nearly all respondents (89%) disagreed that NCLB had a positive effect on faculty morale. Educators described feelings of competition with non-arts educators, decreased work ethic in new teachers and increased disagreements with administration. Respondents also indicated that NCLB’s focus on assessment has had unintended secondary effects on student learning. For example, 67% of respondents felt that NCLB did not make their students become better learners. Several respondents described a narrowing of students’ interest in learning and exploring a broad range of content: students want to know exactly what material will be tested and the simplest answers to questions. Respondents felt that this narrowing was a direct effect of strong emphasis on testing and has also contributed to a decline in the quality of student work.

### **5. “Some aspects of art education programs have experienced positive affects from NCLB.”**

When asked in an open-ended question to identify benefits related to NCLB for their programs or schools, overwhelmingly the most common response was “no benefits” (84%). However, benefits were identified in other respondents’ comments. Respondents identified 30 different aspects of their art programs that were positively affected by NCLB. The two most frequently cited benefits were improved credibility for art education (11%) and improved art curriculum (10%). Other responses included better assessment tools, improved art instruction and increased accountability for art education. Respondents also identified the actions they took to improve their curriculum. The most frequently cited action was increased emphasis and focus on state and/or national standards (60%) followed by increased time spent on curriculum building and revision (43%). It is also important to note that while the majority of respondents did not feel NCLB has had a positive impact on their programs, a smaller percentage—fewer than one in four (23%)—agreed that the quality of education in their schools has improved because of NCLB.

From these findings, Sabol makes the following recommendations:

- Visual art education must be at the core of education in public schools.
- Art educators must be provided professional development that will expand their knowledge and skills for providing quality education in the visual arts.
- Art educators must be allowed to concentrate their full effort toward providing quality art education for their students.
- Visual art curricula, instruction and assessments must be revised, developed and expanded to provide the finest quality of education possible.
- Visual art educators must be given resources necessary for providing quality education in the visual arts.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Participants’ responses to the survey items are not consistently disaggregated to show which instructional levels are represented and in what proportions they responded. Responses to several questions were reported with no disaggregation at all, making it difficult to assess educators’ opinions on NCLB’s effects at each level. Also, because of the qualitative nature of this study, quantifiable, measurable data on the effects of the law cannot be extrapolated to complement educators’ opinions and perceptions.

## Interpretation

Policies that influence classroom conditions and hinder educators' ability to teach also hinder students' opportunity to learn skills for college- and career-readiness as well as general life skills. Teachers who feel limited by inadequate resources, poor student attitudes and lack of control over class content may feel less motivated in their classrooms and dissuaded from seeking professional development. This could have significant implications on the professionalism of the field.

## AEP Recommendations

- Further research should be conducted on NCLB's effects on all forms of arts education at each instructional level to demonstrate the law's effects on student progress in the arts and trends in teacher practices as the standards evolve across grade levels.
- Those concerned about NCLB's effects on learning in all of the arts should monitor the activities surrounding the next iteration of ESEA. Qualitative data on the benefits of arts education coupled with quantifiable, measurable data may support arguments about the necessity of quality arts programming in a complete education.
- Educators should be provided with professional development opportunities to gain skills for effective cross-curricular instruction between all art forms and other core courses. Integrated curriculum increases students' opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills and apply them in various contexts.

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The Arts Education Partnership was established in 1995 and is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education in cooperation with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.