



AEP 2013 National Forum: Arts, Education, and the Next America

Opening Remarks by Sandra Ruppert, AEP Director

Thursday, April 4, 2013

THE NEXT AMERICA

Good morning everyone and welcome to the 2013 National Forum of the Arts Education Partnership!

This year, I am proud to say, we celebrate the Partnership's 18th year as the nation's hub for arts education research, policy, and practice. And the Partnership—which is really all of you—is stronger than ever, thanks to your support and commitment. Together, through our collective efforts, we can ensure that every child, every day, has an equal opportunity to create, perform, learn about, and experience the arts in all their many forms as a fundamental right of a complete and competitive education—regardless of where he or she lives or goes to school.

As I gaze across the room, I am delighted to see so many familiar faces as well as so many new ones. There are 290 of us here, representing 178 organizations from across 34 states. I am especially pleased to see so many of you who are here on behalf of the 100+ national education, arts, business, cultural, government, and philanthropic organizations that we count among our AEP Partners.

We've chosen as the theme for this Forum, **Arts, Education and the Next America**.

We chose it, first and foremost, because we believe it is important to start with an exploration of the economic, political and societal conditions that are shaping the arts and education research, policy, and practice environment over the next decade. These conditions provide a context for understanding how we, as leaders, can respond proactively to ensure our voices are heard, particularly in state and local policy discussions that will inform the scope and direction of education reform efforts.

So, let's start with a snapshot of the face of the Next America:

Based on current demographic trends we can expect significant population shifts to occur over the next decade. For one thing, as a nation, we are getting older. *NBC News* reports that 10,000 Baby Boomers turn 65 every day. By 2030, one in five of us will be 65 or older.

For another, our nation is becoming more diverse. Immigration and fertility patterns suggest that, soon, no one racial or ethnic group will represent more than 50% of the population. By 2023, the majority of school-age children will identify with groups we classify today as “minorities.”

Our educational expectations are changing, too. Where once a high school diploma was a guaranteed ticket to the middle class, today the price of admission to compete successfully in the workplace requires some form of education or training beyond high school. To meet the demands of an increasingly complex and technologically interconnected world, students need to acquire, as part of their regular K-12 educations, more advanced knowledge and a greater range of skills.

A bit later this morning, we will learn more from our opening plenary panel about the challenges and opportunities associated with educating the Next America; how we can rethink the use of time, resources, and people to respond better to the educational needs of our students; and what one innovative urban school district is doing to fundamentally change the way it operates to deliver a high quality education that includes the arts for every student.

With the context of the opening session provided as a backdrop, we will continue to explore the theme of arts, education, and the next America through our two other plenary sessions—one on implementation of the Common Core State Standards and one on leadership. It is going to be a remarkable two days.

It is the first week of April, and at long last, spring has come to the nation’s capital. I think that Washington is at its best during this time of year. I’ve lived here for five years now and, for me, the DC area continues to provide a fascinating mix of politics, history, culture, and the arts. The city also, in my view, offers a study in contrasts: contrasts between new and old, rich and poor, opportunities and obstacles.

Right about this time every year, Washington, DC receives extra attention. People flock here from all over the world to see the famous 100 year-old cherry trees that line the Tidal Basin. These beautiful trees were a gift to the United States from the Japanese people following World War I. Although temperamental and unpredictable, the trees do manage each year to produce a profusion of delicate pink blossoms that are quite a sight to behold, if only for a brief moment in time. For many people, I believe this annual rite of spring belies a greater meaning: it’s come to symbolize a time of renewal and hope—a time of opportunity and optimism—a time when anything might be possible—even in Washington.

This spring, however, Washington, DC is also getting its fair share of notoriety for reasons of a different sort. In the media and elsewhere, DC is drawing attention for the dysfunctional way our government currently operates. If the cherry blossoms are considered a symbol of renewal, hope, and opportunity, then the sequestration has come to symbolize gridlock, disappointment, and obstacles.

A year ago, many of us hadn't even heard the word "sequestration" much less used it in a sentence. These days the word rolls off the tongue—not quite like butter—but it still comfortably finds its place in our daily conversations. If you were to look up the word in the dictionary as I have, you'd learn "sequestration" is not a new word at all—we have heard it used most often in reference to juries—but rather it's an old word being used in a new way. The most common dictionary definition refers to the act of "setting something apart," which is not terribly helpful in this context. Other terms used in Washington to describe sequestration are equally muddy. I have heard sequestration variously referred to as "a fall off the fiscal cliff," "an austerity fiscal policy" and—as an appropriate euphemism if there ever was one—"quantitative easing."

But humor aside, the negative impact that sequestration is likely to have on the educational services received by our most vulnerable students is no laughing matter.

The Congressional Research Service defines sequestration this way:

"In general, sequestration entails the permanent cancellation of budgetary resources by a uniform percentage...applied to all programs, projects, and activities within a budget account."

Last month, Congress decided to make the 5% across-the-board spending cuts permanent for the remainder of the current fiscal year. This translates into a loss of approximately \$2.5B to the Department of Education in the FY 12 fiscal year alone. The greatest impact will be on two of the Department's largest programs—Title I and IDEA (also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). These programs address specifically the educational needs of students from low-income families and students with disabilities or other special learning needs. Meanwhile, also in Congress' hands, is the still lingering matter of the Elementary and Secondary Act—aka NCLB—which is entering its 7th year without reauthorization.

It remains to be seen how the current federal fiscal and policy climate will affect the status of and conditions for arts education at state and local levels going forward. In Washington, we are fortunate to have the Arts

Education Working Group, co-chaired by Heather Noonan from the League of American Orchestras and Narric Rome from Americans for the Arts, to track federal policy activities and to advocate on behalf of arts education at the federal level. AEP will continue to share updates with you on relevant federal-level actions while we focus our primary attention on state-level policy and the implications for local districts and schools.

We also are fortunate to have strong support for arts education at the U.S. Department of Education under the leadership of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Last year, in response to findings from the first federal survey on the status of arts education in public elementary and secondary schools in more than a decade, Sec. Duncan described the lack of access to an arts education for high-need students as “an equity issue and a civil rights issue.” Additionally, during his tenure, Sec. Duncan has overseen the creation and continued support of new competitive grant programs designed to spur innovation and improvement. And, while we wait for Congress to act on ESEA, he has used his authority to issue waivers to states that freed them from certain regulations in order to pursue new reforms.

We are especially fortunate to be joined by Jim Shelton today. Jim is the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, and he is responsible for managing a portfolio that includes most of the Department’s competitive programs including Investing in Innovation or i3, Promise Neighborhoods, and others focused on teacher and leader quality, school choice, and learning technology. In a number of cases, these programs have been the source of grants to states, districts, and schools in which the arts are an important, and oftentimes, central component in the overall innovation and improvement strategy.

I am especially honored to say that one major reason why the Arts Education Partnership has been able to achieve as much success as it has over the past 18 years is because of the continued support of the U.S. Department of Education and leaders like Jim Shelton. The unique cooperative agreement that exists between the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts, which first established the Partnership in 1995 and has continued unabated for 18 years, serves as a cornerstone for our work. Doug Herbert and Edith Harvey represent the Department on AEP’s Governing Council and I want to take a moment to recognize Edith and her colleagues from the Department who are here with us today.

Now, please join me in welcoming Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education.

[Jim Shelton Speaks]

Let us return for just a moment to the theme of educating the Next America and what it means for the arts. Speaking to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in March 2009, President Obama made the following statement. He said, “It is time to give all Americans a complete and competitive education from the cradle through career.” He went on to say that students must “possess 21st century skills of problem solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity.” I suggest we consider that statement an open invitation to address seriously the role of the arts in responding to those needs.

Not long after he made that statement, the President reinforced his message by issuing the following challenge: by 2020, the U.S. would once again lead the world in the highest proportion of college graduates. In recent years, college graduation rates in the U.S. have fallen below those of several other industrialized nations that have stepped up their own efforts to raise their citizens’ educational attainment levels.

The year 2020 is not far away. It is only seven years from now. The high school graduating class of 2020 is currently in the fifth grade. Will the majority of them be college-and-career ready in seven short years? We have seen some modest improvement as high school graduation rates have inched up in recent years, but far too many students still leave high school without receiving a diploma. Wide disparities in achievement persist between white and Asian American students on the one hand and African American and Hispanic students on the other.

The truth is no one can predict with any real degree of certainty what forces, discoveries, or influences will shape the education environment seven years from now in 2020—just as we could not have predicted seven years ago in 2006 what forces would be shaping education today.

Consider, for example, the explosion of innovation and new knowledge in just two areas—social media and breakthroughs in the science of learning—that have occurred since 2006:

In 2006, the goal that educators struggled to meet without much success was simply to keep digital devices—personal phones, iPods and whatnot—out of the hands of their students during school hours. Today, the goal is to ensure that every student has not only access to a range of such devices, but is actively using them throughout the school day for educational or school-related purposes. Schools even have a name for this strategy. It goes by the acronym, BYOD—which stands for Bring Your Own Device.

The growth of social media and networking sites over the last seven years has also altered the learning environment. In 2006, My Space was the leading Social Media Site (SMS). But that same year Facebook decided to open its virtual doors to anyone, after years of confining access only to college students. Today, My Space has all but disappeared from the digital landscape and last fall, Facebook reached the milestone of one billion active users around the globe. Schools and districts are getting in the social media game, too. *Education Week* recently reported that 75% of school districts now maintain a presence on one or more social networking sites. Twitter—which lends itself to a kind of haiku in the form of 140 characters—didn’t even exist before seven years ago. It was launched in 2006. Today, Twitter boasts 465 million accounts, with 1 million more added every day. One early adopter and active Twitter user is Dr. John Maeda, the president of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and our closing speaker. Not long after John arrived at RISD in 2008, he became known among his college president peers as “the president who tweets.” He has, on occasion, even referred to his tweets as “art.” Perhaps we will have an opportunity to learn more about that from John himself tomorrow afternoon.

Like the rise of social media and use of digital devices in educational settings, another area in which we’ve seen rapid and significant growth since 2006 is in the field of brain research and the science of learning. Today, we know much more than we did seven years ago about how the brain works in acquiring and processing information and what traits and dispositions are most likely to have an effect on how well and how much we learn.

These fresh insights are helping to change the way we think about the influence of “non-cognitive” factors on academic performance, student success, and professional attainment. The word “non-cognitive” in simple terms refers to skills, competencies, and other elements of the learning process that contribute to, but also extend beyond, the mastery of content knowledge. They include such traits as self-control, curiosity, motivation and persistence – collectively referred to in the popular media and in certain scientific circles as “grit.” Research suggests that grit along with other interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can be a stronger predictor of academic achievement and student success than standardized test scores or other measures of intellectual ability.

Both the new Common Core State Standards released in 2010 and now adopted by 46 states as well as the revised national arts standards currently under development recognize that to reach their full potential, students need to acquire essential non-cognitive skills and competencies along with a mastery of content knowledge.

These findings about the process of learning and the importance of certain skills and competencies for student achievement and success have significant implications for arts learning and arts education research, policy, and practice.

Today, we are excited to release a new AEP publication called *Preparing Students for the Next America: The Benefits of an Arts Education*.

Preparing Students for the Next America describes in easy-to-understand language what happens to students when they learn in and through the arts. The benefits that accrue as a direct outcome of an arts-rich curriculum and deep involvement in the arts speak directly to the skills and competencies now understood to be so essential for success in school, work, and life.

The findings in this publication are drawn from ArtsEdSearch.org—the nation’s first clearinghouse of research examining the mounting body of evidence on the benefits of arts education.

Many of you will recall that AEP launched ArtsEdSearch.org exactly a year ago in this very room. Today, ArtsEdSearch has received nearly 40,000 visits and over 140,000 page views from more than 70 countries in its first year alone. Since February, visits to ArtsEdSearch have averaged over 1,000 per week.

Here are just a few of the evidence based outcomes for students described in our new publication that research shows are associated with high quality arts education:

- Development of critical and creative thinking skills as well as abstract reasoning and problem solving skills;
- Higher levels of engagement, motivation, and persistence in learning; and an
- Increased sense of accomplishment and self-confidence that translates to success in other content areas.

Further, as discussed in the guide, these outcomes in students are linked to:

- Lower absenteeism from school and a greater likelihood of performing better in school, including receiving higher grades;
- Fewer behavioral and emotional problems and less likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors;
- Improvement in the school culture and increased engagement of parents and the community in meaningful ways.

The findings in *Preparing Students for the Next America* are intended to be accessible and actionable. AEP created this publication for the express purpose of ensuring that advocates for the arts are at the table in upcoming conversations about student achievement and education reform, because, as the saying goes, if we are not at the table, we are likely to be on the menu.

However, it bears noting that as important as these findings are in demonstrating the value of an arts education, they may not be enough to sway the hearts and minds of certain parents, policymakers and members of the public unless we also make a convincing case that deeper learning in the arts is a worthwhile and valuable endeavor in and of itself.

The arts are a uniquely human experience, one that is found universally in every culture, and, as such, the arts help us to make sense of the world around us. Mastery of content knowledge and skills in the arts must be viewed as essential to educating the whole child just as is the mastery of content knowledge and skills in science or math. Artistic literacy must be seen as important an educational outcome as literacy in reading or math. The intrinsic benefits that accrue from deep engagement with an art form—be it music, theatre, dance, or visual art—must be considered as critical to a complete education as the instrumental benefits we may assign to the experience. In fact, one may argue that the two are not only linked but intertwined. Unless and until we can persuasively make that case, the arts are far less likely to be taken seriously as a core academic subject.

As you consider and reflect on the arts, education, and the Next America over the next two days, we encourage you to think about how we as a field would respond to these questions:

- How can we best prepare our students for the future that awaits them?
- What would it look like if all students had an equal opportunity to obtain the very best education possible—one that included high quality arts instruction and experiences—and one which would prepare them to succeed in the Next America?
- And, what will it take to get there? What research, policies, and practices of arts education will have to be in place to make that vision a reality?

We have an imperative to invest more in our children. They are the future leaders of the Next America. And we owe it to them as stewards of their educations to ensure that they receive the very best education possible, a complete and competitive education—an education that includes the arts as an integral component.

So let's get started.