



Arts in Education

By Sara Shelton

In today's globally competitive job market, a comprehensive, well-balanced education is essential to ensuring that students are well prepared to enter college and the workforce. Decades of research connects arts education to higher levels of student engagement, attendance, self-confidence, persistence, civic engagement, creativity, problem solving and critical thinking. Moreover, the benefits of arts education are more dramatic in schools where family income and achievement levels are particularly low. Many education professionals and policymakers consider instruction in the arts to be a critical component of a complete education. Challenges in providing a quality arts education include funding, competing priorities, time in the school day and finding qualified instructors.

Did You Know?

- **Ninety-three percent of Americans** consider the arts vital to providing a well-rounded education.
- **Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia** have established elementary and secondary arts standards, and **45 states** require schools or districts to provide arts instruction in elementary and middle schools.
- Evidence shows that engaging in the arts has a positive impact on students, especially in the early grades and among **at-risk students**, but a disparity in access to quality arts programs exists, especially in schools that serve **low-income students**.

State Action

States, through a mix of laws and regulations, are creating conditions that support quality arts education. Although funding varies widely, states are finding ways to incorporate art into the curriculum in a variety of ways. A recent [report](#) from the [Arts Education Partnership](#) offers a snapshot of state policies in arts education. Its findings include:

- **The Arts as a Core Academic Subject.** **Twenty-seven states** define the arts as a “core” or “academic” subject, consistent with federal policy, which puts the arts on equal footing with other core subjects considered essential to a well-rounded education.
- **State Standards for Arts Education.** **Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia** define what elementary and secondary students should know and be able to do relative to their instruction in the arts. In addition, **44 states and the District of Columbia** have adopted art standards for early childhood education. A movement to revise the 1994 national voluntary art standards for grades preK-12 resulted in new standards being released June 4 by Americans for the Arts and the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards.
- **Instructional Requirements.** The vast majority of states that have adopted art standards also regulate arts instruction. **Forty-five states** define instructional requirements for the elementary and middle school levels and **42 states** do so for high school. [Arkansas H.B. 1034 \(2005\)](#) requires all public elementary schools to provide weekly instruction for 40 minutes in visual art and 40 minutes in music by a licensed teacher certified to teach art or music.
- **High School Graduation Requirements.** **Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia** include the arts in their high school graduation requirements.

- **Assessment and Accountability.** [Seventeen states](#) require the assessment of student learning in the arts. [Kentucky S.B. 1 \(2009\)](#) eliminates annual arts and humanities student testing and instead requires a robust annual program review of arts and humanities as part of a new assessment and accountability model.
- **Teacher Certification or Licensure Requirements that Include the Arts.** [Forty-one states and D.C.](#) require regular classroom teachers to complete coursework or demonstrate knowledge of the arts to receive certification or licensure and [33 states and the District of Columbia](#) specify arts requirements for non-arts teachers. [North Carolina H.B. 23 \(2013\)](#) directs the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, to ensure that aspiring elementary school teachers are prepared “to integrate arts across the curriculum.”

Minnesota, New Hampshire and New Jersey have taken a comprehensive approach to developing arts education policies. They define the arts as a core or academic subject and require elementary and secondary content standards; instruction at the elementary, middle and high school levels; course credits for high school graduation; and assessments of student learning in the arts. In addition, all three states have conducted statewide surveys to assess the status and condition of arts education in public schools.

In addition, Minnesota voters in 2008 passed the [Legacy Amendment](#) to fund and promote clean water, outdoor heritage, parks and trails, and arts and cultural heritage. Over a 25-year period, 3/8 of 1 percent of the state’s sales tax will fund “arts, arts education and arts access to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage.” Based on current sales tax revenue, it is estimated that more than \$1.2 billion will be invested in arts and cultural heritage projects and programs over the life of the tax.

A New Hampshire Supreme Court ruling in 2006 required the legislature to adopt a definition of [adequate education](#). The legislature included arts education in the definition, resulting in the arts being included with other subjects like math, English language and science as part of a core curriculum that is subject to state funding.

Federal Action

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 designates arts as a “core academic subject,” meaning it is on equal footing with reading, writing, math, science and other disciplines for financial support and technical assistance. This designation allows schools and districts to include arts education in their strategies to achieve Title I goals, which support the achievement of low-income students.

Most recently, the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities launched [Turnaround Arts](#), a public-private initiative designed to help transform some of the nation’s lowest performing schools through comprehensive and integrated arts education. Preliminary results of the pilot are promising, with schools demonstrating higher levels of student engagement, focus and collaboration; improved self-esteem; and better behavior and fewer discipline referrals.

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Additional Resources

[Americans for the Arts](#)

[Preparing Students for the Next America](#), Arts Education Partnership (2013)

[Reinvesting in Arts Education](#), President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011)

[The Wallace Foundation](#), Arts Education