

# STATE LEGISLATURES

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## All In! High Stakes in Legislative Races

Ballot Fatigue?

The Primary Puzzle

Art and Learning Linked



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# Art Smart

Art classes often aren't schools' top priority, yet research suggests perhaps they should be.

BY SARA SHELTON

**O**n a sunny spring afternoon in northeast Denver, Celesta Cairns' third graders at Cole Arts and Science Academy are working in groups with professional musicians to orchestrate a concert from start to finish. Sixty-three young composers are making sounds from keyboards and drums to "illustrate" the stories they have just written.

"What I like best is getting to work with my friends to make up a story," says Matt, age 9, one of the young composers. "It was fun to make up a story with some friends. Our story was about three sharks called 'Fred's Adventures.' But it was way more interesting when we got to add music to it."

The professional musicians in the Colorado Symphony's Very Young Composers program transcribe the sounds the kids make into real musical notes, and at the end of the school year perform the compositions. The concert attracts parents and children who rarely, if ever, attend musical performances or go to the theater. For many of Matt's classmates, this was the first time they or their families had ever been to a symphony.

Cole Elementary is used to receiving more attention for its failures than for its successes. It has a history of lagging test scores and low attendance rates, for example. It serves a low-income, minority student population—73 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent are African American, and 93 percent qualify for a free or reduced lunch, a federal program based on family income. After a number of leadership and management changes, the school reopened in 2008, and was granted "innovation status" by the state to come up with new, effective ways to meet the needs of its diverse and constantly changing student population. In return, the state granted the school leaders more autonomy. The school launched the Very Young Composers program this year with its third graders. They plan to expand the program next year by adding 25 fourth graders.

A cohesive team of educators at the school teach visual arts, music, physical education and dance, along with the librarian for creative storytelling and a technology teacher for sound engi-

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neering. They collaborate daily and discuss the kids and what they are learning. And, they are all certified to teach English language learners.

"We have an incredible team that focuses on culture and creating community, traditions and space for kids to feel safe and creative," says Cairns, a veteran music teacher who was instrumental in getting the young composers program into the school. All students at Cole receive arts instruction daily and are never pulled out of art classes for more reading or math. "The freedom to make decisions at the school level regarding budget, hiring, curriculum and professional development has been extremely useful," she says. "I've made it my focus to ensure the arts get as much attention as math, English and science classes."

The Very Young Composers program is funded by a private foundation and a local philanthropist. The program is thriving in New York City public schools in partnership with the New York Philharmonic and is slowly finding its way into other urban areas. The program pairs professional musicians with schools. It is a perfect partnership between the arts community that has experienced a decline in patrons and schools that lack art programs due to limited resources. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 42 percent of schools indicated they had partnerships with cultural or community organizations to help meet their school's arts education goals.

## Show Me the Evidence

Decades of research shows that participation in the arts—music, visual arts, dance or drama/theatre—can lead to higher levels of self-confidence, persistence, civic engagement, creativity, problem-solving ability and critical thinking skills in students. Moreover, the benefits of an arts education are more dramatic in schools where family income and achievement levels are very low.

The evidence from numerous studies has convinced many education professionals and policymakers to value arts as a critical component of a complete education. Even so, supporters face challenges in providing a high-quality program when funding is tight, other concerns take precedence, and qualified instructors are few and far between.

That's where legislators come in. Their support can be vital.

“When times get hard, arts instruction should not be seen as a frill,” says South Carolina Senator Wes Hayes (R), a member of the Education Committee. “Art is an important part of education—it’s critical and needed, and legislators should provide a safeguard.” Hayes, who also co-chairs South Carolina’s Legislative Arts Caucus, says, “Arts is a significant part of keeping businesses and recruiting and retaining talented workers. Legislators can tell that story and remind other legislators about the importance of the arts.”



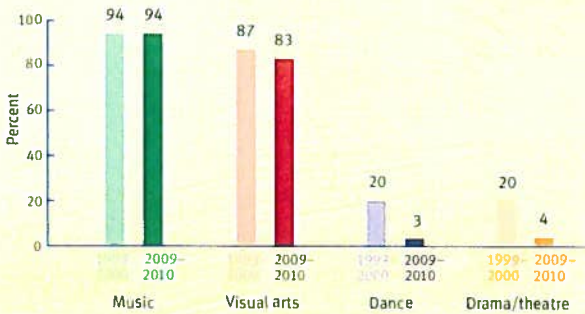
Senator  
Wes Hayes  
South Carolina

Ninety-three percent of Americans consider the arts essential to a well-rounded education, according to a 2005 Harris Poll. And 79 percent agree that incorporating the arts into the curriculum is the first step. During the 2009-2010 school year, 94 percent of elementary schools offered music instruction and 83

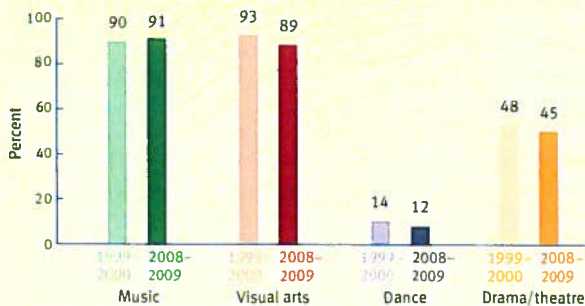
## The Offerings Inch Down

The portion of public schools in school year 1999-2000 with instruction designated specifically for various arts subjects, compared to school year 2009-2010.

### Elementary Schools



### Secondary Schools



Source: *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10* (NCES 2012-014). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

## Americans for the Art

For the past nine years, the Americans for the Arts and the National Conference of State Legislatures have recognized state legislators whose leadership has heightened public awareness of the value of the arts and arts education to their states. Minnesota Senator Richard Cohen (DFL) and South Carolina Senator Wes Hayes (R) are past award recipients. This year’s recipient will be announced at the NCSL Fall Forum in December.

In addition, this fall, the Americans for the Arts organization is launching its State Policy Pilot Program to:

- \* Strengthen arts by advancing state policy.
- \* Expand states’ support and funding of arts education policy.
- \* Increase the availability of arts programs at the local level.

The group will be working with 10 states—Arizona, Arkansas, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Wyoming—during the three-year pilot program. Collaborative teams consisting of representatives from a variety of state agencies, including the legislature, will receive customized technical assistance to write an action plan and manage a grant of \$10,000 each year.

*“The arts is a significant factor in keeping businesses and recruiting and retaining talented workers.”*

—SOUTH CAROLINA SENATOR WES HAYES

percent offered visual art, such as drawing, painting and sculpture, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

And although “the percentages of students receiving music and visual arts instruction are quite high, there are literally millions of students who receive nothing,” says Sandra Ruppert, director of the Arts Education Partnership at the Council of Chief State School Officers. The students receiving little to no arts education tend to be concentrated in low-income areas and include students with special needs and English language learners. Ruppert points out that, while students from poorer schools have the least high-quality exposure to the arts, “the research suggests those kids tend to benefit the most from arts education.”

### Where’s the Money?

Arts programs are often the first to be squeezed. “There are many signs that funding for the arts has declined steadily since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001,” says Narric Rome, vice president of Government Affairs and Arts Education at Americans for the Arts. “Financial pressures at the state and local levels have exacerbated the trend. The focus on tested subjects like reading, math and science has led to a narrowing of the curriculum.”

A new report by the New York City Comptroller’s Office, for example, found that, despite requirements in state law, arts education in New York City’s public schools has become both ineq-

## The Wallace Foundation

“Engaging with the arts can help children develop broader perspectives of the world by introducing them to different ways of understanding their own experiences and those of others,” says Lucas Held, the communications director at the Wallace Foundation.

Since 2005, Wallace has been working with nonprofits and select school districts to overcome the decline in public school arts education that began in the late 1970s and engage more young people in the arts, during the school day and beyond. The foundation works with large, national “youth-serving” organizations to develop an array of arts programs local affiliates can offer children when they are not in school. It has also published a report on how to engage teens in cyberspace with digital art-making technology.

In addition, the Wallace Foundation has funded several efforts in urban areas to introduce more and stronger classroom arts instruction, and is supporting the Boston Public Schools’ Arts Expansion Initiative and Dallas’ Thriving Minds effort. Both are national models of “coordinated approaches” to improving arts education by knitting together the efforts of several groups, including school districts, city agencies and cultural organizations.

*“Education, rather than income level, is the common dominator, and arts education makes a difference, clearly.”*

—MINNESOTA SENATOR RICHARD COHEN

uitable and underfunded. There’s been a 47 percent decline in spending on arts and cultural organizations, and an even steeper decline in spending arts supplies and equipment over the past seven years. And many schools have diverted supplemental arts funding to other areas.

The report also found that reductions in arts education have been greater in lower income neighborhoods. In July, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and School Chancellor Carmen Farina announced their support of a \$23 million initiative to expand arts education in the city’s schools and training for arts teachers.

Although arts engagement and funding vary considerably across states and communities, Minnesota and South Carolina are two states bucking the trend. Minnesota Senator Richard Cohen (DFL), a member of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, is a huge proponent of the arts. “Education, rather than income level, is the common denominator,” he says. “Arts education makes a difference, clearly,” he says, citing research that links arts education to increases in student attendance and parent involvement, and decreases in discipline problems.

As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Cohen made sure the arts were included in the 2008 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment that designates 0.375 percent of the state’s sales tax for 25 years to fund the arts, arts education and access to the arts to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage.



Senator  
Richard Cohen  
Minnesota

In South Carolina, lawmakers have embraced the importance of arts education since passing the Education Improvement Act of 1984. Arts education has been included in a number of key legislative initiatives since then. This year, for example, lawmakers passed the “Read to Succeed” law that, among other things, requires school districts to include state and local arts organizations when developing partnerships. In 2013, with support from Senator Hayes, the General Assembly also passed a \$1 million reoccurring appropriation to help fund the Arts in Basic Curriculum Project and other South Carolina Arts Commission grant-funded programs statewide.

“The arts community can be a partner and a resource in increasing literacy,” says Ken May, executive director of the South Carolina Arts Commission. “Everyone needs to take part in educating our children, including the arts community.”

### Support Comes in Many Forms

In addition to funding, there are several ways in which states can support a high-quality arts education. A recent report from the Arts Education Partnership offers a snapshot of the different policies states have adopted to support arts education.

- **Core Academic Subject:** 27 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:** 49 states and the District of Columbia define what elementary and secondary students should know and be able to do after receiving instruction in the arts. In addition, 44 states and the District of Columbia have adopted art standards for early childhood education.
- **Instructional Requirements:** Most of the states that have adopted art standards also regulate instruction: 45 states define instructional requirements for elementary and middle schools, and 44 states do so for high schools.
- **High School Graduation Requirements:** 25 states and the District of Columbia include the arts in graduation requirements.
- **Assessment and Accountability:** 17 states require assessments of students learning the arts.
- **Teacher Requirements:** 43 states and the District of Columbia require classroom teachers to complete coursework or demonstrate knowledge of the arts to receive certification or licensure, and 34 states and the District of Columbia specify arts requirements for non-arts teachers.

### Encore!

Back in Denver, teacher Celesta Cairns credits Cole’s success with the Very Young Composers program not only to her supportive team of teachers, but also to her principal, who values and shelters time daily for arts education.

“Participating in the arts offers an important additional component to the rigorous academic day,” says Cairns. “There are no boundaries, no right or wrong, with art. It pushes up students’ confidence and gives them the opportunity to think outside the box. Sometimes there is no space for this kind of learning in the classroom.”