

The Arts Education Council of Americans for the Arts, one of eight leadership networks supported by Americans for the Arts, envisions a future where all American students have access to consistent high-quality, sustained comprehensive learning in the arts. In order for this vision to occur, we believe three interconnected areas need to be explored and sustained by arts education advocates across the country:

1. A student centric vision of arts education
2. A supportive atmosphere environment for arts educators, artists and teaching artists
3. A movement from valuing arts education to prioritizing arts learning within the educational system(s) and communities

A student centric vision of arts education

As arts advocates, teaching artists, arts educators, and professional development providers, our conversations about arts education quickly become about the adults in the room and are often centered around perceived needs and desires for arts education and the adults who participate in and make decisions about arts education – the policymakers, the politicians, the university or high school faculty, the cultural organizations. While these conversations are important, they need to be side-lined until we remember who is at the center of this vision of quality arts education: the student.

Whether a pre-Kindergartener learning about patterns or a pre-professional college dancer learning about line extension, the conversation needs to begin with the needs and the desires of students.

This isn't a new concept for arts education, or education, in general. For the past 15 years, the arts education field has worked with national and state standards which outline what students should know and be able to do. The idea of a student centric vision of arts education extends this idea of standards-based learning to the next level – making decisions about resource allocations, including access, time, space, materials and experts/professionals, in terms of students in order to provide students a complete, well-rounded education and to help students meet the academic standards and high expectations for arts learning.

This concept also pushes the “norms” of who owns the conversation about arts education. Why are adults creating arts academic content standards for students? Shouldn't the end users of these standards – the students – be involved in their creation? And will those standards and/or their delivery need to change, especially to include a more meaningful reference to the varieties of technology now being used to create and produce art, as well as help students be informed consumers of art in our expanding technologically inspired and mediated world?

A supportive atmosphere environment for arts educators, artists and teaching artists

The current public education environment, though outwardly supportive of arts education, does not necessarily create a supportive atmosphere for the reality faced by arts educators, artists, teaching artists, or cultural partners working in schools across this nation. The public educational

system is being pushed and swayed by a variety of policy mechanisms, including shifts in state policy, a federal accountability system built around a few tested academic areas, a focused push by business and industry for 21st Century learning skills, and a heightened curricular interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), and a federal accountability system built around a few tested academic areas.

As arts education advocates, we need to work toward building a more supportive environment for the adult experts with the policy makers and gatekeepers at the local school level who can help us sustain a high quality arts education experience and system for all students. Many positive steps are already underway across the country to support arts education professionals including:

- **Increasing dialogue between the variety of adult stakeholders and providers in arts education.** Credentialed arts educators, teaching artists, cultural organizations providing arts learning resources, state arts agencies, state departments of education, state advocacy networks, and higher education are beginning to engage in a rich dialogue about what quality arts education looks like, and the importance of **all** the providers in the arts education arena. Public education cannot create the next generation of American artists on its own – professional artists and teaching artists are part of this mentoring process, as they always have been. At the same time, however, we need to hold explicit the idea that public education should provide access to the arts for all children – and that the public education system should provide adequate funding and access to high quality arts education. and facilitate that access. Conversations around these ideas are occurring, and consensus is growing about roles, rights, responsibilities, and how to best support students in their arts learning regardless of where you, as the adult, fit in the continuum of adult arts experts.
- **Increasing understanding of the variety of ways in which arts learning occurs - the arts are learned – both in and out of school** - and increased access to arts learning for students outside the school day. Creating a variety of arts learning environments strengthens communities and is good for students. Cultural organizations with arts education programs are primed to meet the needs of students in all art forms and are eager to participate in providing rich arts education learning opportunities both in and out of school.
- **Increasing investment in professional development for professionals working in arts education.** From the U.S. Department of Education’s investment in professional development grants for arts education, to dedicated professional learning communities for arts teachers in a local school, understanding that arts educators and teaching artists need spaces to communicate with each other and learn together is growing in the field and in the public education arena. Teaching artists in particular have dramatically increased their investment in professional development learning, understanding their profession as a unique place on the arts and education continuum, and owning that place through the development of credentialing programs at a variety of higher education institutions. and through the professional publication, *the Teaching Artist Journal*.
- **Increasing flexibility of entry into the education profession.** Creating a variety of entry points into credentialed arts teaching helps us create a growing and vibrant arts education profession. It also allows people to enter the teaching workforce when they are interested and ready to do so, instead of closing that door at the conclusion of an undergraduate college experience.

These positive steps are being strained, as is the entire educational system, by the economic downturn. Finding ways to buoy these steps and continue dialogue across the continuum of experts who help students learn in the arts will be vital to building a sustainable, positive atmosphere for arts educators, teaching artists and artists.

A movement from valuing arts education to prioritizing arts learning within our the educational system(s) and communities

The A 2005 Harris Poll shows that 93 percent of Americans feel that the arts are vital to a well-rounded education for all children. The high percentage of Americans valuing arts within education, however, has not led to a prioritizing of the arts within the educational system(s). The primary work of this next decade is must be to move from declaring value for arts education to helping decisions makers prioritize arts education for all students. Several key groups need to be included for this process to be effective and sustainable:

1. **Local education decision makers.** While federal educational laws are exerting greater and greater force on the public education system, budgetary and policy implementation choices still belong to local education decision makers – be they principals, school site councils, or local district governing boards. How do arts education advocates help these decision makers prioritize arts education and make certain every student in their school and/or district has access to quality arts education both in and out of school time?
2. **The business community.** Just as the arts community has learned to galvanize business support for cultural institutions and cultural funding, arts advocates need to galvanize business support for arts education. Business leaders need to be part of defining the resources students should have access to for quality arts education, as well as what we expect students to know and be able to do in the arts. These expectations need not be simply artistic processes but skill sets developed by these processes, such as creative and critical thinking, improvisation, collaboration, innovation, etc. Business is exerting an ever growing influence on public education; yet, the current version of this influence is narrowly focused on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects. Moving a larger and more vocal contingent of business and industry leaders to embrace a holistic educational experience – whether couched as a comprehensive curriculum or as 21st Century skill development – matters.
3. **Parents.** Parents, as voters in school districts and users of the public education system need to be better informed on how to turn their stated valueing of arts education into priority setting at the school building and district level. Students can also be involved in local level advocacy, both defining what quality arts education looks like for themselves as well as advocating for the resources to build such a program in their own school and school district.

Concluding thoughts – or ways to begin the movement

Several key underpinnings support the three areas listed above, and ways to begin the next steps together as arts education advocates to achieve a high quality arts education for all students. They include:

- Begin with students at the center of the conversation
- Include students in the conversation
- Highlight areas of success – especially with the adults stakeholders in the system
- Encourage cross-sector dialogue and engagement, especially between arts educators and teaching artists
- Realize, that while the federal government informs and influences education, local decisions provide greater impact – and a place for quicker, favorable change – on behalf of arts learning
- Include a variety of stakeholders, including the “end users” of education – businesses and the local community
- Understand that change is an ongoing process, and that we have much to learn from one another

As we imagine it, this isn't a one-time conversation or endeavor. Involving students in the conversation, examining resource allocations with a variety of stakeholders, not just the “usual” suspects, and fitting this conversation within the larger context of community and public education will be on-going and iterative. What emerges from this dialogue in New York City may be very different than the same dialogue in Amarillo. Using existing and emerging technology to share successes and ideas across communities and the country will be vital for supporting high quality arts education for and by all students.

We, The Arts Education Council at Americans for the Arts, encourage your participation in this dialogue, and in shaping what could be the future agenda together as arts education advocates. In addition, we invite you to a 24-hour conversation on arts education at the Half Century Summit Arts Education Pre-Conference, June 24-25, 2010, in Baltimore (<http://convention.artsusa.org/schedule/arts-education-preconference>).

Additional Resources from the Arts Education Council

Along with this Green Paper, the Arts Education Council has created two documents to help you in your work to advocate for quality arts education:

[2009 Arts Education Trends Report](#). This report brings to light seven trends viewed by the Arts Education Council as impacting arts education now, including program profiles where communities across the country are using these trends to build stronger arts education programs.

[The Arts Education Policy Scan](#). This document attempts to bring together ALL the stakeholders in America's public education system – from the federal level down to the local community. Along with identifying the stakeholders, the Policy Scan identifies some of the issues facing stakeholders in the public education system, and can be used as a place to begin your a dialogue with stakeholders in your local community.