

# ACCESS TO ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY ARTS EDUCATION FOR ALL

## HELPING CHILDREN ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

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### ACTION NEEDED

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#### We urge Congress to:

- Advance student success for arts education (dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts) through the **vital role of federal education funding and appropriate robust funding in FY2026 for programs authorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act:**
  - Title I supports access to arts education in our nation's highest-poverty schools.
  - Title II supports content-specific professional development for arts educators.
  - Title IV, Part A strengthens arts learning as part of a Well-Rounded education.
  - 21st Century Community Learning Centers supports afterschool learning in the arts.
  - Assistance for Arts Education grants support community partnerships and the dissemination of evidence-based strategies to advance arts learning nationwide.
- Co-sponsor the bipartisan "Arts Education for All" Act (HR2485) introduced by Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Don Bacon (R-NE).
- Support arts teaching and learning through federal education research and data collection.

### TALKING POINTS

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- **The arts and music are included as part of a "Well-Rounded Education" in federal law.** This designation—alongside reading, math, science, history and other subjects—is confirmation that the arts are essential to a complete education and belong in the instructional day. Federal education funding (such as Title I, teacher training, and school improvement) is directed to support all aspects of a well-rounded education, including the arts. The arts have been listed as a core academic subject of learning in prior iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Congress should affirm arts education as an essential part of a complete education and encourage state and local education authorities to use supplemental federal funding to increase access to arts education for all students.
- **Students are increasingly in need of environments that support active engagement in learning.** Access to arts learning can motivate students to attend school and significantly reduce chronic absenteeism rates. Seniors in the state of Virginia who are "career arts" students (students who take arts classes each year in high school) show between 32.3% and 50.8% lower chronic absenteeism rates than their peers based on a 2024 study.
- **Students in our nation's highest-poverty schools, schools eligible for Title I funding, have the least access to arts education.** A report released by the Arts Education Data Project in 2022 found that more than 2 million students in U.S. public schools have no access to any arts education. The majority of these students attend schools in very rural and major urban communities; have a high percentage of students from low-income families; and represent a student population that is majority Black, Hispanic, or Native American. Research shows that arts education can have dramatic effects on critical 21st century skills, such as creativity, teamwork and perseverance. While arts education supports success across student groups, disadvantaged and at-risk youth often see even greater success through these programs. Title I was funded at \$18.4 billion in FY24. Advocates are seeking \$18.68 billion for FY26.

- **Federal resources should support the many schools that are struggling to recruit and retain arts educators, which impacts the quality and availability of arts education.** According to IES, 35% of all public schools that had teaching vacancies during the 2022-23 school year found it very difficult or were not able to fill vacancies in music or art. Greater challenges were experienced by schools serving a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and rural schools. Title II was funded at \$2.19 billion in FY24. Advocates are seeking \$3 billion in FY26.
- **Federal funds that support a Well-Rounded education (Title IV-A) are making a difference.** A 2019 non-scientific survey found that more than \$30 million of Title IV-A funds were helping increase access for students to music and arts education in 26 states. Title IV, A was funded at \$1.38 billion in FY24. Advocates are seeking \$1.6 billion for FY26.
- **Congress should fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21CCLC),** allowing after-school programs to fully embrace the arts as a learning opportunity for all students in and out of the traditional school day. A 2023 report from the Afterschool Alliance found that students who attended 21st CCLC programs made significant improvements in classroom behavior, homework completion, and class participation. In FY24, 21CCLC was funded at \$1.3 billion. Advocates are seeking \$2.09 billion in FY 2026.
- **The U.S. Department of Education, for more than two decades, has provided grants through the Assistance for Arts Education (AAE) program to strengthen the arts as part of a well-rounded education.** The AAE program has received consistent bipartisan support from Congress year after year since FY04 and reached its highest funding level in FY10. FY24 funding was \$36.5 million and advocates are seeking \$40 million for FY26. A [U.S. Department of Education resource center](#) highlights funded projects.
- **Federal data that transparently and comprehensively reports on arts education is urgently needed.** [A report](#) released by the Arts Education Partnership in 2024 found that many different entities collect and report data across the country, yet the extent to which children in every state and community have access to a complete arts education is not measured. Comprehensive collection and reporting of arts education data at the federal level--including gaps in access, participation and quality--is vital to ensure that all young people have access to excellent arts learning opportunities. The National Core Arts Standards can serve as a foundation for creating reliable measures of what children know and are able to do in the arts, and 43 states have adopted or adapted the Core Standards. Data collection in the arts, previously undertaken by the Institute for Education Sciences and National Assessment of Educational Progress, must be immediately reinstated to inform opportunities to improve access to and advancements in arts education.