Luke Ferrell
Undergraduate Student
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Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D.
Acting Commissioner
NJ Department of Education
PO Box 500,
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Dr. Allen-McMillian:

Now more than ever, the world is learning about the many challenges faced by marginalized communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a clear lack of resources devoted to underserved communities in almost every aspect of life. Focusing on education, the lack of technological preparedness to revert to remote learning exposed the tip of the iceberg of the socioeconomic education disparity in New Jersey's public schools. While the lack of technology in these schools has been at the forefront of the immediate crisis, this is just one area in which underperforming schools lack the resources necessary to support student success; the work to defeat the socioeconomic education disparity in New Jersey is far from over. The New Jersey Department of Education states that its mission is "to ensure all of New Jersey's 1.4 million students have equitable access to high-quality education and achieve academic excellence". There is an urgent need to achieve this goal with a new, creative, and innovative approach. I hope you will consider my plan to combat this issue through the arts and recognize the need to provide students with a sense of community, identity, and purpose to support their academic and post-secondary success.

This proposal will discuss the well-documented social-emotional learning, academic, and college and career benefits of high exposure to arts education. Funding arts programs in underperforming schools will not only close the divide in the inequitable access to quality arts education but will likely yield significant increases in academic performance and future outcomes in these underserved student populations.

Please feel free to reach out to me at (732) 615-7175 or luke.ferrell@rutgers.edu to discuss this important issue further. Thank you for your time and for considering this initiative.

Sincerely,
Luke Ferrell
Luke Ferrell
Undergraduate Student
Rutgers University

Closing New Jersey's Socioeconomic Education Divide through the Arts



(Source: Middletown Arts Center, Middletown, NJ)

A proposal to effectively implement a robust arts education initiative to combat the socioeconomic education disparity in New Jersey

Submitted by:
Luke Ferrell

Submitted to:
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Acting Commissioner
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PO Box 500,
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Abstract

There is a clear socioeconomic education disparity in New Jersey schools with about 90 percent of New Jersey students in poor communities attending underfunded schools (Education Law Center, 1). The lack of resources available to students in these underfunded schools limits their ability to perform well in their academics and ultimately inhibits their success in the post-secondary world. Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between academic success and years spent studying the arts in high school. Among other benefits, studies have also concluded an increase in academic performance, graduation rates, and higher education enrollment in low-SES students who had a high engagement with the arts as opposed to low-SES students who had a low or no engagement with the arts. Increasing funding for the arts in underperforming schools and increasing the required coursework in the arts to graduate high school in New Jersey would likely promote academic growth and success in low-SES students, closing the socioeconomic education divide in New Jersey schools.

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Executive Summary

Although New Jersey public schools are among the highest ranking in the country, there are still great strides to be made in equity. In the 2013-2014 school year 37% of New Jersey students received free or reduced lunch (Education Law Center, 1). Not only do about one-third of students in New Jersey struggle with this learning barrier but also lack the resources necessary to succeed with nearly 90 percent of New Jersey students in poor communities attending underfunded schools (Education Law Center, 1). Low-SES (low-socioeconomic status) students are undeniably not allotted the same resources for success as their economically advantaged peers. As shown in studies that found a correlation between socioeconomic status and SAT scores and GPAs, students are essentially predestined for poor future college and career outcomes without the necessary funding towards programs that promote student success.

Currently, proposed solutions prioritize allocating funding based on student performance. These solutions are ultimately ineffective for low-SES students in underperforming schools as they simply punishing districts that continue to perform poorly on standardized tests. Performance-based funding, a funding structure that allocates funds based on educational results, is one solution that, although typically used in higher education, has been proposed for K-12 schools. Ultimately, the strong correlation between socioeconomic status and standardized test scores stagnates schools with a high demographic of low-SES students. Rather than withholding funding from schools already demonstrating poor academic performance, schools could implement a unique intervention to meet students where they are and boost their academic performance.

The first of many benefits to low-SES students is improved cognitive and social development. Social-emotional learning is an integral component of a student's education and supporting students outside of academia and intelligence will in return help them in those areas. The arts develop community and promote students gaining a sense of identity and a sense of place among their peers. Empowerment through the arts for marginalized communities can only be achieved through equitable access to a quality arts education.

Among other benefits, there is a clear correlation between academic performance and exposure to arts education. Increasing funding to arts education in New Jersey public schools, especially to underperforming schools, would ultimately encourage greater access to and participation in school arts programs, which is an intervention with clearly documented academic benefits. Low-SES students who had a higher engagement with the arts were found to have a higher average GPA than low-SES students who had a lower engagement in the arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 13). Another profound byproduct of high exposure to arts education is better college and career outcomes. There appears to be a strong positive correlation between SAT score and the number of years enrolled in a fine or performing arts course in New Jersey seniors who took the SAT (The College Board, 13). As far as college outcomes, Americans for the Arts found that low-income students who are involved in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education (Americans for the Arts, 4). Funding arts programs undoubtedly have a greater impact on academic performance in all schools, including underperforming schools and SES students, whereas linking funding directly to performance likely only increases this ever-growing academic gap.

The benefits of the arts extend beyond success within the public school system. Students who participate in the arts also typically have better outcomes in the post-secondary world. Specifically, low-SES students, who are disproportionately less likely to attend a higher education institution, see higher rates of graduation and college attendance. A study from the National Endowment for the Arts also found that low-socioeconomic status students who were involved in the arts more attended a post-secondary institution at a significantly higher rate than students who had a lower involvement in the arts. While attending those institutions, students with a higher level of involvement in the arts also performed better and tended to complete more college.

The plan to implement a robust arts education to combat the socioeconomic education disparity in New Jersey is two-fold. First of all, the Visual and Performing Arts high school graduation requirement must be increased from the current one year required to three years. By increasing this to three years, the arts are treated as a core academic subject, and students are consistently motivated by arts involvement throughout (at least most) of their high school career. The second part of the plan is to increase the number of fine and performing arts courses offered in each school, to allow for these increased requirements, as well as diversifying the course offerings available to students. To make this all possible, there must also be increased funding towards arts programs in all K-12 schools. Increased funding towards the arts should be viewed as less of a hobby and more of an investment in student success. As underperforming schools currently already lack the funding and resources to accommodate an expansion of their arts programs, prioritization for funding should be based on the socioeconomic demographic of students as well as the cost to implement and develop new arts courses and increase sections and teachers for these courses. This unique approach will allow proper funding to programs that are proven to promote student academic success, specifically in SES students, rather than continuing to increase funding towards a broken system that allows for this disparity to exist in the first place.

Introduction

The Socioeconomic Education Disparity in New Jersey

According to U.S. News & World Report, New Jersey's Pre-K-12 public schools were ranked first in the country (as of 2021) (U.S. News & World Report, 1). Upon closer examination, although the state as a whole leads in public education, there is still an urgent need to address the inequitable access to resources and high-quality education to low-socioeconomic students in underperforming schools. According to the Education Law Center, 37% of New Jersey students received free or reduced lunch in the 2013-2014 school year (Education Law Center, 1). Not only do about one-third of students in New Jersey struggle with this learning barrier but also lack the resources necessary to succeed. With a lack of necessary funding to high-poverty schools, necessary educational resources are less accessible underserved students. Figure 1 showcases the decreasing education spending in New Jersey following the Great Recession of 2009. Following the recession, "New Jersey's high-poverty districts have suffered the greatest consequences of these reductions" (Weber, 1). The reversal of the previously progressive funding of education in New Jersey preceding the recession has stagnated under-resourced schools that never made up for these losses in revenue.

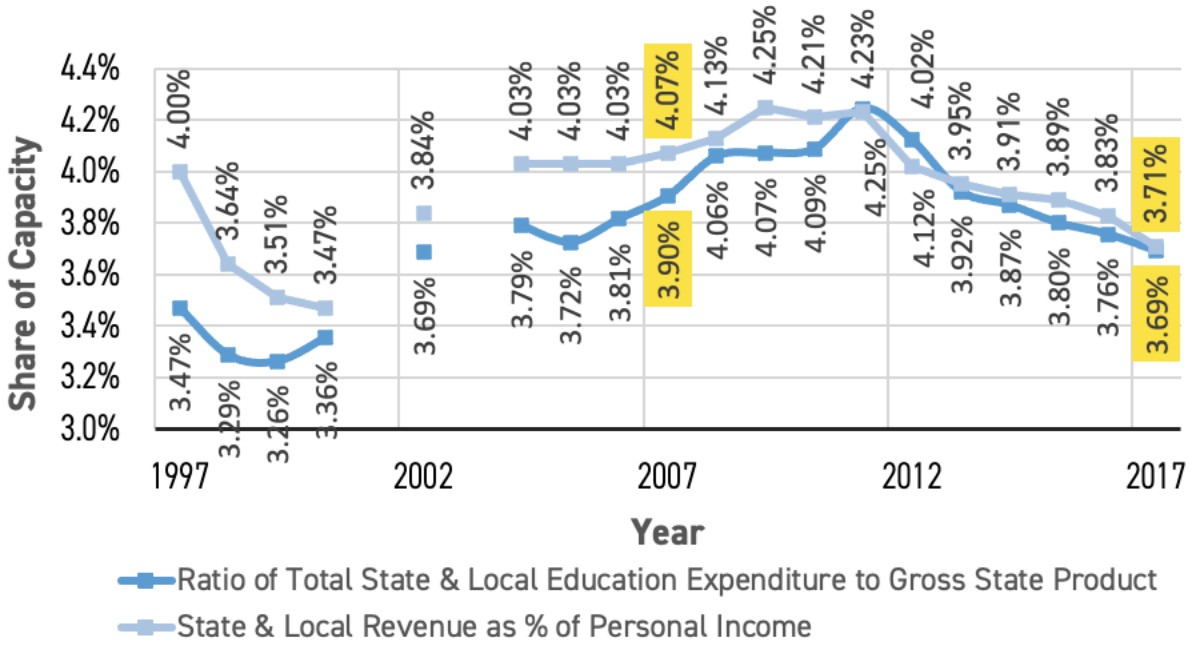

Figure 1: New Jersey Education Spending as a Share of Fiscal Capacity Measures
(Source: New Jersey Policy Perspective)

Not only do many students in underfunded schools struggle with the learning barrier of low-socioeconomic background, but also lack the resources to perform as well in schools as their economically advantaged peers.

Low-Socioeconomic Status as a Barrier to Academic Success

Low-socioeconomic status is unquestionably a learning barrier to students and this related lack of necessary accessibility to high-quality education inhibits these students' ability to succeed at the same level as their higher-income peers. According to a Stanford University paper entitled "Patterns and trends in racial academic achievement gaps among states", low-SES students enter high school with mean literacy rates 5 years behind their higher-income peers (Reardon, 20). As expected, this suppressed level of performance often continues throughout high school and in the post-secondary world. The college admissions process is greatly dependent on academic performance in high school and standardized test scores, typically the SAT. Figure 2 shows the 2016 SAT scores of New Jersey high school seniors by family income. There appears to be a positive correlation between family income and scores in each category of the SAT. In other words, students whose families had a higher income tended to perform better on the SAT. This is unsurprising given that according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 population survey, individuals within the top income quartile were eight times more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree by age 24 compared to those in the lowest income quartile (United States Census Bureau). Low-SES students are being underserved at every step along their public education career which is having serious effects on their ability to succeed beyond their K-12 education. It is imperative that the state of New Jersey considers an approach to fund programs that supports low-SES students rather than a solution that results in withholding funding from underperforming schools, often being high-poverty districts.

SAT	Test-Takers		Critical Reading		Mathematics		Writing	
	Number	Pct	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Family Income								
Less than $20,000	5,211	10	419	102	437	106	414	99
About $20,000 to $40,000	6,582	13	453	101	472	108	448	102
About $40,001 to $60,000	5,525	11	477	100	493	107	470	102
About $60,001 to $80,000	5,341	11	493	100	509	105	486	100
About $80,001 to $100,000	6,094	12	508	98	525	104	502	101
About $100,001 to $140,000	8,589	17	518	101	538	107	514	102
About $140,001 to $200,000	6,487	13	533	101	553	107	532	105
More than $200,000	6,143	12	569	101	595	105	573	105
No Response	34,982		490	127	509	133	488	129

Figure 2: SAT Scores of 2016 New Jersey High School Seniors by Family Income (Source: College Board)

A Creative and Proven Intervention

To combat this issue, it is crucial that a creative and well-proven intervention is implemented. As documented later in the proposal, arts education addresses the inequity in access to quality education based on socioeconomic status and promotes academic and post-secondary success in low-SES students. The arts inspire students by providing a sense of community and identity that

promotes improved cognitive and social development, increased academic performance and graduation rates, and greater college and career outcomes.

Looking at two New Jersey high schools with similar socioeconomic demographics, one can see that a more robust arts program can have a positive impact on student performance and graduation rates. Figures 3 and 4 give an overview of student performance on English language arts statewide assessments and 4-year graduation rates at West Side High School in Newark, NJ. The median income in Newark is $22,236 (United States Census Bureau). The arts enrollment in grades 9-12 is 38.1%.

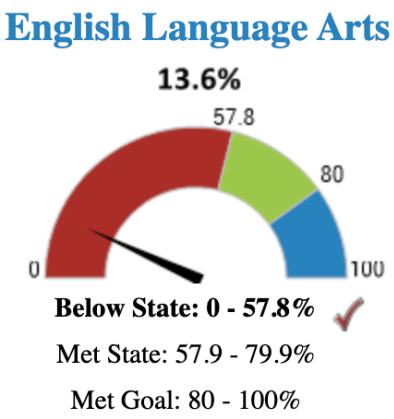

Figure 3: West Side High School (Newark, NJ) Students that Met or Exceeded Expectations on English Language Arts Statewide Assessments
(Source: New Jersey Department of Education)

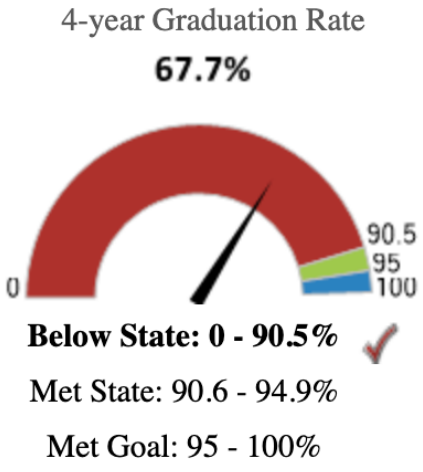

Figure 4: West Side High School (Newark, NJ) 4-year Graduation Rate
(Source: New Jersey Department of Education)

Figures 5 and 6 demonstrate student performance on ELA assessments and 4-year graduation rates at Asbury Park High School in Asbury Park, NJ, where the median income, similar to Newark's, is $26,271 (United States Census Bureau). Although both high schools exhibit a similar income demographic, the arts enrollment at Asbury Park High School is 51.7%, about 10% higher than West Side High School. One can observe that although students at both schools likely have a poor socioeconomic background, students at Asbury Park High School, where there is a higher arts enrollment, perform better on average on standardized assessments and graduate at a higher rate. These more subtle advantages could be seen amplified with a greater arts enrollment across all schools with a greater demographic of low-SES students and across all schools in the state of New Jersey.

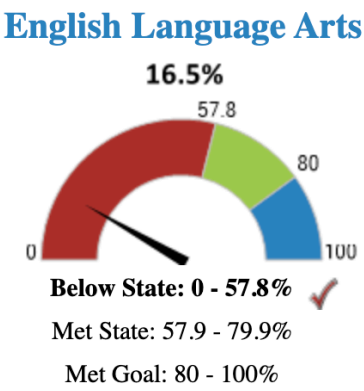

Figure 5: Asbury Park High School (Asbury Park, NJ) Students that Met or Exceeded Expectations on English Language Arts Statewide Assessments
(Source: New Jersey Department of Education)

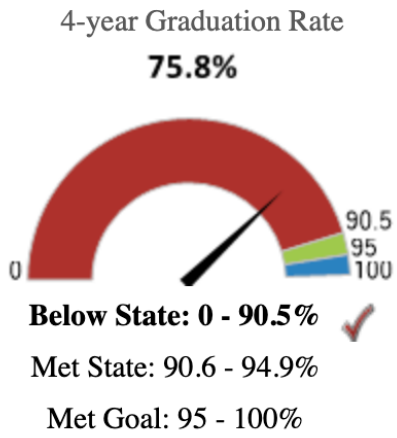

Figure 6: Asbury Park High School (Asbury Park, NJ) 4-year Graduation Rate
(Source: New Jersey Department of Education)

Literature Review

A 2012 study from the University of Minnesota entitled “The Role of Socioeconomic Status in SAT-Grade Relationships and in College Admissions Decisions” found that generally students from higher-income backgrounds earned higher SAT scores, and “21.2% of variance in SAT scores is shared with SES, as measured here as a composite of mother’s education, father’s education, and parental income” and attribute the correlation between SAT score and SES to “some combination of educational opportunity, school quality, peer effects and other social factors” (Sackett, 1006). Given that about one-third of New Jersey students are from a low-socioeconomic background (Education Law Center, 1), there is a large demographic of students who are statistically disadvantaged in academic performance on standardized tests and as a result, are hindered in the college admissions process. To ensure an equitable future for all New Jersey students in higher education and the workforce, the work has to start in the state’s public schools.

The Pitfalls of Standardized Testing and Performance-Based Funding

To encourage student growth in these underperforming and underfunded school districts, many have argued for a performance-based funding initiative. The United States Department of Education defines performance-based funding as a structure “that allocates dollars based on the educational results achieved” (US DOE, 1). This is a concept used often in higher education institutions but is being more commonly pursued in K-12 education as a means of leveling the playing field for underperforming public schools. However, studies exploring the implications of this funding structure found an adverse effect on under-performing colleges and universities. An analysis of performance-based funding in higher education institutions published in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, “Performance-Based Funding in American Higher Education: A Systematic Synthesis of the Intended and Unintended Consequences” found that “PBF adoption is generally associated with null or modest positive effects on the intended outcomes of retention and graduation, but there is also compelling evidence that PBF policies lead to unintended outcomes related to restricting access, gaming of the PBF system, and disadvantages for underserved student groups and under-resourced institution types” (Ortagus, 1). Evidently, this and many other funding-based approaches to address underperforming schools are flawed and pose unintended adverse consequences. Rather than withholding funding from schools already demonstrating poor academic performance, schools could implement a unique intervention to meet students where they are and boost their academic performance by providing students with a sense of being and purpose and an outlet for expression.

Improved Cognitive and Social Development

An integral part of a high-quality education is social-emotional learning. The arts are one of the best tools to promoting cognitive and social development in schools. However, low-socioeconomic status students, who would benefit most from a robust arts education, often attend schools where arts education is, as the author states, "marginalized or even eliminated from the curricula" (May, 223-29). In an article exploring the developmental benefits of the arts,

“The Arts as a Venue for Developmental Science: Realizing a Latent Opportunity”, the authors note the several cognitive and social development benefits of arts education. In discussing theater education, the authors note that theater is “safe practice: as children pretend to be a character and connect their emotional states and reactions to those of that character, they learn to engage with their own and others' emotional states. In the habits of mind study of theater (Goldstein & Winner, 2012), paying attention to others and theory of mind concepts were two of the central skills taught in classes” (Goldstein, 1508). Not only do the arts encourage students to explore their emotions and identity, but they also foster collaboration and community. The authors draw upon ensemble music-making as a means of collaboration and social development saying that it may lead to increased social affiliation with fellow music makers, (Goldstein, 1508). Elevating a student’s social-emotional learning could not only serve as beneficial to their mental health and well-being but could also foster greater success in academics.

Increased Academic Performance and Graduation Rates

There is a studied relationship between academic performance and exposure to arts education, particularly in low-SES students. In a 2005 sample of teenagers and young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES), students who had a high level of engagement with the arts had a mean GPA of 2.94 (on a four-point scale) while students who had a low level of engagement with the arts had a mean GPA of 2.55 (National Endowment for the Arts, 13). While there is a significant increase in GPA, an important benefit of exposure to arts education is better college and career outcomes. For example, there has also been a profound impact on years spent studying the arts and SAT scores. New Jersey college-bound seniors who took the SAT in 2016 who studied the arts and music for more than 4 years earned higher mean scores in all areas than those who were involved in ½ year or less. Students who studied the arts and music for more than 4 years earned a mean score of 520 in critical reading, 531 in mathematics, and 517 in writing, while students who reported studying the arts for ½ year or less earned a mean score of 466 in critical reading, 482 in mathematics, and 461 in writing (The College Board, 13). As far as college outcomes, Americans for the Arts found that low-income students who are involved in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education (Americans for the Arts, 4). Increasing accessibility to high-quality arts education for all New Jersey students, especially low-SES students, would likely be yield significant academic benefits to students, ultimately closing the gap between schools that are underperforming, typically in lower-income areas, and those that are not.

Greater Post-Secondary Outcomes

Accessibility to quality arts education doesn’t just support students within the confines of the public-school setting but also encourages greater participation and engagement in higher education and the workforce. Students who participate in the arts are seen to have better outcomes in the post-secondary world. Specifically, low-SES students, who are disproportionately less likely to attend a higher education institution, are seen to have higher rates of graduation and college attendance with higher participation and accessibility to arts education in high school. A study from the National Endowment for the Arts also found that low-socioeconomic status students who were involved in the arts more attended a post-secondary institution at a significantly higher rate than students who had a lower involvement in the arts.

Low-SES students who had high exposure to the arts attended college 23% more than low-SES students who had low exposure to the arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 11). While attending those institutions, students with a higher level of involvement in the arts also performed better and tended to complete more college. For example, 15% of low-SES students with a high engagement in the arts in high school earned mostly A's in college while only about 9% of low-SES students with low arts exposure did the same (National Endowment for the Arts, 11). This ripple effect continues into the workforce as well. Low-SES students who participated more in the arts also anticipated serving in a professional career 28.4% more (National Endowment for the Arts, 22). Something as seemingly simple as taking more arts courses could, as seen, have drastic impacts on a student's future and could better make adequate preparation for higher education and/or the workforce a reality for all New Jersey students.

Model for Success: The Madison Violin Project

The authors of "The Role of the Arts in School Reform", an arts education policy review, drew upon the Madison Violin Project, "a partnership between a low-performing low-socioeconomic status elementary school and a school of music" (223), as a model for initiatives that should be implemented throughout the nation's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) "failing" schools. This program utilizes preservice teachers providing both a benefit for aspiring educators to see the need for and impact of a robust arts program in low-performing schools while providing students living in poverty a sense of identity and self-confidence. The students involved in this program were able to develop "the ability to work with other and building social relationships" (227) and helped "engage students who need to have some control over their environment and who are able to learn from the leadership they can provide" (227). "The arts provide an avenue to success for some children, reinforcing critical skills that will serve them well throughout their lives through something that they love. The development of policy at all levels that guarantees access to a broad curriculum that includes quality instruction in music for all children is critical. The message from the collective Madison voices tells us that these kids need music—it changes their ideas about what they can do and helps the children and their parents start to see new possibilities" (228). This small-scale project is just one example of the direct effects of an expanded arts education on student success and well-being, especially in those who come from a low-socioeconomic background.

Plan

The basic plan to implement a robust arts education program in underperforming schools is to increase funding towards these districts' arts programs, then direct them to develop new and engaging arts courses that reflect student backgrounds and interests. Once districts have the capabilities to handle an increased capacity of students enrolled in arts courses, the state will increase the Fine and Performing Arts graduation requirement from one year in high school to three years. The plan in more detail can be seen below.

Overview
Phase 1: Research and Public Outreach (12-14 months)
Phase 2: Planning (9-14 months)
Phase 3: Implementation (12 months-Ongoing)

Note: Parts of each phase can overlap depending on each district's personnel. However, there should be a deadline for all districts to submit a plan to the state to grow their arts program.

Breakdown

Phase 1: Research and Public Outreach

Task	How	Timeline
Form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee within the New Jersey State Board of Education	1. Form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee within the state board of education. 2. Get in touch with representatives of marginalized communities throughout the state to assess their needs in schools.	1 month
Collect and analyze data on underperforming schools	1. Analyze data on the academic performance of schools in low-income areas in comparison to their arts programs. 2. Collect and analyze data on the cognitive and social development of low-SES students in comparison to their access to and participation in the arts. 3. Collect and analyze data on the post-secondary outcomes of graduated low-SES students in comparison to their access to and participation in the arts while they were attending their perspective K-12 schools.	2 months
Observe arts education programs throughout the state	1. Visit schools throughout the state of varying socioeconomic demographics.	1 month

	2. Engage with educators, students, and parents to gauge interest and feedback on their current arts programs. 3. Note best practices for implementation of an arts education program that supports low-SES students. 4. Collect information on successful arts education programs throughout the state.	
Observe arts education programs throughout the country	1. Visit schools throughout the country of varying socioeconomic demographics. 2. Engage with educators, students, and parents to gauge interest and feedback on their current arts programs. 3. Note best practices for implementation of an arts education program that supports low-SES students. 4. Collect information on successful arts education programs throughout the country.	1 month
Hold public hearings	1. Give information about tentative plans to increase access to quality arts education to low-SES students. 2. Hold public hearings in low-income areas to collect ideas, attitudes, and feedback on what an arts program should look like in a low-income area school district.	2-3 months
Create a profile on arts programs in every school district in New Jersey	1. Collect data and information on each school district's arts program. 2. Relevant information could include: a. Arts enrollment rate b. Student demographics c. Student attitudes towards the arts d. Teacher attitudes towards the arts e. Availability of resources and funding to arts programs f. Number of arts courses available to students g. Number of arts teachers employed h. Average arts class sizes	3-4 months
Analyze and synthesize research and information to prepare for planning	1. Review data and school arts profiles. 2. Identify potential obstacles and create solutions to those obstacles. 3. Identify the needs of each school's arts program and plans to address those needs. 4. Devise a need-based formula to allocate funds to school arts programs and	2 months

	guidelines outlining how those funds must be used.	

Phase 2: Planning

Task	How	Timeline
Develop and release initial guidelines and criteria to schools	1. Develop and release initial guidelines and criteria to schools regarding the need to increase accessibility to the arts. The basic guidelines will include: a. Increasing the graduation requirement for years enrolled in a fine and performing arts course from 1 year to 3 years (this will be implemented at the state level). b. Increasing the number of arts courses offered and the number of sections of courses to allow all students to be enrolled in at least one arts course. c. Develop new curriculum and new course offerings that engage students of marginalized communities (i.e., offer music and art courses that reflect student cultural and ethnic backgrounds). d. Hire additional qualified arts instructors to teach these new courses.	1 month
Develop and release funding and grants for school arts programs	1. Notify schools of need-based funding they will receive to grow their arts programs. 2. School districts should submit tentative arts budgets based on guidelines provided by the state.	1-2 months
Direct school districts to form arts curriculum-writing committees	1. School districts should select arts educators from each school to serve on a curriculum-writing committee in each area of the arts. 2. Committees should collect demographic information on their prospective student population to create courses that engage students of all backgrounds.	1-2 months
Arts curriculum committees should write new courses and curricula that engage	1. Committees should engage with different communities of students to gauge interest in different arts courses.	2-3 months

students of all backgrounds	2. Courses should be written that reflect the district's interests, backgrounds, and current ability levels. Examples of considerations are: a. Student ethnic and cultural backgrounds b. Student interests c. Cross-curricular connections to the arts d. Current levels of abilities in areas such as instrumental and vocal music and art	
Hold district-level public hearings and adjust plans as needed	1. Hold public hearings and question-and-answer sessions to engage community stakeholders. 2. Make revisions to plans and curricula based on community feedback.	
Submit and receive approval on plans for implementation	1. Each district will submit final plans for the implementation of a robust arts education program. 2. The New Jersey Department of Education and the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Board must review and approve all plans.	2-3 months
Interview and hire arts educators as needed	1. Interview and hire highly qualified arts educators to teach the new courses.	2-3 months

Phase 3: Implementation

Task	How	Timeline
Increase the state arts graduation requirement	1. Once it is clear that all districts are prepared to handle the increased capacity of students enrolled in arts courses, the state will increase the Fine and Performing Arts graduation requirement from one year required to three. This will be for a future graduating class.	TBD
Implement arts education plans for growth	1. Growing an arts program understandably takes time. That said, districts should set goals in their final plan to implement certain phases of their plan by certain deadlines.	Ongoing
Monitor the progress of low-SES students and	1. Continue to collect data on low-SES students to ensure they are making progress	Ongoing

make adjustments as needed	in academic achievement and social-emotional learning. 2. Monitor graduating students to ensure increased post-secondary success. 3. Consistently communicate with community stakeholders throughout the implementation of the plan and make adjustments as needed.	

Budget

Although it would be difficult to calculate a budget for a proposal of this scope without engaging with stakeholders and collecting more data on school districts in low-income communities, one can observe a school district with a high-quality arts program to get a sense of what sort of resources are required.

This proposal will include a sample budget of Westborough Public School District's Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Budget.

Westborough Public School District is located in Westborough, MA, and has a very successful and robust arts education program. According to the district's Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Budget, 100% of students in grades K-8 receive Fine Arts instruction with 80% of high school students taking Fine Arts elective courses. The district is recognized by the National Association of Music Merchants as "One of the Best Communities for Music Education" (Westborough Public Schools, 74). Figure 7 is a list of the fine arts course offerings in Westborough's high schools. This expansive offering of arts courses is a model for what should be available to every student in New Jersey.

American Music History L3, L4	**Graphic Design**
AP 2D Studio Art	**Integrated Theater Arts I & II (Option for L3)**
AP 3D Design Portfolio	**Mixed Chorus**
AP 2D Design	**Mixed Media Painting L3**
2D Art Foundations	**AP Music Theory**
3D Art Foundations	**Music Theory I & Music Theory II L4**
3D Design L3	**Piano Lab – No Level**
Birth of Modernism L3, L4	**Pottery I, II, III, IV**
Chamber Orchestra	**Shakespeare Text L3, L4**
Concert Band	**Symphonic Band**
Concert Choir	**Theatre Arts I & Theatre Arts II L4**
Concert Orchestra	**Theatrical Ensemble I & II L4**
Digital Photography I & II	**Theatre Foundations**
Drawing I & II, L3,L4	**Women's Chorale**
Film & Society L3, L4	

Figure 7: Example Fine Arts High School Course Offerings
(Source: Westborough Public Schools, Westborough, MA)

Figure 8 demonstrates Westborough Public Schools' increasing fine arts budget over the years. This example budget can demonstrate what sorts of resources and financial requirements go into a high-quality arts education program. Notably, this budget does not include personnel. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average New Jersey secondary school teacher salary was $76,430 in 2017. This number varies even from district to district and there are different requirements for the number of arts teachers needed dependent on the number of students in each school. Besides hiring more teachers, curriculum development will require additional personnel. The average curriculum development salary in New Jersey is about $39 per hour. This value as well as the number of hours required to develop new arts curricula varies

greatly by district. Many underfunded schools may need to essentially start their arts program from scratch, therefore requiring significantly more funding towards curriculum development.

FINE ARTS											
FY19 BUDGET			FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY19	FY19
ORG	OBJ	ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	YTD EXPENDED	YTD EXPENDED	YTD EXPENDED	YTD EXPENDED	YTD EXPENDED	BUDGET	PROPOSED BUDGET	% INCREASE/ DECREASE	$ INCREASE/ DECREASE
08301	5223	FINE ARTS DIR - MISC	1,339	585	-	2,196	2,255	1,600	1,600	0%	-
08302	5223A	ART SUPPLIES FALES	2,014	718	1,819	1,979	2,616	2,500	2,500	0%	-
08302	5223B	ART SUPPLIES HASTINGS	2,812	1,787	1,972	2,270	2,403	3,000	3,000	0%	-
08302	5223C	ART SUPPLIES ARMSTRONG	2,226	2,400	1,903	2,111	2,393	2,500	2,500	0%	-
08302	5223D	ART SUPPLIES MS	5,620	5,523	4,784	4,348	5,789	6,000	6,000	0%	-
08302	5223E	ART SUPPLIES HS	13,411	14,072	16,267	15,978	16,679	17,000	17,000	0%	-
08302	5223F	MILL POND ART	6,737	6,258	6,784	8,152	7,774	8,000	8,000	0%	-
08303	5223A	MUSIC SUPPLIES FALES	1,091	1,126	1,412	1,182	2,019	1,800	1,800	0%	-
08303	5223B	MUSIC SUPPLIES HASTINGS	935	961	1,238	1,061	2,054	2,000	2,000	0%	-
08303	5223C	MUSIC SUPPLIES ARMSTRON	1,164	942	1,527	1,639	3,411	2,000	2,000	0%	-
08303	5223D	MUSIC SUPPLIES MS	7,216	7,454	6,982	5,101	6,910	7,100	7,100	0%	-
08303	5223E	MUSIC SUPPLIES HS	12,366	12,972	25,323	41,870	5,652	14,000	14,000	0%	-
08303	5223F	MILL POND MUSIC	9,885	6,047	6,658	7,998	8,345	10,000	10,000	0%	-
08304	5227	FINE ARTS TEXTBOOKS	475	-	1,736	1,180	1,716	1,800	1,800	0%	-
08305	5223E	FINE ARTS AV HS	-	-	-	17,900	9,480	-	-	0%	-
08306	5209E	FA DRAMA HS	1,568	995	824	12,547	934	1,600	1,600	0%	-
08307	5219A	FA ACTIVITIES FALES	-	-	-	225	-	225	225	0%	-
08307	5219B	FA ACTIVITIES HASTINGS	-	-	-	225	-	225	225	0%	-
08307	5219C	FA ACTIVITIES ARMSTRONG	-	-	-	225	-	225	225	0%	-
08307	5219D	FA ACTIVITIES MS	2,102	2,668	1,160	3,160	2,983	2,500	2,500	0%	-
08307	5219E	FA ACTIVITIES HS	6,036	6,373	9,752	5,928	5,758	10,000	10,000	0%	-
08307	5219F	MILL POND FINE ARTS ACT	813	681	-	22	104	700	700	0%	-
08308	5203A	FA EQUIP MAINT FALES	568	215	-	-	120	500	500	0%	-
08308	5203B	FA EQUIP MAINT HASTINGS	-	215	-	-	64	500	500	0%	-
08308	5203C	FA EQUIP MAINT ARMSTRON	675	215	195	-	730	500	500	0%	-
08308	5203D	FA EQUIP MAINT MS	931	1,928	1,535	1,224	1,914	2,250	2,250	0%	-
08308	5203E	FA EQUIP MAINT HS	5,921	5,142	2,314	1,934	3,387	6,000	6,000	0%	-
08308	5203F	MILL POND FINE ARTS EQ MA	1,307	298	225	450	395	1,500	1,500	0%	-
		TOTAL	87,211	79,575	94,409	140,906	95,885	106,025	106,025		

Figure 8: Example Fine Arts District-Level Budget
(Source: Westborough Public Schools, Westborough, MA)

Discussion

In order to "ensure all of New Jersey's 1.4 million students have equitable access to high-quality education and achieve academic excellence", as per the New Jersey Department of Education's mission, the department must address the almost one-third of New Jersey students who are economically disadvantaged and attending underperforming schools. To ensure the greatest opportunity for success both in school and in the post-secondary world, a creative, unique, and proven approach must be implemented to ensure that the textbook solution of standardized testing doesn't continue to inhibit the success of low-SES students. Rather than proposing to solve this issue by allocating funding based on standardized test scores, a more effective solution is to reverse this model by funding a program that encourages academic success.

The arts are the state's greatest weapon in defeating this socioeconomic education disparity. Arts education has proven effective in increasing academic success and college and career outcomes in all students and specifically in low-SES students. Coming from a low-income family is a great learning barrier to students and hinders their success in life starting in K-12 schooling and continuing through adulthood. This intervention of increased access to high-quality arts education motivates students by providing them with a sense of being and can, as proven, alter the trajectory of their academic and post-secondary lives.

The implementation of such a program is complex and multi-faceted but could prove as an extraordinary asset in increasing equity in New Jersey schools. Requiring only one year of a fine and performing arts course in high school is a great disservice to students who could, if given the opportunity, yield great success in their other subjects by continuing their participation in the arts throughout their high school years. That's why it is imperative to treat the arts as a core academic subject area and increase the graduation requirement to three years for high school students. To do so, districts must meet students where they are and develop arts curricula that meet their needs, backgrounds, abilities, and interests. Providing more engaging and targeted arts courses will allow students to better explore their identity and more easily identify with a community within their schools.

It is my hope that the New Jersey Department of Education accesses this untapped potential in our underperforming school districts as a means to promote equitable access to a promising future for our low-SES students. It is time to think "out of the box" and not give up until all 1.4 million students in the state of New Jersey have the resources necessary to become productive members of our increasingly competitive 21st century society.

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