

# Arts Education in School, Work, and Life

## Background

In order to respond to the changing climate of global competitiveness, demographic shifts, and economic disparity, major changes to the delivery of education to our nation's children are inevitable. As our nation contemplates these changes, and prepares students to be global citizens, the federal commitment to arts education must be strengthened so that the arts are implemented as a part of the core curriculum of our schools and are integral to every child's development. The recommendations below are consistent with President-Elect Obama's public statements and proposals in support of a comprehensive arts education for every student.

### **When needed most, the arts are being cut from our schools.**

- The arts are uniquely able to boost learning and achievement for young children, students from economically disadvantaged circumstances, and students needing remedial instruction.
- A 2007 study from the Center on Education Policy has found that, since the enactment of NCLB, 30% of districts with at least one school identified as needing improvement have decreased instruction time for arts and music. These are the districts whose students are most responsive to the benefits of the arts, as demonstrated through numerous research studies.

### **The public, business leaders, and economic experts agree that the arts are essential to a complete education and preparing a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.**

- According to the Conference Board, there is overwhelming consensus from superintendents (98%) and corporate leaders (96%) that "creativity is of increasing importance to the U.S. workforce." Of those corporate respondents looking for creative people, 85% said they were having difficulty finding qualified applicants with the creative characteristics they desired.
- The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, in its report *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (2006) states, "It is a world in which comfort with ideas and abstractions is the passport to a good job, in which creativity and innovation are the key to the good life..."
- A Lake Research poll of 1,000 likely voters revealed that, "83% of voters believe that a greater focus on the arts – alongside science, technology, and math – would better prepare students to address the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

## Policy Recommendations

### **Prevent economic status and geographic location from denying students a comprehensive arts education.**

- Ensure equitable access to the full benefits of arts education when reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act so that all, not just some, students can learn to their full potential.
- Exercise leadership to encourage arts-based and other creative learning environments for academically at-risk students participating in Title I-funded programs.
- Retain the arts in the definition of core academic subjects of learning and reauthorize the Arts in Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education.
- Fund after-school arts learning opportunities and support arts education partnerships between schools and community arts and cultural organizations.

**Move federal policy beyond simply declaring the arts as a core academic subject to actually implementing arts education as an essential subject of learning.**

- Require states to issue annual public reports on the local status and condition of arts education and other core academic subjects.
- Improve national data collection and research in arts education.
- Invest in professional development opportunities for teachers in the arts.

**Deploy arts education as an economic development strategy.**

- Authorize and encourage inclusion of arts learning in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiatives in order to foster imagination and innovation. Without the arts, STEM falls short of its potential to advance education and workforce development.
- Fully preparing students with the creative skills they will need to advance our nation's position in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy requires implementing the arts as a core subject of learning and ensuring that all students attain cultural literacy.
- Ensure that the full range of federal initiatives that advance workforce development, such as Department of Labor programs, provide training in the skills of creativity and imagination.