

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

THE VALUE AND QUALITY OF ARTS EDUCATION

We, the undersigned representatives of professional education associations, share a deep concern about the nature, role, importance, and future of arts education in the schools where our members teach, administer, supervise, develop and implement education policy.

We are unanimous in our agreement that all New Jerseyans who share our concern about the quality of education in general, and of arts education in particular (dance, music, theatre and visual arts), should understand the value of arts education for every child, and we encourage those who will work with us to enhance and support arts education in our schools. To that end, we invite all New Jerseyans, both within the professional education community and outside it, to join us in support of the following principles.

First, every student in New Jersey should have a comprehensive education in the arts.

This means that all PreK-12 students should have a thorough, balanced, sequential, in-school program of instruction in the arts, taught by qualified teachers, designed to provide students of all ages with skills and knowledge in the arts in accordance with high state and local standards.

Second, to ensure a basic education in the arts for all students, the arts should remain recognized as serious, core academic subjects.

The arts should not be treated as an extracurricular activity, but as integral core disciplines as they are recognized in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. In practice, it means that effective arts education requires sequential curricula, regular time-on-task, qualified teachers, and an equitable share of educational resources. Similarly, arts instruction should be carried out with the same academic rigor and high expectations as other core subjects.

Third, as education policy makers develop decisions, they should incorporate the multiple lessons of recent research concerning the value and positive impact of arts education.

The arts have a unique ability to communicate the ideas and emotions of the human spirit. Connecting us to our history, our traditions, and our heritage, the arts have a beauty and power unique in our culture. At the same time, a growing body of research indicates that education in the arts provides significant cognitive benefits and bolsters academic achievement, beginning at an early age and continuing through school.

For example:

- There is a demonstrated, direct correlation between improved SAT scores and time spent studying the arts. In 2014, The College Board reported that students with four years of study in the arts outscored students with no arts instruction by a combined total of 111 points on the critical reading and mathematics portions of the SAT.
- Statistically significant links are being reported between music instruction and spatial reasoning. In one widely cited meta-analysis of 15 studies (*Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 2000), after six months, students who have had active music instruction showed enhanced temporal-spatial ability than did uninstructed students. The findings indicate that music instruction enhances the same higher brain functions required for mathematics, chess, science, and engineering.
- As numerous school-based programs around the country have repeatedly reported, study of the arts helps students think and integrate learning across traditional disciplinary lines. In the arts, they learn how to work cooperatively, pose and solve problems, and forge the vital link between personal (or group) effort and quality of result. These skills and attitudes, not incidentally, are vital for success in the 21st century workplace. Sequential arts education also contributes to building technological competencies. It imparts academic discipline and teaches such higher level thinking skills as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating both personal experience and data. Finally, research findings indicate that arts education enhances students' respect for the cultures, belief systems and values of their fellow learners and plays an important role in the development of social and emotional skills.

Fourth, qualified arts teachers and sequential curriculum must be recognized as the basis and core for substantive arts education for all students.

Teachers, who are qualified as arts educators by virtue of academic study and artistic practice, provide the very best arts education possible. In-school arts programs are designed to reach and teach all students, not merely the interested, the talented, or those with a particular socioeconomic background or abilities. These teachers and curricula should be supported by local education funding, nurtured by higher education, and afforded professional development benefits from outstanding teachers and trainers in the organizations we represent.

Fifth, arts education programs grounded in rigorous instruction, provide meaningful assessment of academic progress and performance, and take their place within a structure of direct accountability to school officials, parents, and the community.

In-school programs that are fully integrated into local curricula afford the best potential for achieving these ends.

Sixth, community arts providers that offer exposure to, and enrichment through the arts in both in-school and out-of-school settings give valuable support and enhancement to an in-school arts education.

As a matter of policy or practice these kinds of activities should complement a balanced, sequential arts education taught by qualified teachers, as shaped by clear standards, and as focused by the content of the arts disciplines.

Seventh, integrating the arts into other curricular areas, when done properly, enlivens learning for our students. Arts integration should be coordinated between the arts educators and the other content specialists and/or community partners to ensure learning outcomes in all content areas are met. However, arts integration, while a valuable tool for learning, is not a substitute for the acquisition of skills and knowledge provided by in-school arts education programs.

Eighth and finally, we offer our unified support to those programs, policies, and practitioners that reflect these principles.

On behalf of the students we teach, the schools we administer and work in, and the communities we serve, we ask all New Jerseyans who care deeply about making the whole spectrum of creative, cultural and cognitive development available to their children to join us in advancing opportunities for all children to receive an education in the arts.

Signatory Organizations

New Jersey Association of School Administrators

New Jersey Education Association

New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association

New Jersey School Boards Association

New Jersey PTA

Arts Ed NJ

