

January 20, 2010

Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

ESEA Arts Stakeholders Meeting Remarks

The Educational Theatre Association is the voice of nearly 5,000 trained theatre educators and 100,000 middle and secondary student members throughout the United States. During the last twenty years, as a leading advocate for theatre education, we have sponsored a comprehensive survey of theatre education and, with the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, helped write the 1994 National Standards for Theatre Education and played a critical role in shaping the theatre portion of the 1997 NAEP test. More recently, EdTA partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards to envision new models of standards and assessment for the arts.

Research conducted in the last ten years or so—detailed in compendiums such as *Champions for Change*, *Critical Links*, *Third Space*—has clearly articulated the impact of a theatre experience in the academic and social skills of students. And Dr. James Catterall's 2009 twelve-year study *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art* confirmed that school theatre involvement, and other arts as well, can influence specific levels of achievement in college and pro-social behavior such as volunteerism and political involvement.

Additionally, the Conference Board's 2008 *Ready to Innovate* report noted that 97 percent of respondents said that involvement in drama activities develops creativity, a key twenty-first century workforce skill.

There has been other encouraging news for theatre education as well in recent years: Forty-six states offer theatre certification or endorsements for drama specialists and an equal number of states have adopted standards for theatre education. But there is certainly work to be done, based on data gathered in EdTA surveys conducted within the past two years:

- While 70 percent respondents said they were certified to teach theatre, 25 percent stated they were not.
- Nearly 50 percent said their programs were co-curricular, with primary funding coming from box office receipts and fundraising.
- 20 percent said their budgets were significantly cut or eliminated in the 2008-09 school year, and 17 percent noted that classes had been eliminated as a result.
- 20 percent also noted that mandatory testing in other core subjects had resulted in cutbacks in theatre classes, either eliminating them entirely or prompting class consolidation.

EdTA is appreciative of the inclusion of the arts as a core subject area, as defined under the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And we, like our arts education colleagues, were heartened by Secretary Duncan's 2009 letter reminding school leaders that the arts are a core subject under ESEA.

But it is not enough for the core language of the act to simply say "the arts." Theatre is but one of four distinct art forms that are currently taught in our schools. Every arts discipline is at risk for marginalization, but that risk is greatest for theatre and our colleagues in dance—our place in the curriculum is far less secure than that of music and visual arts. We need for each of the disciplines to be spelled out in the language of the law. There is also a need for more research, professional development opportunities, and recognized teaching standards in each arts discipline.

EdTA asks that the re-authorization of ESEA:

- Name each arts discipline—theatre, dance, visual art, and music—as a core academic subject [*Title IX, Part A, Section 9101(1)(D)(11)*].
- Encourage the creation and dissemination of new research that confirms the value of all arts learning, and require states to engage in the gathering and monitoring of longitudinal arts education data [*Title V, Part A, Section 15*].
- Encourage states to promote professional development opportunities for arts educators and the creation of national teaching standards in each arts discipline [*Title V, Part A, Section 15*].
- Acknowledge the current to create a new arts standards and assessment model, led by a consortium of national, state, and service organizations [*Title V, Part A, Section 15*].
- Reconsider ESEA language that promotes STEM as a priority at the expense of other subjects, including the arts [*Title I, Part A, subpart 1, Section 1111(b)(1)(c)*].
- Include financial support for the DOE's Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination grant program.

If we strengthen the federal commitment to arts education through ESEA, at each successive juncture—the state, the district, the school—we strengthen the capacity of teachers to teach, administrators to lead, and, most importantly, students to learn the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.



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