

Arts Education Navigator

Making the Case



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Arts Education Needs Your Support

You've probably found this e-book because you understand the importance of students experiencing arts programs. But unless we make a conscious effort to let our education leaders know that we value arts education, they might not assume that it's valuable. That's where you come in. We need your help to ensure that the arts are continually provided as a part of a complete education for all students.

Through a partnership with Vans Custom Culture, Americans for the Arts has designed a series of e-books to help educators, advocates, students, and organizations alike navigate the field of arts education as we work together to ensure that the arts are valued in our country as an important part of all students' lives.

Vans Custom Culture has provided critical resources to support the development and launch of this e-book series as part of the *Arts Education Navigator*, which provides advocates with the tools and data they need to effectively support arts education in their communities.

This e-book series will cover multiple topics, such as the benefits of arts education, what quality arts education looks like, and some models of communities that have mobilized to support arts education. *Making the Case* will focus on how to effectively communicate with education leaders that the arts should be an integral part of a well-rounded education.

While this e-book will focus on crafting effective messages and ways to communicate those messages with leaders, check out our entire [Navigator series](#) for more tips and tools for how to effectively support arts education.

Let's get started!



The Need for Arts Education

We learned in the *Getting Started* e-book the who, what, where, when, why, and how of arts education. In summary, it truly takes a village of partners, policymakers, and players to ensure that all students experience instruction and programming in dance, music, media arts, theatre, and visual arts, whether at home, at school, or in the community.

[The Benefits of Arts Education](#)

[The Decline of Arts Education](#)



ion Advocacy

The following two sections summarize our *Facts & Figures* e-book. Visit [here](#) for more research on the benefits and declines of arts education.

The Need for Arts Education Advocacy

The Benefits of Arts Education

All students deserve the opportunity to take part in the arts, both in school and in the community.

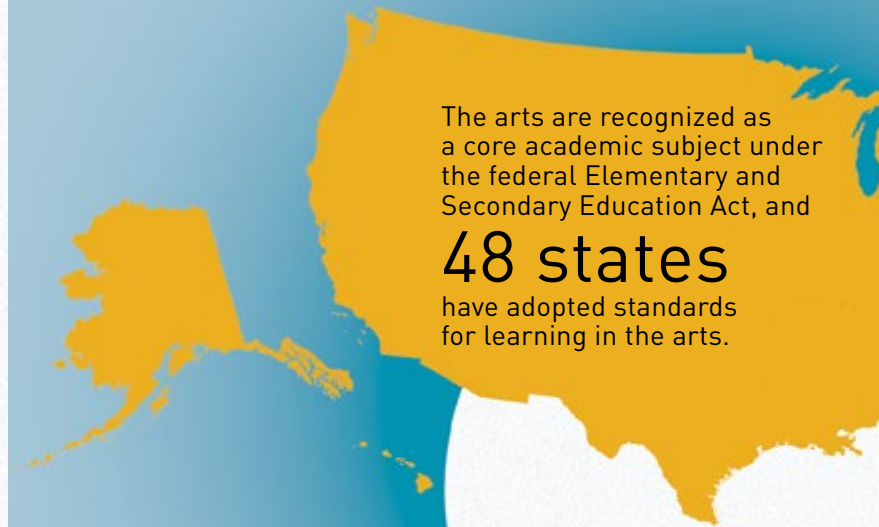
The arts can positively affect entire school culture—especially student motivation, attitudes, and attendance—which encourages students to:

- 1 Stay in School
- 2 Succeed in School
- 3 Succeed in Life
- 4 Succeed in Work

The arts teach students innumerable lessons: that practice makes perfect, small differences can have large effects, and collaboration leads to creativity. The arts also teach children that there are several paths to take when approaching problems and that all problems can have more than one solution.

Summary of Arts Education Benefits

The Arts Are Core



Succeed in Life
Low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are **more than twice as likely** to **graduate college** as their peers with no arts education.



The Arts Are Motivating

The arts help our students to:

Succeed in School

Students who are involved in the arts are:

4 times more likely to participate in a **math and science fair**

3 times more likely to win an award for **school attendance**

4 times more likely to be recognized for **academic achievement**

3 times more likely to be elected to **class office**

Succeed in Work

72% of business leaders say that **creativity** is the number one skill they are seeking when hiring.

4%
high arts,
low SES

22%
low arts,
low SES

Stay in School

Low socioeconomic status (SES) students with a **high** participation in the arts have a drop-out rate of 4 percent, but their peers with a **low** participation in the arts have a dropout rate of 22 percent.

e



The Need for Arts Education Advocacy

The Decline of Arts Education

While there are many impressive benefits to arts education, unfortunately, research also shows that teachers spend less time on the arts in the classroom; there are fewer opportunities nationwide for students; and that there are different levels of access to arts education across various communities.

At right is a diagram from our *Facts & Figures* e-book that shows the different access across communities.

So despite the impressive benefits of arts education, access to the arts is inequitable and on the decline. For more information about both the benefits of and the decline of arts education in America, please refer to [Facts & Figures](#).

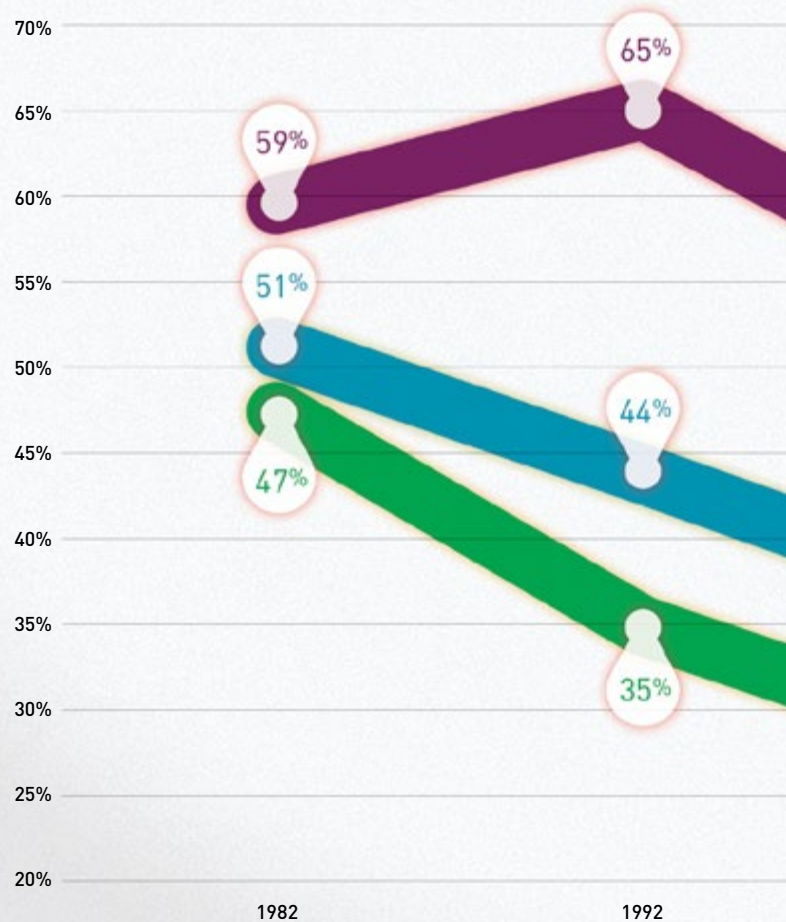
“A well-rounded education is simply **too vital** to our students’ success to let the teaching of the arts and humanities erode.”

- **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** in response to the 2012 release of data on the state of arts education in U.S. Public Schools

Decline of Arts Education

Different Access

One of the most disheartening statistics is the decline of arts education in underserved populations, where African-American and Hispanic students have significantly less access to arts education than their



Arts Education across Communities

Arts education in
African-American and
Hispanic students
is significantly lower than
their White peers.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) periodically administers a Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). The results of the 2008 SPPA showed such a dramatic decrease in arts attendance that the NEA commissioned a report by Nick Rabkin and E.C. Hedberg to determine if a correlation between the decline in arts education today will affect the decline in future arts participation.

In 2008, African-American and Hispanic students had **less than half** of the **access** to arts education than their White peers.



This graph, taken from *Arts Education in America*,¹⁰ shows that access to arts education for African-Americans and Hispanics is significantly lower than for their White peers and has been steadily declining for three decades.

Even though research proves the arts are a good investment for low socioeconomic status students—boosting academic performance and college attendance and decreasing dropout rates—schools are not utilizing the arts as a tool to reach their neediest students. Those who could use the academic benefits of arts education the most are receiving it the least.

Percentage of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Who Received Arts Education in Childhood

- White
- African-American
- Hispanic

10. Rabkin, N., & Hedberg, E.C. (2011).

The Advocacy Imperative

Moving from merely valuing arts education, to doing something about it, takes guts. This section will convince YOU to be the person to take action.

[Why Advocate?](#)

[What is Advocacy?](#)

[Who Can Be an Advocate?](#)

[What Does it Take to Be an Arts Education Advocate?](#)



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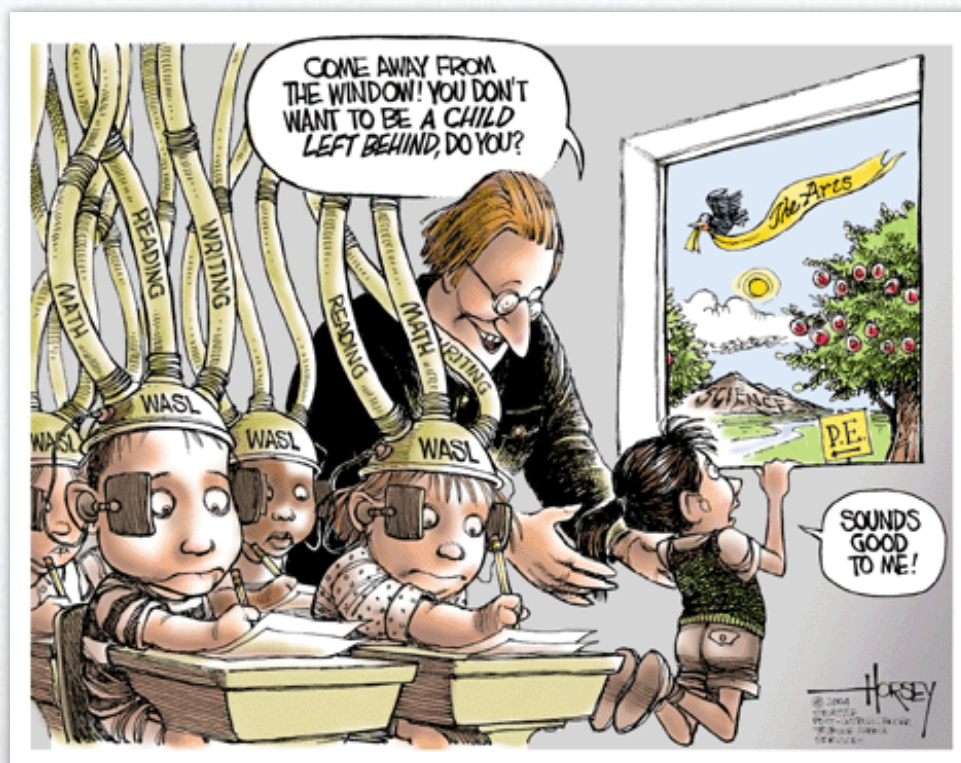
The future belongs to
young people with an
education and the
imagination to create.
–President Barack Obama

The Advocacy Imperative

Why Advocate?

Our schools are under pressure to compete at an international level on high stakes tests, and our teachers, principals, and superintendents operate in an incredibly stressful environment. We need to show decision-makers how arts education is relevant and can help with education reform and create better students and future citizens.

We need to learn to **speak the same language of administrators** and **craft more compelling statements** about why the arts are important. We need to **show administrators that arts education can connect to their priorities**, such as educational standards, and that arts education can enforce college/career-ready skills like rigor, habits of mind, and higher order thinking. And we need to **make appropriate “asks” of our leaders**. Otherwise, we could remain susceptible to the unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind...



No Child Left Behind leads to many subjects left behind. (WASL refers to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning.) Photo by David Horsey/SeattlePI.com

It's so important for individuals to be champions of change for arts education in communities. Many arts education programs, such as those offered by community organizations, have staff that are busy running programs and operating their nonprofit organization at current capacity—not necessarily focused on increasing advocacy efforts. Often we hear that even though these arts education professionals want what's best for their students, they either don't know how or don't have the time to focus on advocacy. This is a shame because a little bit of advocacy can help translate into better local, state, and federal policy and funding scenarios that would actually help ensure the continued existence of that organization's arts education programs.

Even one step further, an arts organization may exist one year, but is not guaranteed to keep its doors open in the future. Many of these organizations rely on local, state, or federal grant funding which can decrease because of the status of the economy, a change in leadership, or budget cuts. While serving students through arts education programs is first and foremost on your mind, it is also important to understand the impact of policy and funding at the federal, state, and local levels, and how it, in turn, affects your organization.

For example, let's look at how critical the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA's) funding is in supporting local organizations and programs. That funding goes out to places like state and local arts councils or commissions that, in turn, re-grant it to local organizations. If the NEA's funding decreases, it will put many organizations and programs at risk. Our advocacy is essential for building a permanent, nationwide infrastructure of support and funding for arts education, both in schools and in the community.

It has become critical that as individual citizens, we take time out to advocate at the local, state and the national level on behalf of our students.

It's not a question of
“should we
advocate?”
but rather
“can we
afford not to?”

The Advocacy Imperative

What Is Advocacy?

Don't be scared of the word advocacy...in fact, let's examine, just what is "advocacy"? Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.

Advocacy /ad·vo·ca·cy/ *n.*

The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.

Education /ed·u·ca·tion/ *n.*

The act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge.

Lobbying /lob·by·ing/ *v.*

To try to influence the thinking of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause.

Not all
advocacy
is lobbying,
but lobbying
is one form
of advocacy.

So when we speak about advocacy, we're talking about a broad definition of advocacy, which can include everything from educating to lobbying. In fact, a lot of types of activities fall along this spectrum. Much of the work that you do in grantwriting, marketing, public relations, and board work is very similar. At its essence, advocacy is largely a communications issue, or being a spokesperson for your organization and your field. However, for it to be advocacy, it is putting those skills from grantwriting, public relations, and marketing to use for a different end result than getting funding or getting higher attendance at a show. Advocacy is looking to change policy, behavior, attitudes, and rules.

Who Can Be An Advocate?

If you're reading this e-book, it's probably safe to say that you know the joy that the arts can bring into our lives. You probably also agree with Elliot Eisner in his "[Ten Lesson the Arts Teach](#)":

"The arts teach children that **problems can have more than one solution**. The arts celebrate **multiple perspectives**. The arts help children **learn to say what cannot be said**."

However, even if you agree with all of the above statements, you've likely come across a situation where you felt that the arts *weren't* being valued as an integral part of every child's education.

Or, you've come across program and budget cutbacks.

Or, you might have come across teachers, principals, and superintendents who need more justification for why the arts are important because of the pressure they feel to compete at an international level on high stakes tests.

Or, maybe you are a concerned parent, a teacher, a student, an artist or just a member of the community that knows the value of the arts.

If you want to ensure that all students have access to the benefits of an education that includes the arts, we need to enlist your help as an advocate.

Who can be an arts education advocate?

- » **Anyone** with an interest in a particular issue—arts education
- » **Anyone** with a story to tell about the arts and their impact on students
- » **Anyone** who wants to change the law or status quo of education
- » **Anyone** who votes!

The Advocacy Imperative

What Does It Take to Be an Arts Education Advocate?

One does not need to be an expert to be able to advocate for arts education.

The rest of this e-book will present essential ways individuals can advocate for arts education. Specifically, we'll focus on

- » **ways to effectively make your case about arts education;**
- » **messaging about arts education; and**
- » **how excellent communication is a form of advocacy.**

If we can get better about telling a compelling story about the importance of arts education, we can convince decision-makers such as principals and school boards, that arts education needs to be included as part of the well-rounded education for all students.



For more nuts and bolts information about advocacy and lobbying, please see our **Mobilizing Support** e-book.

Why Don't People Contact Education Leaders?

Here are the top five reasons why people have said that they don't contact their education leaders:

- 1 Don't know who they are.
- 2 Don't know the issues.
- 3 Don't know what to say.
- 4 Think it will take too much time.
- 5 Don't think it will matter.

We're going to change that. In the next section, we'll provide you with information about issues to cover, who to speak to, how to craft a message, tips for what to say (and what not to say!), easy ways to action, and just how powerful even one voice can be.

Making the Case

The first step in making the case is knowing the issue(s). This section provides some key policy considerations for the arts at the federal, state, and local levels.

Issues to Cover

Who to Influence



The secret to being effective advocates lies in vertically integrating our federal, state and local advocacy strategies.

Issues to Cover

By knowing the issues facing arts education from top to bottom, you can ensure more effective advocacy. Without knowing how federal legislation affects your local school, you could discredit yourself and your efforts.

Our education system's structure can be seen as tiers of influence, where each partner has a different role and a different amount of influence.

- White House • Congress • U.S. Department of Education • National Endowment for the Arts
- National PTA • National Association of State Boards of Education
- Americans for the Arts • National Associations for the Various Arts • National Education Directors of Arts Education • Kennedy Center Alliance for the Arts
- American Association of School Administrators • National Education Association

- State Legislatures • State Department of Education • State Board of Education
- State Department of Education's Director of Arts Education • State Arts Education Organization • State Alliance for Arts Education • Governor and Lt. Governor

- School Board • Superintendent • Assistant Superintendent
- Arts Coordinator • Principal • Teachers Unions Local Affiliates • Local Arts Organizations
- Teaching Artists • Parents / PTA • Mayors • City Elected Officials
- Arts & Culture Organizations • Community Leaders • Community Foundations • Colleges • Businesses • Voters

Students

ational School Board Association
 on • Arts Education Partnership
 Arts Disciplines • State Agencies of
 ce for Arts Education Network
 al Endowment for the Arts

Federal

of Education • State Superintendent
 e Arts Agency • State Arts Advocacy
 ernor • Teachers Unions State Affiliates

State

t for Curriculum and Instruction
 Arts Specialists • General Teachers
 Officials • Local Arts Agencies
 nity Programs • Grantmakers
 rs

Local

Building an integrated system of federal, state, and local advocates will help the arts education field better compete against the rising tide of standardized tests, prescribed curricula, and rote memorization that compete for the limited resources that comprise a student's school day. Knowing how an individual fits into the nationwide system of arts education, and how his or her sphere of influence impacts others, will boost our efforts to effectively address each issue and each policy-maker.

The secret to being effective advocates lies in vertically integrating our federal, state, and local advocacy strategies. It's a complex web of jurisdictions and policy inputs that determine whether and how a public school student in a given school gets formal training in, and through, the arts. We cannot hope to make change for every student unless we begin to work to impact the system as a whole. Below, we'll discuss how to strengthen our advocacy efforts by understanding the policy environment at the federal, state, and local levels.

Federal Policy Opportunities

The single most powerful provision in federal education law benefitting arts education is the designation of the arts as a “core academic subject” in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The **definition of core academic subjects** is included in ESEA, which was last reauthorized as No Child Left Behind in 2002.

This allows schools to use **federal** funds to support arts teachers, arts programs, and services provided by local cultural organizations. Even more importantly, the designation also sends an essential policy signal. It affirms the value of the arts as an area of instruction. This is why Americans for the Arts and our national advocacy partners have worked so hard to protect this designation from being weakened or removed.

However, many decision-makers may not be aware that the arts are identified as a core subject in the Act and, as a result, may be unaware that many types of federal education funds may be used for arts education. Additionally, the current reauthorization of ESEA is the No Child Left Behind Act, which expired on September 30, 2007. Because this key piece of legislation is in need of reauthorization, there is a need to remind our legislators about the importance of arts education and that it should remain a core academic subject.

Our federal advocacy opportunities, however, are much larger than ESEA reauthorization. The White House and U.S. Department of Education can take a number of important and independent steps to advance arts education. **Here are a few indicators of federal interest in arts education:**

- » President Obama and the First Lady have hosted arts education events, such as this **star-studded talent show** and the annual National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards.
- » The White House has highlighted the work of arts education **Champions of Change** on its website.
- » The U.S. Department of Education is spending more on direct arts education projects than ever before through the Investing in Innovation (i3) and the **Arts in Education (AIE) grant programs**.

- » In early 2012, the Department released the full results of the **Fast Response Survey System report**—the most comprehensive look at the status of arts education in our nation’s public schools since 1999.
- » The President’s Committee on the Arts & Humanities has also supported arts education through a major publication, **Reinvesting in Arts Education**, which was followed by a signature initiative, **Turnaround Arts**. This public-private partnership is designed to help transform some of the nation’s lowest performing schools through comprehensive and integrated arts education.

While this federal support for arts education is great, we can continue to work to convince the Department of Education to include measures of the arts in their national research efforts and to boost their efforts in utilizing the arts in their school turnaround efforts. We can continue to ask for an end to the narrowing of the curriculum, for less of an emphasis on summative testing, and for the use of multiple measures to gauge student achievement. We can build more partnerships with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) leaders to find ways to bring in the arts through the work of the **Congressional STEAM Caucus** and the **Innovation Collaborative**.

While we’ve listed several federal opportunities for supporting arts education, we need to remember that the federal share in total education spending is only 11 cents on the dollar. The remaining funds come from state and local sources. This means that, in terms of funding sources, the state and local policy opportunities are much greater.

The term
‘core academic subjects’
 means English,
 reading or
 language arts,
 mathematics,
 science,
 foreign
 languages,
 civics and
 government,
 economics,
arts, history,
 and geography.

Making the Case

State Policy Opportunities

Increasingly, the majority of funding and policy decisions for our nation's education system are at the state level. States are responsible for implementing federal mandates, and with ESEA still unauthorized, many states have received waivers from the U.S. Department of Education from some federal penalties, in exchange for writing their own accountability systems. States account for approximately 46 percent of education funding. Each state has its own policies for arts education, which means that everything ranging from standards, curriculum, teacher certification, and graduation requirements can vary from state to state. Since 1999, 49 states have adopted standards for arts education. For example, most states require that students complete some amount of arts courses in order to graduate from high school. Understanding which policies exist in your state is a good starting point for advocacy. **Check out your state's individual arts policies at the Arts Education Partnership's database, [ArtScan](#).**

State decisions can also impact local access to arts programs and instruction for students. For example, states that have a college entrance requirement in the arts are more likely to in turn require their K-12 students to take arts courses in order to be competitive in their college applications. We can call on our state leaders to collect statewide data on access to arts education so that we can better understand how state policy affects local access to arts programs. **[Here is a list of states](#)** who have conducted statewide surveys for arts education. This type of data can also help state be more strategic in allocation of resources and help local districts improve provision of instruction. If your state isn't on the list, contact your state advocacy organization to begin advocating for a study (link below).

A big step forward for state-level advocacy took place in 2009, when the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network joined the State Arts Action Network at Americans for the Arts. Together these 73 organizations reach arts education leaders and advocates in 47 states. You can search for your state advocacy networks on Americans for the Arts' **[state pages](#)**.

Local Policy Opportunities

Local policy can be layered on top of federal and state policy. Often times local policy reflects the priorities and values of the communities, so local policies prevail. For example, even though the arts are designated as a core academic subject at the federal level, local school districts might still choose to place more emphasis on reading and math because these subjects are tested and have accountability mechanisms tied to funding.

A written statement should protect funding for arts education by explicitly stating that when budget cuts occur, reductions are distributed equally across all subject areas, rather than eliminating specific programs. If you would have a hard time passing a policy with your school board, a resolution might work as well, which would serve as a strong values statement. School boards that adopt such policies and resolutions demonstrate their commitment to arts education as a critical component of a child's basic education.

Here is an example of a local school board policy for arts education from Burbank, CA.

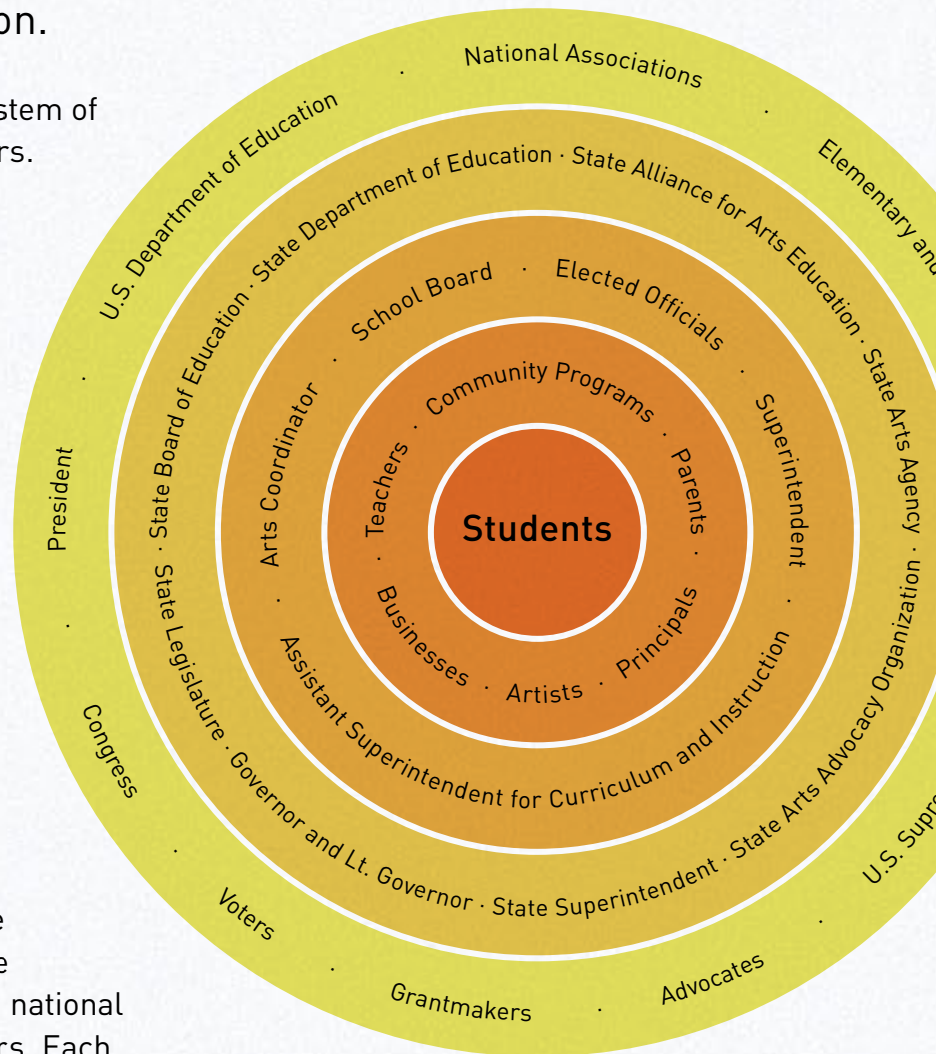
In conclusion, arts education will not simply materialize in every school—it will emerge when thoughtful and directed resources at the federal, state, and local levels have been aligned to make it possible. Once you know what issue you want to advocate for (arts remaining core in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; a statewide study to assess access to arts education across the state; or the adoption of a local school board resolution or policy), then you need to know who to influence in order to align those resources to make it happen.

The
federal
share in
total
education
spending
is only
11¢ on
the dollar.
States
account for
approximately
46% of
education
funding.

Who to Influence

Do you know who you need to influence? Who are the key influencers in your community? Who will become your advocacy target? Who are your allies? It is important when you are preparing to advocate for arts education that you get familiar with those key decision-makers in your community. Understanding where the power lies will help you know where to concentrate your efforts to help advocate for arts education.

Arts education is a complex ecosystem of partners, players, and policymakers. To find out who they are and what they do check out the [Arts Education Field Guide](#). As you read through the 48 page reference guide, you will see that there are many key stakeholders that you can speak with about arts education. The Field Guide has one page devoted to each stakeholder and provides information about their motivations and connections in arts education, allowing you to build more effective relationships from the schoolhouse to the White House and from the living room to the boardroom. Each page captures information in a one-page format for each constituency, from national stakeholders down to local partners. Each page highlights the stakeholder's relationship to arts education in several key areas: support, barriers, successes, collaborations, funding, and national connections.



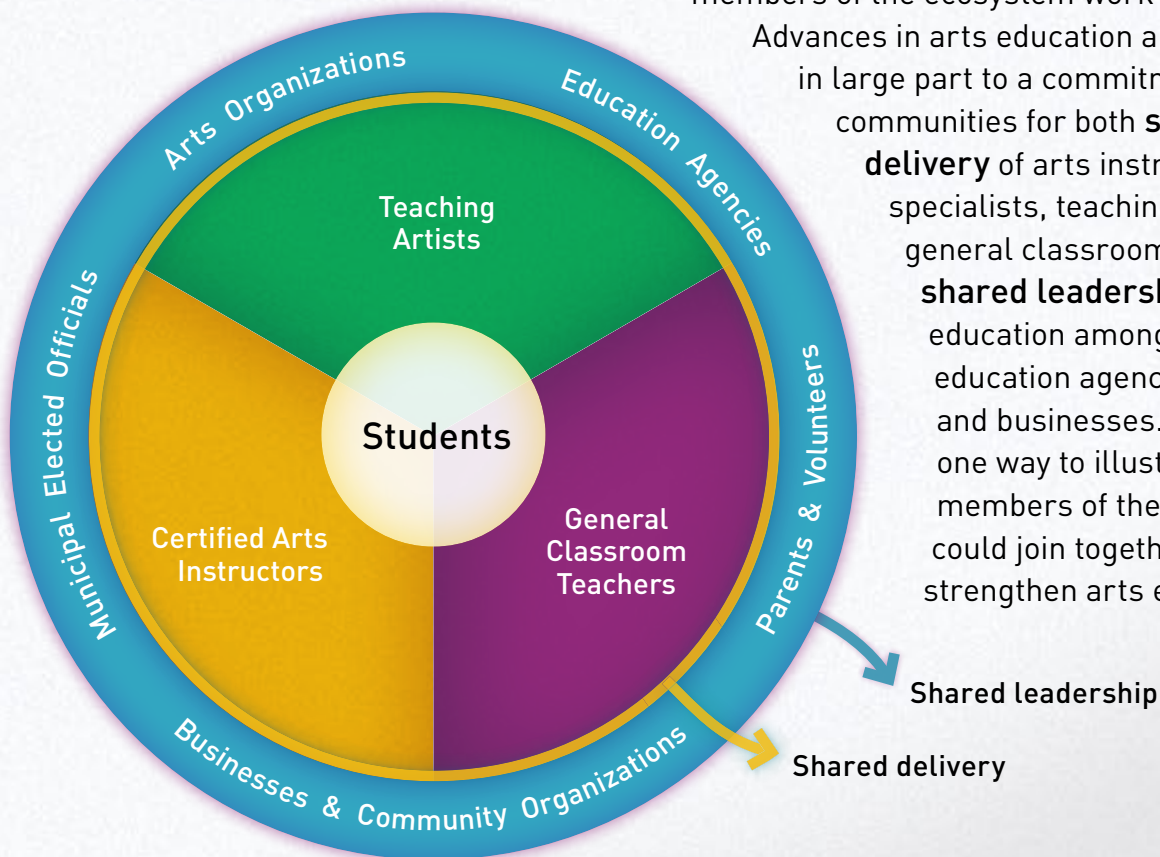
Familiarize yourself with the key decision-makers within the book, their role in arts education, and what they could potentially do to support arts education. For example, if you are hoping to affect the amount or quality of instruction in the arts in your school district, then it would be helpful to read the sections in the Field Guide about district-wide arts coordinators or assistant superintendents. These stakeholders generally oversee curriculum for the entire district and are appropriate targets for your advocacy. Additionally, because they understand all of the curricular goals and initiatives for the district, they can help you refine your goals to become more connected to other district priorities.

This is just one example of how the Field Guide can help you better understand which leaders to reach out to in your advocacy.

You can read more about models of shared leadership for arts education in our *Getting Started* e-book.

Everyone has a role to play in the arts education ecosystem—not just professional educators or administrators! Understanding these roles is important because the sustainability and success of arts education will only occur when members of the ecosystem work together.

Advances in arts education are often due in large part to a commitment across communities for both **shared delivery** of arts instruction by arts specialists, teaching artists, and general classroom teachers and **shared leadership** for arts education among arts agencies, education agencies, parents, and businesses. Below is just one way to illustrate how members of the ecosystem could join together to strengthen arts education.



Secondary Education Act
eme Court

Crafting the Message

Once you have decided who you want to influence on your issue, it is time to tailor a message to that specific person.

Audience

Framing

Messaging

The Ask

Putting It All Together

Style Guide and General Tips



Here are the three
main components to
effective communication
in your advocacy:
audience + message + ask.
Let's explore each
component...

Audience

Use the Field Guide to choose your audience. The key areas listed in the Field Guide will help you know your audience. Whenever you are communicating anything, you always want to think about your audience and know how to answer each of the questions below. Who your audience is will change your messaging drastically. Your audience will determine how you define the issue. Once you know your audience, you can craft a targeted message and ask.

Know Your Audience:

- » Who are they?
- » What motivates them?
- » Where do they get their information?
- » Why are these issues important to them?
- » What you want them to do?

Let's craft a sample message and ask for a principal. From the Field Guide, we learn that principals can provide time and training for their staff, make budget decisions that provide sufficient resources, and provide visibility on the issue. The Field Guide fleshes out these details so that you understand what motivates principals and what issues matter most to them. Once you've read up on what principals can do to support arts education, then next step is crafting messages with appropriate asks for when you speak with a principal.

Framing

Frames are mental shortcuts we use to view the world. According to George Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at UC Berkeley, we think in frames, rather than facts:

“When you hear a word, its frame (or a collection of frames) is activated in your brain...If the facts don’t fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off.”

These frames trigger our values and help us decide what information is relevant to us and what is not. Lakoff is famous for his work on framing around political issues. Just to give you an example, let’s take the frame “tax relief.” This is an emotionally charged frame, as the phrase already implies that taxes are a burden and you need relief from them. So in order to re-frame a conversation with someone who already has particular beliefs about taxes, you would need to steer clear of this phrase and find different words to describe your issue, such as something more neutral like “tax policy.”

You can see how simple wording makes a big difference in whether or not someone will even listen to what we have to say. But how does this apply to arts education? Let’s take a look at how arts education is framed.

In 2011, Lauren Kapalka Richerme published a paper in the Music Educators Journal looking at how music education is framed in major American news outlets. She analyzed news coverage from 2005-2010 and found that music education...

- » is perpetually in crisis & has disappeared from schools
- » “helps” troubled students
- » is a handmaiden to math, reading, and standardized testing

These are negative images that do not highlight the many unique, wonderful, and intrinsic benefits of music education. So how do we move away from these negative frames for arts education? Lauren’s article reminds us of one of Lakoff’s key principles: Don’t use the

Don’t use the language of your opponents. Even a rebuttal of someone else’s statement can reinforce a negative frame.

Crafting the Message

language of your opponents. Even a rebuttal of someone else's statement can reinforce a negative frame. For example, if you have someone whose frame is "the arts are extra," then merely saying, "the arts are NOT extra" won't change someone's mind or values. It will actually just reinforce their frame because of the linguistic association of those same words.

In a keynote address called "From Nicety to Necessity," Kevin Kirkpatrick from the Metropolitan Group reminds us that framing is the first step of changing people's minds:

"People have opinions on all sorts of things. And it's really not all that tough to get people to believe something, at least for a little while. But, that doesn't mean what they believe today will still be something they believe tomorrow, and it sure doesn't mean they care enough to get off their butts and do something about it. What we need is not public opinion, but public will. The kind of public will that translates beliefs and attitudes into behaviors, policies and cultural norms."

It is no wonder that we have not created public will to support arts education, if popular public opinion about arts education is that it is "perpetually in crisis." If someone constantly read about the disappearance of arts education in our schools, they might wonder what they, as just one person, could do to save a sinking ship.

You can see how it is important for us to find new ways to talk about arts education. We need to move our conversation into our audience's frame. Or, better yet, let's create a new frame for both of us to step into. In the following sections, we'll discuss ways to craft messages that will resonate with various stakeholders' frames.

Messaging

Once you've decided on a frame that might work with your target audience, you can choose the specific words to craft your message. Below are some sample messages that are based on the frame of the importance of the **Common Core State Standards Initiative**, which is the name for the new standards in reading and math.

The sample messages about the arts and Common Core might resonate with a principal, as implementing Common Core is a huge priority for principals. Each message is tailored to three specific goals for the common core. As you'll see below, the thrust of the message isn't about arts education as your objective—your objective is cultivating habits of mind, or developing skills for close reading, or ensuring that all students are college and career ready. And the arts are your proposed solution for helping reaching that objective.

Habits of Mind

"In a world where students must frequently wade through a sea of information to determine which facts are trustworthy and relevant to a particular topic, critical thinking skills are key to college readiness and lifelong learning. Arts education develops students' critical thinking skills—including skills for comparing, hypothesizing, critiquing, and exploring multiple and alternative viewpoints."

–Excerpted from *Preparing Students for the Next America*, published by the Arts Education Partnership

Close Reading

"The arts teach students to observe closely, very similarly to observation required in the scientific method. When students learn to attend to visual contexts more closely than ordinary "looking" requires, they begin to see things that otherwise might not be seen."

–Excerpted from *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* by Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner

College and Career Ready

"Arts education develops creativity, one of the top five skills employers prize for the 21st century. Students receiving an arts-rich education perform better on assessments of creativity than do students receiving little or no arts education. Performing arts students, for example, show greater flexibility and adaptability in thinking than their peers."

–Excerpted from *Preparing Students for the Next America*, published by the Arts Education Partnership

Crafting the Message

There are two important things about why these messages work:

- » They use data to drive the message
- » They move into another person's frame of mind

Each of the sample messages are backed by research. Two of the messages are taken from the Arts Education Partnership's brochure, *Preparing Students for the Next America*, which has research-based talking points for advocates to use with school leaders. Each message is footnoted with all of the research that backs it up, and then there is a summary of the research on the final page. It's one of the many ways that the Arts Education Partnership is making research user-friendly and helping advocates like us become better at making the case for the importance of arts education. You can download a free PDF of the brochure or order hard copies from the Arts Education Partnership at www.aep-arts.org.

Additionally, these messages helped move the conversation into another person's frame of mind. These messages contained talking points in a frame that principals (our chosen advocacy target for this example) would understand. When you can frame your message in a way that resonates with another's values, ideas, and priorities, you have a much higher chance of your messaging sticking. And framing your message as a solution for a principal puts you in the position of strength and helps you be seen as an ally.

Packing the Final [Messaging] Punch

So you've picked your frame and crafted a message that will resonate with the intended audience. There are a few final messaging points to consider: While your message needs to be backed by data, it also needs a story in order to be compelling. Just like boxing, this is what we call the one-two punch:

warm and fuzzy anecdote + hard hitting data = effective messaging

Additionally, an effective message will also have an appropriate introduction and conclusion. Your introduction should state how and why you are connected to education (parent, educator, concerned citizen, etc.) Your conclusion should have a clear, simple, and actionable "ask." We'll learn more about the ask in the next section, and then we'll put it all together with some completed sample messages.

The Ask

Your message should always conclude with an “ask.” The ask should be clear, simple, and action oriented.

Your ask needs to be more specific than just “care about the arts.” What you want them to do—what action you want them to take—should be tied to their specific role and it should be simple and achievable. You also may have multiple, small asks that are spread out over time, leading up to the actual request.

For example, you could ask a parent to attend a PTA meeting. Once they become involved with PTA, you could ask them to present about the Reflections Art Competition at the school board meeting. Once they’ve done this, you could ask them to speak one-on-one with a school board member about adopting a policy that designates arts as a core subject.

In the previous section, we chose principals as the target for our advocacy and crafted messages tailored to their current priorities. **So here are some examples of specific asks we can make of principals**—time for professional development, time for specific instruction, and asking the principal to explore career pathways for students interested in creative careers. Each ask, detailed below, connects back to the messages in the previous section:

Message: Habits of Mind

Ask: Time for Professional Development

Specialists need time for co-planning with generalist teachers, and the district could dedicate a professional development day to the topic.

Message: Close Reading

Ask: Time for Specific Instruction

We need instruction in each art form available to students at least once per week, taught by a certified instructor, with no higher student to teacher ratios than 400:1.

Message: College and Career Ready

Ask: Join the Team

Create / Join a community arts team, comprised of teachers, school leaders, parents, cultural organizations, businesses, to create pathways for students interested in creative careers.

Crafting the Message

While principals are a key leader in supporting arts education, students, parents, educators, school and community leaders, and policymakers all have a role as either a carrier of the message or as a recipient of the message. They each have specific calls-to-action, and it is important to understand what each person's role is within the ecosystem of arts education.

For example, the most influential messengers are usually parents, students, and arts advocates. The targets who are most often poised to make change are principals, superintendents, and school board members. Because of this powerful local influence in education, we've limited the asks below to reflect ways that these local leaders can support arts education. Everyone has a role to play, if only they know what to do:

Students Carrying the Message

All education decision-makers (teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards), do what they do in the name of better education for students. As such, students can be an effective messenger for advocacy. Students can influence their peers and their parents. And if students and their parents join together to demand something, education decision-makers usually listen. Never underestimate the power of students as influencers!

Potential Asks	Appropriate Target
Fund a new program, save/maintain a current program	Donors, education leaders, high profile individuals, parents, citizens
Create / Join a community arts team, comprised of teachers, school leaders, parents, cultural organizations, businesses, etc.	Parents, students, arts advocates, donors, education leaders, thought leaders, high profile individuals, state/local government officials, arts education field professionals, business sector, teachers
Host a community conversation, speaker series, or a screening of an arts education documentary.	Parents, students, arts advocates, donors, education leaders, thought leaders, high profile individuals, state/local government officials, arts education field professionals, business sector, teachers
Collect/publish statewide research / data about access to arts education across the state.	Education leaders, state government officials
Utilize arts education as a solution and resource for civic outcomes (environmental, mental health, safety)—include community organizations in your work with schools and other municipal agencies.	Local government officials, arts education field professionals, business sector
Create a map of the assets and needs in your community for arts education	Parents, students, arts advocates, donors, education leaders, state/local government officials, arts education field professionals, business sector, teachers
Look for these five indicators of a healthy arts education: Dedicate 5 percent of the general budget for the arts. Draft a plan for arts education. Have the school board adopt an arts education policy. Hire a designated arts coordinator in the district office. Maintain a ratio no greater than 1:400 arts teachers to students.	Parents, students, arts advocates, donors, education leaders, state/local government officials, arts education field professionals, business sector, teachers
Start a conversation with a principal—use our handout 15 Questions to Ask ; or publications such as What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education from the Arts Education Partnership or My Child's School and the Arts from the Center for Arts Education.	Arts education field professionals, parents, teachers, students

Putting It All Together

We've explore each part of the message. Now, it's time to put it all together.

Below are three sample messages based on what was outlined above for these basic parts of audience, message, and ask.

1 Know your audience/ framing

2 Introduction

3 Message = Data + Story

4 Conclusion = Ask

Conversation with a Principal

Hello, my name is Olivia Johnson. I am the mother of Monica, who is in Mrs. Adler's 3rd grade class.

I am concerned about the proposed cuts to music for 3rd and 4th grades next year that were mentioned at the last PTA meeting. Music is the time of school that Monica most looks forward to, and I would be sorry to see it go next year. Studies have shown that students that receive arts instruction are 4 times more likely to have been recognized for academic achievement; four times more likely to participate in a math and science fair; and three times more likely to win an award for school attendance. I know that our school is struggling with attendance, and it seems that, just like it did for Monica, music is a great motivator for attendance. As a parent, I also want to be sure that my daughter is receiving a well-rounded education.

I hope that you will reconsider this proposal—perhaps we can look at an alternate funding source for the program, such as using federal Title I funds next year. I am happy to draft some talking points for you to use at the next school board meeting. Thank you for your time!

Electronic versions of sample letters can be found [here](#). The more you can personalize your letter, the more seriously it will be taken. Personal touches include any history you may have with the leader and your own thoughts and observations about arts education. Specific references to your school, school district, or legislative district and how arts education would affect you and other constituents also help make your point. Remember, you can also write to thank a decision-maker for including the arts in your child's education or taking a strong public stand in support of arts education!

Letter to the School Superintendent

Hello, Superintendent Ramirez, my name is Emily Nelson, and I'm a teaching artist with all of the elementary schools in the district.

I know that the district has a big initiative to equip students with 21st century skills that will prepare them for both college and career. A 2008 study called Ready to Innovate shows that superintendents and business leaders agree that arts courses (drama, music, creative writing, studio arts, etc.) help develop creativity. And 72 percent of business leaders said that creativity is the number one skill they look for when hiring. I'd love to show you a video of a recent student performance that demonstrates the creative, collaborative, and critical thinking skills these students are learning. As a guest teacher to these students, I want to be sure that they are all afforded every opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Therefore, I am concerned that the school board is proposing cuts to the arts program next year.

I belong to a community arts team, comprised of teachers, parents, cultural organizations, and businesses. We're working on creating pathways for students interested in creative careers. I'd love it if you could join us at our next meeting to discuss what resources the district can provide to ensure that all students are prepared for 21st century careers.

Public Comment at a School Board Meeting

My name is Aiden Monroe. As a teacher for Madison High School, I am concerned with the proposed cuts to visual arts next year.

I would like to encourage that visual arts remain as part of the curriculum. Seventy-five percent of the students who attend Madison High School are classified as low socioeconomic status. I understand that one of the school's concerns is the dropout rate. As research studies demonstrate, students with a low participation in the arts have a dropout rate of 22 percent, but their peers with a high participation in the arts have a dropout rate of only 4 percent! Additionally, low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts. Let's help pave a future for our students who are at risk of dropping offering access to the arts—they can help provide the motivation for the students to want to attend school.

The school board is in the unique position to craft, implement, and fund policies that encourage administrators and educators to improve the quality and delivery of instruction. I respectfully request that the board draft a policy stating that the arts are a core academic subject, therefore tying funding and resources to these programs. Please let me know how I can further support this effort, and thank you for all that you do on behalf of the students in this district.

Style Guide and General Tips

You know who you want to contact, and you have a message you want to convey. But when you are in the moment, HOW you deliver your message is key. Here are some tips for the best delivery of your message possible.

The following style guide is adapted from [Arts for LA's](#) handout on this topic. (See our source page for more information on Arts for LA's resources.)

Be Honest

Be honest, and never stretch the truth to make a point or be able to respond to a question. It's okay to say, "I don't know the answer to that but I'll get back to you."

Be Knowledgeable

Do your research. Study our [Facts & Figures](#) Navigator and be comfortable talking about data. But also be knowledgeable about your opponent's position. Know what the other side will be presenting so you are not caught off guard. Be aware of other non-arts issues affecting the situation. Also, show understanding about the pressures the decision-maker is under and the tough decisions they have to make.

Be Specific

Speak their language: use data and concrete details whenever possible. Stay focused on the specific issue and create specific, measurable asks: "We want the 2 percent allocation restored to this program" is more effective than "Arts are important."

Be Positive

Thank administrators and board members for their positive comments and support. Thank even those who did not vote with you; there will be other battles. Be respectful and professional at all times. You never know when you might have the opportunity to work together. Remain professional, poised, and positive in your work with school and community leadership. Be optimistic about the future, but realistic about the present. Show that you understand the pressing issues at hand and the harsh realities everyone is facing. Positive angle helps decision-makers view you as strategic partners instead of adversaries.

Instead of: Tell the City Council they are destroying the arts!

Use: Encourage the City Council to maintain their support for the arts and cultural facilities in our community. We encourage you to tell your story: how have the cultural facilities benefited you or your family?

Build Relationships

Build partners, not adversaries. Seek to create lasting and productive partnerships, not adversarial relationships. Have a good working relationship with officials and decision-makers. Be inclusive. Share ownership of good ideas and avoid speaking or acting out of self-interest.

Instead of: We're victorious! We won the battle against City Hall!

Use: More than 3,000 stakeholders voiced their support to the mayor, who will maintain his support of cultural facilities in our city.

Get to know school board members. All board members are potential allies. Work to help re-elect school board members who understand the importance of arts education. Encourage advocates to run for office. Invite them to student performances and introduce them to the audience. If appropriate, ask them to say a few words. Thank them for their interest in student achievement through the arts.

Reach out to official's staffers and deputy officers. They are often very accessible and willing to help.

Build relationships before you ask for something. Advocacy is an ongoing effort to build relationships, not just a reaction during times of crisis. Think about what you can offer: Do you have meeting space? A local network of civically engaged citizens?

Be Credible

Become a source of solid information. Decision-makers appreciate your help in bringing them new information on arts education's vital role in life and learning. Use credible data to build trust. It is our responsibility to keep decision-makers informed. Providing candidates or recently elected/appointed officials with information about local arts issues is a good start to an informed relationship. Be a squeaky wheel, not a gadfly (maintain credibility). Elected officials quickly learn to tune out those who only show up to yell at them.

Be the Solution

Try to develop and offer solutions instead of focusing on problems. Get a policy in place before controversy arises.

Instead of: The school board is eliminating the arts teacher position on Monday.

Use: Tell your school board member that the arts teacher plays an essential role in our district.

Five Easy Ways to Get

So we've talked about the importance of arts education, the need for advocacy, and some best practices in arts education advocacy. You've practiced your message and are ready to deliver it. Congratulations, you've become a spokesperson for arts education—also known as an advocate!

Stay Informed

Find & Join Your Local, State, and/or National Associations

Speak Out with Voter Voice

Join the Arts Action Fund

Attend Arts Advocacy Day



Started

Now, what are your next steps? During this final section, we'll cover quick actions you can take to get started with advocacy.

Five Easy Ways to Get Started

1

Stay Informed

Keep up to date on the latest arts education topics by subscribing to the RSS Feed for [ARTSblog](#).

Check out newsletters and education publications like [ED Week](#) and [Edutopia](#).

Sign up for Americans for the Arts' field-wide publication, [The Creativity Connection](#), which features headline news for those interested in arts education, creativity and the role it plays in education in America.

Or even follow the [#artsed](#) hashtag on Twitter. Twitter and Pinterest have emerged as the largest professional learning communities in education.

2

Find & Join Your Local, State and/or National Association(s)

Use our [member directory](#) to find local arts agencies. Your local arts agency—usually a private nonprofit arts organization, but sometimes a branch of your local government (especially in larger cities)—may have someone on staff who specializes in arts education, and could help you understand the arts education landscape, both in your school district and in the broader community. They can tell you about offerings for children and youth during afterschool and weekend hours—or, perhaps, through already established partnerships with schools.

Use our [state pages](#) to find state agencies for arts education. There are three key arts education resources at the state level:

- » the arts specialist(s) at your state department of education;
- » the arts in education (AIE) specialist at your state arts agency; and
- » a state alliance for arts education, whose primary purpose is to advocate for arts education.

These professionals can help you understand how arts education policy is developed both in your state legislature and state department of education. The state department of education staff person may be prohibited by law from asking you to lobby in any particular way, so you may want to start with your state arts agency or state alliance for arts education.

State arts agencies and state departments of education often fund model local projects, so their arts education specialists may be able to help you find good programs to learn from or possibly let you know how to apply for funds to support your own good idea. The state alliance for arts education would appreciate knowing you are a supporter and that you are willing to help in some way.

Here's a list of national arts education organizations:

- » Americans for the Arts
- » Arts Education Partnership
- » National Association for Music Education
- » National Dance Education Organization
- » American Alliance for Theatre and Education
- » Educational Theatre Association
- » National Art Education Association
- » John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
- » National Guild for Community Arts Education
- » State Agency of Education Directors of Arts Education
- » National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
- » American Association of Museums
- » Association of Art Museum Directors
- » Association of Performing Arts Presenters
- » VH1 Save the Music
- » Performing Arts Alliance
- » Quadrant Arts Education Research
- » Dance/USA
- » Opera America
- » National Association of Music Merchants
- » Theatre Communications Group
- » League of American Orchestras

Associations with an interest in arts education:

- » ASCD
- » American Association of School Administrators
- » National School Board Association
- » National Association of State Boards of Education
- » National Education Association
- » National PTA

3

Speak Out with Voter Voice

In two minutes, you can write your state and local elected officials about the value of arts education or find out about the latest federal- and state-level battles for arts education.

It's easy to find your elected officials. You can go to Americans for the Arts' [e-advocacy center](#) to do some research on who your elected officials are.

- » Automatically identifies elected officials and links to finding state and federal legislators and media contacts
- » Sample issue topics
- » Sample letters
- » Makes it very easy
- » Sign up for e-mail updates

Let your Legislators know what you think. Let them know why arts education matters. Most legislators are not hostile to the arts; they merely have trouble seeing how they fit into the big picture or relate to their areas of interest. Help them connect the dots. Letting decision-makers know what you think and want for your child or the students of the community is important. Thanking decision-makers who support programs you want is even more important.

If you prefer to be contacted directly when your voice is needed on a particular issue, you can sign up for the Arts Action Fund.

4

Join the Arts Action Fund

The [Arts Action Fund](#) is the only organization working to increase the visibility of arts education through a political action committee, an online advocacy center, and report cards for our elected officials. Membership is free and you will automatically receive updates when your support is needed, such as during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

- » Free Membership
- » Keeps you up to date about policies that affect the arts

The Arts Action Fund supports increased funding from the U.S. Congress to the National Endowment for the Arts each year so that more programs can be supported, more jobs can be created, and more people can enjoy the arts in their communities.

5

Attend Arts Advocacy Day

It's important for you to be part of the united effort to preserve and advance the arts in America during Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, DC. It's more than just one day...it is beginning to build relationships that you will cultivate throughout the year. Even if you are unable to attend the events in person, you can watch the live stream of our Nancy Hanks Lecture (given by notables such as Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Pink, and Alec Baldwin); add your voice to the conversation on Twitter; send e-advocacy messages to your elected officials—there's strength in numbers. [Check out last year's highlights.](#)

These are just five examples—the possibilities are endless. See our next e-book, "[Mobilizing Support](#)" for more advanced actions you, your organization, or a group of people can take to affect change.

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About Vans Custom Culture



For more than 45 years, Vans has evolved beyond a surf and skate shop to draw influence from Southern California youth culture as diverse as it is progressive. Incorporating elements from art, music, and street culture, with deep roots in action sports heritage, Vans today offers a full range of footwear, timeless apparel, and accessories around the world.

In 2010, youth brand Vans developed the Vans Custom Culture Art Competition to encourage high school students across the United States to embrace their creativity and inspire a new generation of youth culture. Vans Custom Culture is committed to investing in the arts as an integral part of all students' education.

The Vans Custom Culture competition offers students a fresh perspective on art and an outlet for self expression through the synthesizing of design, fashion, and function during this unique contest and multimedia exhibit.

www.vans.com/customculture

About Americans for the Arts



Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education. From offices in Washington, DC and New York City, we provide a rich array of programs and services that meet the needs of more than 150,000 organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America.

Americans for the Arts envisions a country where every child has access to—and takes part in—high quality and lifelong learning experiences in the arts, both in school and in the community. We believe that learning in the arts enables every individual to develop the critical thinking, collaborative, and creative skills necessary to succeed in today's ever-changing world.

Through advocacy, research, partnerships, and professional development, Americans for the Arts strives to provide and secure more resources and support for arts education.

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Navigator Series Editor: Kristen Engebretsen
 Managing Editor: Elizabeth Van Fleet
 Research: Sandra Hernandez
 Design: Andee Mazzocco, Whole-Brained Design, LLC
 Spanish Translation: Alex Sarian

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Americans for the Arts
1000 Vermont Ave NW 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

202.371.2830

artseducation@artsusa.org

www.AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEducation