



NATIONAL
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FOR THE ARTS

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June 15, 2009

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Statement on The Nation's Report Card on Student Achievement In Music and Visual Arts

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The National Endowment for the Arts applauds the commitment of Congress and the U.S. Department of Education in funding this historic assessment of the arts as part of The Nation's Report Card.

I want to thank Mary Crovo and her team at the National Assessment Governing Board—as well as Peggy Carr and her analysts at the National Center for Education Statistics—for implementing the study and for delivering these results.

We especially want to recognize the public value of including the arts as part of this important study. The Arts Endowment is proud of having helped to fund the framework for the arts education assessment that first occurred in 1997. These data provide an invaluable insight into arts learning among students of diverse backgrounds throughout the United States. This data will continue to help parents, educators, communities, and legislators make informed decisions about arts education policy and classroom practices.

The Arts Endowment believes that a world-class education that prepares students for college and career must include arts education as part of the K-12 core curriculum.

We seek to ensure that high-quality arts education opportunities that ensure the experience of self-discovery and creative expression are made available to young people, equally, regardless of income or locale.

With this goal in mind, I'd like to comment on a few findings from the study that reflect evidence about issues of concern in arts education. Specifically, in the music and the visual arts, there were differences in the average scores of students, depending on their socioeconomic background. Lower average scores were reported most frequently for students attending urban schools and schools in lower-income communities, as well as for males, and for African American and Hispanic students.

To educators of other subjects—such as reading—these gaps in student achievement are all-too-familiar. With state education departments and school boards nationwide struggling to maintain high standards in arts instruction amid many competing requirements—and with the funding for that instruction so often imperiled at the state level—we must be attentive to be especially vigilant about

the availability and application of resources across all demographic groups—including disadvantaged communities, schools, and students.

On the one hand, the NAEP study has good news to impart about the availability of arts instruction at many of our nation's middle schools. For example, 77 percent of 8th-graders attend schools where administrators reported a full-time specialist for visual arts or music instruction. We know that a substantial number of students participate in both music and visual arts.

But there are still concerns. Why are there some declines in understanding of these art forms, as reflected in test results? We need to learn more about what is expected of students in music and visual arts class.

These results invite some hard questions, questions that can help raise the bar for arts education in K-12 education:

If most schools have full-time arts specialists, many backed by a curriculum, then why are we seeing lackluster levels of student achievement in some fundamental areas of music and visual arts learning? Are we providing these arts specialists with enough training and support to reach all children?

Most schools reportedly have appropriate guides to implement music and visual arts instruction. But are these guides being fully used?

Questions such as these can start a dialogue to improve arts instruction nationwide, and establish it as part of the core curriculum for K-12 schools. Under the leadership of NEA Arts Education Director Sarah Cunningham, our agency has begun a review of best practices in the field of K-12 arts education assessment, and we hope to have results to share next year.

One other potentially distressing finding from the NAEP study is that the percentage of 8th-grade students who reported visiting an art museum or gallery at least once with their class has decreased significantly—from 22 percent in 1997 to 16 percent in 2008. We need more information to help us understand the contributing factors and hopefully begin to address this negative trend.

As it happens, today, the NEA is releasing a study on the nation's largest and most representative periodic study of adult participation in arts events and activities. The survey shows that audiences for the arts are changing. While many now participate in arts activities available through electronic media, the percentage of American adults who participate in live performing and visual arts events is declining. The findings underscore the need for more arts education to foster the next generation of arts enthusiasts. NEA Research Director Sunil Iyengar and his team will release further analysis on arts learning, both for parents who took the survey and for their children.

NEA researchers will continue to review the Nation's Report Card data and, where possible, provide secondary analysis to the public.

In this way, we hope to contribute to the ongoing, necessary conversation about evidence-based practices to guide arts instruction and its availability for all Americans we serve. Numerous studies show the benefits of arts education. Arts education promotes critical thinking and problem-solving, and is key to a successful 21st century workforce. A student with access to arts learning becomes an adult who participates in the arts. These adults are more likely to engage in positive civic activities, like volunteering. Equally significant are the intangible benefits of arts education for a child's heart, mind, and soul.

In arts instruction, as with all school subjects, we anticipate that excellence will offer youth self-discovery and creative expression. For these early teenage students, about to enter the more rigorous requirements of high school and beyond, the price of the continued investment is most worthwhile.

We look forward to more substantive discussion about this important issue.

Thank you.