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Preparing Educators and School Leaders for Effective Arts Integration

The discretion provided to states under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers new possibilities for policymakers to determine how best to allocate resources and support policies to provide students with a well-rounded education. As states begin to examine new strategies for improving student outcomes and developing the next generation of innovative, socially conscious citizens, policymakers frequently ask how to effectively accomplish this.

Arts integration is a holistic approach to educating students that involves incorporating arts competencies into other core school curricula.



Increasing access to arts in education by integrating it with other courses — such as math, science and language arts — is one strategy to consider. Integrating arts education — which includes dance, music, theater, media arts and visual arts — has proven beneficial in improving student learning and developing thinking skills and capacities, as well as supporting the civic skills necessary to contribute as a member of a diverse community.¹ Expanding access to arts instruction in schools presents opportunities to enrich the learning environment and provide students with valuable life skills.

THE POTENTIAL OF ARTS INTEGRATION

In 2017, the Arts Education Partnership and Education Commission of the States highlighted the importance of arts in education by addressing [deeper learning skills](#).² This report, as well as an overview of [opportunities for arts in education](#) under ESSA and AEP's [2020 Action Agenda: The Arts Leading the Way to Student Success](#), create a framework for expanding state arts education programs.³ In that context, AEP strives to connect robust research to promising practices to better support the arts in education. As part of this effort to support effective educators and school leaders, AEP partner organizations continue to work to ensure that all levels of the educator workforce have the necessary tools to include the arts as a key instructional resource across all disciplines, and achieve the goal of strengthening the role and contribution of the arts in the preparation and support of educators and school leaders.

Research shows that bringing the arts into the instruction of other classroom subjects benefits students' academic, cognitive and personal outcomes. Arts integration, at its core, "refers to the effort to build a set of relationships between learning in the arts and learning the other skills and subjects of the curriculum."⁴ The challenge is how to best integrate arts learning in ways that support effective teaching and supplement and support other core areas of study.

Arts Integration and Student Outcomes

Studies show that arts integration has a positive effect on student academic achievement and on personal outcomes and engagement. From closing the achievement gap for elementary math students to increasing reading scores across multiple age levels to improving language acquisition among English language learners, a wide variety of opportunities and untapped potential exist among strategies for arts integration.⁵

In one example, research from the Kennedy Center’s Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA) program, conducted over a 10-year period, evaluated the effectiveness of their professional development partnership designed to support teachers’ employment of arts-integration practices in their classrooms. The evaluations found positive impact of arts integration on students’ cognitive skills, engagement and attitudes about learning — especially for low-performing students, diverse learners and students with special needs. CETA involvement also appears to be linked to improved grades and standardized test scores.⁶



Read more in this [Success Story](#), featuring Digital DELTA.

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This is just one of many examples that illustrate the positive benefits of arts integration across non-arts curricula. In 2017, the American Institutes for Research completed a comprehensive review of evidence-based strategies for arts integration that could qualify for funding under specific titles of ESSA.⁷ According to this report, 44 studies of arts-integration interventions meet the definition of one of the four tiers of evidence under the ESSA Tiers of Evidence provisions. Ten interventions were found to be supported by evidence at Tier I, II or III, meaning they “demonstrate a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.” ESSA requires that school improvement interventions funded under Title I, Section 1003 include at least one intervention that meets the criteria of Tier I, II or III. Thirty-four interventions were found to be supported by Tier IV evidence, demonstrating that they are “likely to improve student outcomes.”

Arts Integration and Educator Professional Development

The positive effects of expanding arts education are not limited to students. As research demonstrates, educators who integrate the arts into their lesson plans can better reach all students by creating dynamic and engaging lessons that help students understand other core content and bolster student thinking skills of the discipline they teach.⁹ Arts integration also has demonstrated outcomes for both the professional and personal aspects of the teaching profession.

Teachers who incorporate the arts into their lesson plans or receive professional development in this area demonstrated improved instructional skills and competencies around several aspects of the profession.

For instance, research demonstrates that arts integration supports teachers' perceptions of their abilities to meet the educational needs of diverse learners and reach students who are disengaged. As one study from researchers at Lesley University documents, teachers who implement arts integration report that the strategy stimulates deep learning, creates increased student engagement and cultivates students' investment in learning.¹⁰ In a study of six Chicago schools, researchers found links between teacher professional development outcomes, student arts integration and student academic learning outcomes.¹¹ Additionally, a study of A+ schools in **North Carolina** found a general improvement in professional culture and instructional practice within the 25 participating schools.¹² Other research reveals similar findings supporting the notion that arts integration can improve professional awareness when working with diverse student populations.¹³

In addition to improving educators' ability to connect with students, arts integration also provides teachers with the skills, confidence and opportunity to approach their practice in innovative ways. Teachers report that this confidence extends to ongoing innovation throughout their lesson planning.

A study of **North Carolina** A+ schools reveals the substantial role arts integration plays in guiding schools to build new connections between teachers, across schools, and between schools and their communities.¹⁴ The study illustrates how arts integration improved school leaders' abilities to enhance organizational capacity within schools and manage factors influencing students outside of schools. In a sample of 10 elementary, middle and high schools with strong arts programs and significant numbers of economically disadvantaged students, incorporating the arts into the curriculum substantially increased teacher engagement and satisfaction.¹⁵



Read more in this [Success Story](#), featuring Perpich Arts Integration Project.

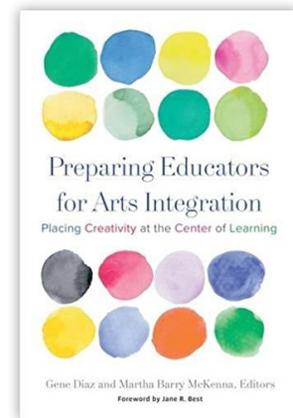
NATIONAL A+ SCHOOLS

For more than 20 years, the National A+ Schools program has worked to improve student outcomes through the arts.⁹ Having expanded from **North Carolina** to **Arkansas, Louisiana** and **Oklahoma**, A+ Schools is one of the most well-known programs for arts integration and provides support in curricula, experiential learning, enriched assessment and more.

Strategies for Equipping Educators With Tools for Arts Integration

One of the most important aspects of student success is teacher quality.¹⁶ As state policy leaders consider the role arts education can play in fostering K-12 academic achievement, preparing and equipping educators for an arts-integrated environment is critical.

The arts community has produced resources to help support high-quality policy development at the state level. A recently published compilation of resources focused on teacher development is entitled *Preparing Educators for Arts Integration: Placing Creativity at the Center of Learning*. This book, authored by members of the AEP Higher Education Working Group, provides an in-depth look at various strategies for arts integration, research on the effects of arts-integration policies and guidance for states looking to incorporate the arts into learning environments.



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The following strategies focus on policies that states can begin to work toward now: advisory panels, standards, credentialing and professional development.

Advisory Panels

One important step state policymakers can take toward sustainable arts integration is developing an in-depth understanding of their state's needs in this area. Creating sustainable policy often requires input from key stakeholders who can provide expertise, serve as a source of support for policy innovation and help build capacity during implementation.¹⁷

Creating an advisory panel or commission on arts integration is one way to leverage stakeholder input. Using advisory panels or commissions to get the right stakeholders at the table, with sufficient backing, can provide states with meaningful strategies that directly address local needs for arts integration.

The **Maryland** Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel provides an example of the long-term benefits that a high-quality task force can have on sustained arts integration.¹⁸ Created in 1997, FAEAP is a collaborative effort developed in response to widespread acknowledgement that “most classroom teachers lacked sufficient relevant personal experience and training in the arts.”¹⁹ FAEAP advises the state board of education and department of education on issues related to arts education, including instructional practice and professional development. The panel includes representatives from school districts, the **Maryland** Department of Education, postsecondary institutions and cultural organizations.

While **Maryland** is well-known for supporting arts integration through the Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance, as well as established arts education regulations and standards, FAEAP provides a pathway for ongoing input and dialogue between state policy leaders and the arts community that is crucial for long-term success.²⁰ Importantly, the advisory panel has a continuing formal role as **Maryland** improves policies for academic standards, professional development and standards development.²¹

Standards

Standards alignment plays a critical role in arts integration by supporting the coordination of arts and non-arts content and practices in pursuit of a common objective.²² This alignment requires deliberate and nuanced connections between subjects under a guiding goal or mission for all levels of student learning. Standards support teachers and school leaders alike by providing clarity and consistency in student learning expectations.

While all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, have incorporated arts education into instructional standards in some capacity, **Minnesota** stands out for connecting standards to teacher development.²³ Through the Perpich Center for Arts Education, schools or districts can apply to become part of the integration network and work with outreach specialists “to improve standards-based learning through collaborative arts integration.”²⁴ In addition to expanding learning opportunities for students, providing professional development tied to existing standards “brought about substantial change in teachers’ instructional practice and their role in improving schools.”²⁵

THE ROLE OF TEACHING ARTISTS

One way to support arts integration is to prioritize the expertise of teaching artists in schools. Distinct from arts teachers, teaching artists are two-career professionals who work both as artists and as educators.²⁶ Accordingly, “it is essential that the artist is also developing a knowledge base and skills to be an effective partner in education.”²⁷ In doing so, teaching artists can help enrich student learning and support professional development focused on arts integration for other teachers as well.

Credentialing

Preparing educators for arts integration begins before entering the classroom. Teacher preparation courses can provide educators with the tools and skills necessary to teach students through the integration of the arts. States can guide preparation programs by incorporating arts integration into educator credentialing, as many already do. **Kansas** and **North Carolina** provide examples of two strategies states can use.²⁸

Professionals trained in arts integration in some states can receive credentials through accredited university programs. In **Kansas**, arts integration was developed through a “patchwork of overlapping programs with shared vision.”²⁹ This vision is most clear in training programs developed for special needs and disability services professionals in the areas of music therapy, art therapy and special music education. To help meet education goals for special needs

learners in the state, arts professionals and state universities collaborate to develop degree programs in areas such as art therapy and music outreach therapy through arts integration. Additionally, preservice training using arts integration highlights the importance of cross-training professionals to have competencies in more than one job, and the value of shared discipline knowledge and skills for professionals.³⁰

States can also guide arts integration by creating licensing standards for educators. For example, **North Carolina's** teacher credentialing laws include arts integration.³¹ In 2012, the state passed legislation requiring preservice elementary teachers and educators pursuing alternative licensure to be prepared to integrate arts education across curricula.³² Additionally, the legislation requires the state board of education and the University of North Carolina's Board of Governors to work together to ensure preservice training programs equip educators with the skills required for arts integration.³³

Professional Development

A key aspect of creating a sustained practice of arts integration is the ability to provide professional development. Several states developed programs to support professional development in arts integration for teachers and school leaders.

In **Oklahoma**, A+ schools work to promote sustainable arts integration for teachers by providing professional development, networking and research.³⁴ Using a network of 70 artists and master teachers known as fellows, educators at A+ schools receive hands-on, individualized professional development to connect the arts to other disciplines.³⁵ Networking events for participants sustain integration efforts and support, which are refined using ongoing evaluations and surveys to monitor effectiveness.³⁶

Efforts to implement arts integration tend to be more successful when school leaders have an active role. Based on a report issued by the Washington State Arts Commission, **Washington** identified school leader professional development as a focus area.³⁷ In response, a small group of arts and education leaders developed the Principals Arts Leadership program to help school leaders understand the importance of their role in implementing and sustaining arts integration and provide them with the tools to create infrastructure for the arts.³⁸ The program guides school leaders in developing a vision for the arts and facilitates discussions with peer principals.³⁹

In addition to **Oklahoma** and **Washington**, eight states included professional development opportunities focused on arts integration in their state ESSA plans. They are: **Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada** and **Pennsylvania**. These states explicitly include language referencing either the arts or a well-rounded education in professional development sections of their plans.⁴⁰

Policy Considerations

Arts integration provides states with an opportunity to support students and educators alike. However, successful and sustainable arts integration requires aligned efforts from the state level to local districts. Some strategies that could benefit student achievement and educator effectiveness through the expansion of arts integration include:

- **Understand arts opportunities in state ESSA plans:** As ESSA's definition of a well-rounded education includes the arts and music, states may consider opportunities to use Title II grants to fund professional development in arts integration for educators. Funding provided under Title II, Part A helps to ensure that all students have access to teachers and school leaders who can support them in achieving the state's academic standards. Additionally, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is designed to ensure all students have enriched learning opportunities to help them succeed in their education. Through this competitive grant program, districts and community organizations receive federal funds to provide additional learning opportunities, including activities that support a well-rounded education.
- **Formalize stakeholder engagement and communications:** Arts integration requires nuanced discussions on a range of state needs, such as standards alignment and teacher preparation, among others. Expert commissions and advisory panels provide policymakers with access to expertise and key stakeholder input that can help navigate complex policy discussions and create buy-in for new initiatives. Executive, legislative or state department leadership could lead the creation of an advisory group to provide input to policymakers on how to incorporate the arts into education to further student success.
- **Align standards intentionally:** A regular review of academic standards with an arts-integration lens may reveal connections between other core subjects and the arts that would contribute to student achievement. Authentic alignment of standards allows states to offer teachers professional development opportunities that provide opportunities for growth within all subjects, including the arts.
- **Review credentialing requirements and options for endorsements:** States can help ensure instructors receive appropriate training for arts-integrated curricula by working with universities to align preservice training requirements and by incorporating requirements for arts integration into credentialing. This could include additional options for endorsements in arts integration, where appropriate.
- **Consider professional development on arts integration:** Policymakers could consider developing a professional development program that specifically builds competencies in arts integration for teachers and school leaders. This type of program might include opportunities to network with other practitioners and incorporate regular evaluation and performance tracking.
- **Explore arts integration as a school improvement strategy:** As models for arts integration that use a whole-school approach continue to expand and evolve, policymakers could consider including them as an option for school improvement strategies. The whole-school model of arts integration offers a systematic approach to school improvement with a focus on weaving the arts into the fabric of the school, including providing professional development for teachers and administrators, using strategies in arts integration to improve student achievement, and fostering a school climate that engages parents and students alike.

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