

**League of American Orchestras
Remarks by Heather Noonan, Vice President for Advocacy**

**U.S. Department of Education
Elementary and Secondary Education Act Arts Education Stakeholders Forum**

January 20, 2010

Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League of American Orchestras leads, encourages, and supports America's orchestras while communicating the vitality and value of orchestras and the music they perform. Our membership includes nearly 1,000 symphony, chamber, youth, and collegiate orchestras of all sizes. Orchestras across the country have signed onto a national statement of common cause, pledging to take action in their communities to improve the presence of music education in the schools. Orchestras stand ready to partner with civic leaders at all levels to advance a high quality arts education for all students. We are grateful for this opportunity to communicate with the U.S. Department of Education regarding the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

We endorse ongoing and increased support for the U.S. Department of Education's Arts in Education funding programs, and seek continued inclusion of the arts in the federal definition of core academic subjects of learning. As the Department points out in the excerpts from the ESEA circulated in advance of this meeting, the current inclusion of the arts in the definition of core academic subjects allows states and localities to potentially use federal funds in support of arts education. However, the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act have led to highly inequitable access to arts education in our nation's schools. Substantial policy improvements are needed to move the arts from merely being named as a core academic subject to being implemented as one.

Achieving equitable access to a complete arts education for all of our nation's students will depend upon supportive federal, state, and local policies that reach beyond direct federal funding decisions. In order to respond to the changing climate of global competitiveness, demographic shifts, and economic disparity, major changes to the delivery of education to our nation's children are inevitable. **As the ESEA is re-written, significant policy shifts will be made, including new approaches to the accountability provisions of Title I and teacher preparation and training guidelines in Title II. As a core academic subject of learning, the arts should be fully addressed in these and other policy areas.**

To gain a foothold in the policymaking process at any level requires sound information about the status and condition of arts education. **The next version of ESEA should require states to annually publicly report comprehensive information about the status and condition of all core academic subjects, including the arts.** Collecting and reporting the status and condition of arts education at the state level (such as the number and range of course offerings, student enrollment in each of the core subjects, pupil/teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, full time equivalent teacher employment) is critical to ensuring equitable access to a comprehensive education for all students.

Likewise, comprehensive data collection is needed at the federal level. The U.S. Department of Education's research efforts must be strengthened by systematically including the arts in studies conducted on the condition of education and practices that improve academic achievement. The last FRSS report on arts education featured data collected in the 1999-2000 school year. An updated report with the next round of data collection is long overdue, and is now in the field. This data collection should be repeated with regularity and be comprehensive. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts (NAEP) - the national arts "report card" - provides critical information about the arts skills and knowledge of our nation's students. When last administered in 2008, the NAEP was only implemented for music and the visual arts, and did not include performance measures. To provide a complete picture of arts learning in the U.S., future National Assessments of Educational Progress in the Arts should be more comprehensive in scope and depth and be conducted more frequently. The FRSS and NAEP are essential to studying and improving access to the arts as a core academic subject. **Support for arts education research should be provided in the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.**

To make progress towards equitable access to the benefits of arts education, it is key to not just measure the amount of arts education accessed by students, but to also understand the quality of arts education being delivered. The Race to the Top definition of student achievement indicates support for "other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms." As the Administration further considers its approach to measuring student growth and alternative forms of assessment, we would like to point out that **the arts have demonstrated their capacity to develop rigorous measures of student learning through performance and portfolio-based assessments.**

Education Secretary Arne Duncan's letter to school leaders of August 2009 is an important statement in support of arts education, and may influence states and localities to make short-term progress towards equitable access to a comprehensive arts education for all students. Upcoming education policy reform provides the opportunity for the federal government to demonstrate substantial and long-term leadership in support of arts learning. America's orchestras are committed to doing their part to improve education in our nation's schools and communities. As the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act moves ahead, we look forward to future dialogues about opportunities to improve federal support for arts education.