

February 2, 2015

Engaging · Sustaining · Transforming

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
[FixingNCLB@help.senate.gov](mailto:FixingNCLB@help.senate.gov)

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions,

America's orchestras are committed to supporting for better education for students in all of our nation's schools. On behalf of its approximately 800 member orchestras throughout the country, the League of American Orchestras thanks you for this opportunity to comment on Sen. Alexander's draft proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As Congress re-writes our nation's education law, it is vitally important that federal law enables all students to reap the benefits of a full, comprehensive arts education.

We urge you and your colleagues to prioritize the following:

- 1) Retain the current definition of core academic subjects that includes the arts;
- 2) Require states to report annually and publicly on student access to arts education;
- 3) Strengthen support for arts education in provisions relating to early childhood education, afterschool/out-of-school learning, teaching effectiveness, school turnaround, charter schools, and student assessment; and
- 4) Maintain the U.S. Department of Education's direct, nationally funded competitive Arts in Education grant program, which has been proven to leverage the power of the arts to support comprehensive school reform and improve teaching.

The 2009-10 U.S. Department of Education's Fast Response Statistical Survey on the status of arts education found that schools with a higher concentration of students in poverty were less likely to offer arts education.<sup>1</sup> The results of the study were alarming enough to prompt U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to declare the status of arts education "an equity issue and a civil rights issue," and to conclude that "a well-rounded education is simply too vital to our students' success to let the teaching of the arts and humanities erode." The arts are an essential component of a complete education, and every student's success depends upon the kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Parsad, Basmat & Spiegelman, Maura. (2012). *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10*. (p.14 & 28)

benefits a rich arts education provides. The extreme disparities in student access to arts education must be addressed.

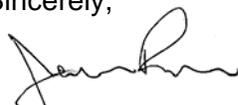
Where schools and communities are delivering high-quality learning opportunities in, through, and about the arts for children, extraordinary results occur. A study by the Arts Education Partnership, *Third Space: When Learning Matters*, finds that schools with large populations of students in economic poverty – too often places of frustration and failure for both students and teachers – can be transformed into vibrant hubs of learning when the arts are infused into their culture and curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, studies have found that high school students from under-resourced environments who are highly involved in the arts have better grades, are less likely to drop out, and are more likely to go on to college.<sup>3</sup>

As this country works to strengthen our foothold in the 21st Century global economy, the arts equip students with a creative, competitive edge. The arts provide the skills and knowledge students need to develop the creativity and determination necessary for success. Indeed, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills argues that “the arts are among society’s most compelling and effective paths for developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in our students.”<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive arts education – fully implemented as a core subject of learning – fosters the creativity and innovation needed for a more competitive workforce.

As you take action on the “Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015,” we strongly urge you to reconsider the provisions in the discussion draft that remove the current list of core academic subjects, terminate the current federal afterschool funding program, fail to require state transparency on the status and conditions of arts education, and eliminate the federal Arts in Education grant program. Such actions will fail to address the education needs of “every child” and deprive students of the full capacity of the arts to prepare them for “college or career.”

Thank you for considering public feedback to the Senate discussion draft, and I look forward to future opportunities to engage in this process.

Sincerely,



Jesse Rosen  
President and CEO

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<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, L. M. & Deasy, R. J. (2005). *Third Space: When Learning Matters*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership. (pp. 10-11).

<sup>3</sup> Catterall, J.S., Dumais, S.A., & Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012). *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>4</sup> Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. (2010). *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Map in the Arts*. (p. 2)