



*Several states are using ESSA to increase access and quality in arts instruction.*

---

**Lynn Tuttle**

## Using ESSA to Leverage Arts Education Policy

In its four years of life, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has blazed new pathways for policy and funding in K-12 arts education. Many states acted early to take advantage of these federal opportunities to expand students' access to the arts.

Through its definitional language, suggested actions, and funding mechanisms, ESSA provides states five levers:

**1. The definition of a well-rounded education.** ESSA replaces the idea of “core academic subjects” found in No Child Left Behind with a more broadly defined “well-rounded education.” The arts and music are included in the definition in Section 8002, with music being listed for the very first time in federal education law (box 1). As the language makes clear, states may add to the definition as they see fit to meet their curricular needs and the needs of the students they serve. Its predecessor term “core academic subjects” was referenced only in relation to the

Highly Qualified Teacher provision. By contrast, a well-rounded education is referenced 14 times throughout Titles I, II, and IV of the law.

**2. Title IV-A.** Also known as the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant, Title IV, Part A of ESSA provides new block funding to local education agencies (LEAs) to support three broad areas of education: educational technology, safe and healthy students/schools, and a well-rounded education. As Title IV underscores, the U.S. Congress sees access to a well-rounded education as a civil right. Section 4104 states that the funds are meant to help states (and LEAs) “offer well-rounded educational experiences to all students, as described in section 4107, including female students, minority students, English learners, children with disabilities, and low-income students who are often underrepresented in critical and enriching subjects, which may include—(i) increasing student access

to and improving student engagement and achievement in ... (II) activities and programs in music and the arts.”

At least 20 percent of the funds an LEA gets under Title IV-A must be spent on a well-rounded education. As the arts and music are part of the definition of a well-rounded education, these federal dollars can support arts and music-related funding requests so long as those requests a) increase access and opportunity for students to participate in the arts and music as identified through a local needs assessment and b) do not supplant local and state funds already received by the school district for such activities. To date, Congress has authorized annual funding levels of over \$1 billion for Title IV, Part A.

**3. Title I.** ESSA changed language in Title I to reflect the importance of a well-rounded education. Title I schools come in two varieties: schoolwide Title I schools and targeted assistance Title I schools. Under ESSA, schoolwide Title I schools are for the first time encouraged to include information in their schoolwide plans on how they provide well-rounded educational opportunities, including music and arts education, to their students. While this does not necessarily mean Title I funds will support those opportunities, it marks the first time that schools have been encouraged to include a wider range of curricular offerings beyond the tested subject areas within their schoolwide plans.

Also for the first time, targeted assistance Title I schools may use their supplemental federal Title I dollars to support well-rounded educational opportunities, including music and the arts, for students identified as the most

academically at-risk students in their school based on academic achievement indicators, usually the tested subject areas. Traditionally, Title I funds in targeted assistance schools have funded supplemental interventions in the tested subject areas. Under ESSA, opportunities for a well-rounded education may also be funded for these students.

**4. Accountability.** During ESSA’s first two years, each state created an ESSA plan, including a revised accountability system to meet the law’s new requirements. Increased flexibility for states in defining their accountability systems was a defining tenet of ESSA. In fact, states were required to select at least one new measure for their accountability systems that met their needs. Music and arts education advocates and supporters worked with states across the nation to make the case for including an arts-related measure in the revised accountability systems. Several took up the challenge, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, Michigan, and Louisiana. These states have been developing measures of student access to arts and music instruction. Georgia went further and included measures of student achievement in the arts as part of its revised accountability system. Additional states included music and arts education in unique ways throughout their ESSA plans, from how migrant students (Title I, Part C) should have access to the arts to how the arts can play an active role in 21st Century Community Learning Center after-school programs (Title IV, Part B).<sup>1</sup>

**5. Protection from “pullouts.”** Congress maintained Title I language that discourages schools from pulling students out of the

---

**The clearest evidence of state and local innovation is revealed in activity around Title IV-A and state accountability systems.**

### **Box 1. ESSA’s Definition of Well-Rounded Education**

“(52) WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION.—The term ‘well-rounded education’ means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, *technology, engineering*, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **arts**, history, geography, *computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education*, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience.”

**Rural, suburban, and urban school districts alike reported using Title IV-A funds to support music and arts.**

regular classroom to receive the supplemental interventions that Title I funds. This language has been in place since No Child Left Behind. However, with music and the arts now part of the “well-rounded education” definition, it is easier for arts educators to make the case that students should not be pulled from their arts “specials” because the arts are part of what should be the “regular classroom” experience for all students.

**How Did States and Districts Respond?**

ESSA clearly affected arts education across the nation. How far have these impacts extended to date? The clearest evidence of state and local innovation is revealed in activity around Title IV-A and state accountability systems.

This past spring, the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation (NAMM Foundation) partnered with my organization, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), to survey music educators, their advocates, and their music merchant partners (stores, dealers) about Title IV-A funds. Were schools using these funds to support music and arts programs? If so, what did the funds support? And what were the outcomes for schools, teachers, and students?

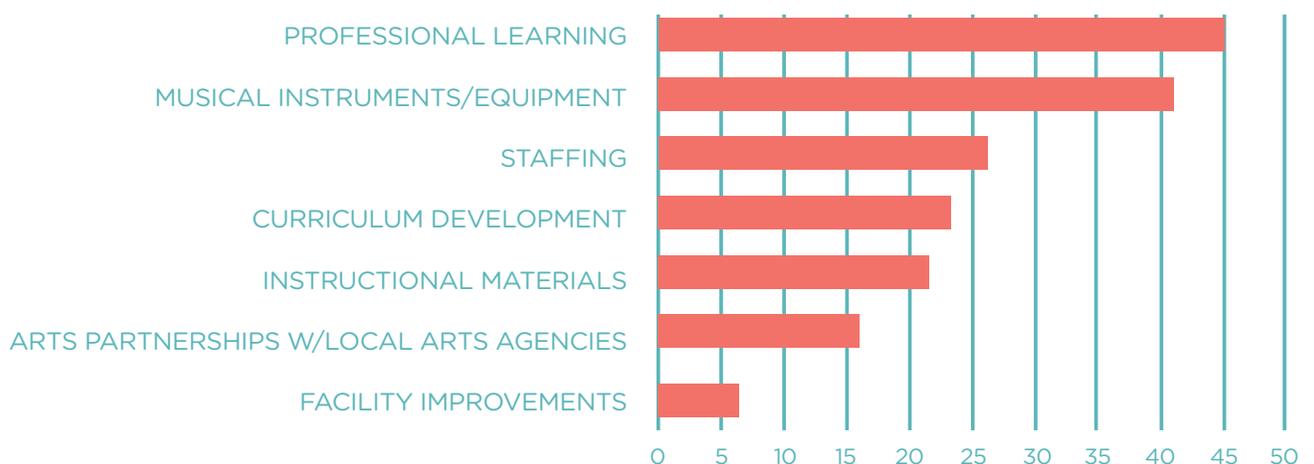
Working informally through the two organizations’ advocacy networks, we collected stories from participants in 26 states over a period of nearly six weeks. Here are some highlights:

- More than \$30 million of the \$1.17 billion in Title IV-A funding from the 2018–19 school year supported music and arts programs.
- Rural, suburban, and urban school districts alike reported using Title IV-A funds to support music and arts education.
- The top seven uses of Title IV-A funding are for professional development, purchase of musical instruments and equipment, staffing augmentation, curriculum development, purchase of instructional materials, arts partnerships with local arts agencies (e.g., teaching artists, field trips), and facility improvements (e.g., acoustic treatment, sound system, theatrical lighting). Most respondents reported using the funds for multiple purposes (figure 1).

District-level respondents to our nonscientific survey provided additional insights on the impact of Title IV-A funds. One said, “Students are able to participate in types of art-making they might not have had access to previously. Students have access to a wider variety of curricular materials than in previous years, including pieces of music and theatre resources that are priced out of the range of many individual school budgets.” Another: “Students that would have been denied access to our programs were given the opportunity to participate.”

At the state level, there are two areas where ESSA has had the most impact to date: funding activities using state set-asides and state

**Figure 1. Uses for Title IV-A (percent of respondents reporting)**



Source: National Association of Music Merchants Foundation and the National Association for Music Education

accountability and reporting systems. **California** and **Georgia**, for example, used their set-asides—that is, state percentages of the federal allocations under Title IV-A—to promote and support music and arts education as part of a well-rounded education.

In California, the legislature encouraged this usage, led by Senator Ben Allen during the spring of 2018. The legislature established priorities for the use of Title IV-A state-level set-asides of \$44 million, including the use of the LEA funds to expand visual and performing arts education. LEAs could apply through a competitive process to receive additional Title IV-A funds from the state. Of the \$44 million set-aside, \$30 million went to visual and performing arts projects across the state. The California Alliance for Arts Education has established a working group of participating school districts in order to help them learn from each other as well as document the outcomes of the funded programs.

Georgia's Department of Education decided to dedicate a portion of its state-level set-aside funds to create a competitive Title IV-A stART Grant. According to the department, "The purpose of the stART grants is to assist rural schools and districts in creating and developing arts initiatives that support quality arts education programs that significantly improve student access to the arts." Designated LEAs can apply, and the program continues in the 2019–20 school year.<sup>2</sup>

On the accountability and reporting front, the **Illinois State Board of Education** has continued to work with stakeholders to determine the weighting of an arts indicator to be included in preK-8 schools and high schools. For now, the indicator will be reported but not part of the rating system for schools until at least 2022 (see also the article on page 21). The state board will report on how many students participate in the arts via the state's longitudinal data system. The board received more comments on including the arts as part of its accountability system than for any other topic area.<sup>3</sup>

The **Michigan** School Index includes access to the arts as one of its indicators of school quality. The index weighted access to the arts and physical education at 4 percent in the school quality rankings for K-8 schools during its first year. School quality overall represents 14 percent

of a school's rating. Ratings are now available per school on the Michigan Department of Education website and include staffing ratios to help determine a school's ranking for access to arts and physical education.

## Implications for State Boards

New federal dollars are increasing access to music and arts education in states throughout the country, often with an emphasis on underserved populations, such as rural counties in Georgia. States are looking at ways to leverage ESSA to support arts education, from highlighting places in the law where the arts can play a positive role in a student's academic outcomes to making transparent how and when students can access the arts during the school day.

There are two broad implications for the work of state boards in ensuring transparency and equitable access to an arts education.

The work of Michigan and Illinois are two examples of states making more transparent where and how students have access to arts education and where they do not. There are others. Many states are building arts education dashboards.<sup>4</sup> **New Jersey**, which has been collecting arts access data for more than a decade, just announced that its efforts to increase transparency on arts access has paid off: In September, the governor announced that 100 percent of the state's public schools now offer students access to arts education.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to advocating for greater data transparency, a state board can consider other ways to increase equitable access to the arts. Does your state require an arts credit for graduation from high school? Doing so will increase access to the arts in all high schools in the state. Does your state recognize honors for arts classes as it does other academic classes? **New Jersey** enacted a law in 2016 to make certain that all honors classes, including the arts, are treated equally for grade weighting. Does your state offer an arts seal for high school graduates? **Arizona** just passed a law creating a State Seal for Arts Proficiency, and the state board will work with stakeholders to determine what requirements students will need to complete to obtain the seal, including focused study in at least one arts form (see also article, page 26).

If your state board has excellent examples of policies, practices, or funding streams to support

---

**States are looking at making transparent how and when students can access the arts during the school day.**

Lynn Tuttle is director of public policy, research, and professional development at NAFME.

*cont'd from page 9...Using ESSA to Leverage Arts*  
the arts, please share those with the arts education community. Sharing your stories and ideas will help create a vibrant educational environment that includes the arts for all students, not just those with privileged access. ■

<sup>1</sup>Lynn Tuttle, "How Does Arts Education Fare in the Final Round of State ESSA Plan Submissions?" *EdNote* blog (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, January 18, 2018).

<sup>2</sup>Georgia Department of Education, "Title IV, Part A stART Grant," web page, <https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/Grants.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup>Arts Indicator Work Group, "Arts Indicator Recommendation," presentation to the Illinois State Board of Education on January 16, 2019, [https://www.isbe.net/Documents\\_Board\\_Meetings/Illinois-Arts-Indicator-Work-Group-Presentation.pdf](https://www.isbe.net/Documents_Board_Meetings/Illinois-Arts-Indicator-Work-Group-Presentation.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>Valerie Norville, "Focusing on Gaps in Access to Arts Education," *Policy Update* 23, no. 1 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, July 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Brent Johnson, "N.J. Just Reached This Education Milestone, Murphy Says," *NJ.com* (September 9, 2019).

---

### *cont'd from page 25...The ESSA Arts Indicator*

State boards of education face numerous policy challenges, but arts educators are ready allies and able ones. They bring innovative insight to policymaking and foster collaboration and grassroots participation. Together, arts educators and state board members can succeed in the art of policymaking. ■

<sup>1</sup>Arts Education Partnership, "ESSA: Mapping Opportunities for the Arts" (Denver: Education Commission of the States, February 2019), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Illinois Arts Learning Standards, "Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative: Recommendations for Updated Arts Learning Standards and Their Implementation," Report to the Illinois State Board of Education, February 2016, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>James Lichtenberg et al., "Ready to Innovate" (New York: The Conference Board, 2008), 13–14.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel H. Bowen and Brian Kisida, "Investigating Causal Effects of Arts Education Experiences: Experimental Evidence from Houston's Arts Access Initiative" (Houston: Houston Education Research Consortium, Rice University, 2019), 2.

<sup>5</sup>James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, "The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies" (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2012), pp. 18–21 and 24.

<sup>6</sup>Illinois Arts Indicator Work Group, "Illinois Arts Indicator Recommendation Report," December 18, 2019, p. 3, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UE4zLjVv6u6bfjOqvRjtjdrQrR6E9Rhw/view>.

<sup>7</sup>Erick Deshaun Dorris, personal communication, September 30, 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Arts Indicator Work Group, "Recommendation Report," 5.

<sup>9</sup>Valerie Norville, "Focusing on Gaps in Access to Arts Education," *State Innovations* 23, no. 1 (Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, July 2018), 1.

<sup>10</sup>Arts Indicator Work Group, "Recommendation Report," 10 and 20.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>12</sup>State Matters, "ESSA Fine Arts Indicator: Say What?" Vimeo video, 2:55, posted by Arts Alliance Illinois, January 29, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/314079047>.

<sup>13</sup>Karla Rivera, personal communication, October 7, 2019.

<sup>14</sup>Jessica Kwasny, personal communication, October 2, 2019.

---

### *cont'd from page 29...Advancing Arts Educator*

administrators, reform activists, and foundation supporters.<sup>9</sup> As of fall 2019, work on the next steps continues—recruiting participants, securing additional funding, and further developing the policy agenda.

At the same time, ADE, ACA, and AzCA continue to build relationships with state board members and other state policymakers to leverage existing resources, even as they seek expanded support for arts education. Work also proceeds on developing valid student achievement assessments, mining the arts census data, engaging teachers and schools in federal and state grant programs. ■

<sup>1</sup>Edward B. Fiske, "Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts on Learning" (Washington, DC: President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Arts Education Partnership, 1999); "Progress and Promise: 10 years of Arts Education Model Development and Dissemination Program," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2011); James S. Catterall et al., "The Arts and Achievement in At Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies" (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>"State Pilot Policy Program Summary and Findings," (Washington, DC: Americans for the Arts, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Morrison, "Arizona Arts Education Census: A Comprehensive Survey of Arts Education in the Arizona Schools" (Shaker Heights, OH: Cypress Research Group and Quadrant Arts Education Research, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Morrison, "Arts Education in the Arizona Public Schools for the 2012/2013 School Year," prepared for the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Arizona Department of Education by Quadrant Research, 2014.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Morrison, "Arts Education Data Project Arizona: Executive Summary," prepared as part of the Arts Education Data Project administered by State Agency Directors of Arts Education, Arizona Department of Education, Arizona Commission on the Arts, and Arizona Citizens for the Arts, 2018.

<sup>6</sup>Arizona Arts Standards, web page, (Phoenix: Arizona Department of Education, 2015), <https://www.azed.gov/standards-practices/k-12standards/arts-standards/>.

<sup>7</sup>Arizona Administrative Code R7-2-301, Minimum Course of Study and Competency Goals for Students in the Common Schools.

<sup>8</sup>"Strengthening Schools through Arts Partnerships, Evaluation Summary, 2016 & 2017," (Phoenix: Arizona Commission on the Arts, 2018).

<sup>9</sup>"Arts Education Advocacy Initiative" (Phoenix: Arizona Citizens for the Arts, 2019).