



## Advancing Arts Education in Arizona

*The state leverages partnerships, ESSA funding, and a diploma seal to bolster equitable access to arts learning.*

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**Catherine “Rusty” Foley**

In the arts education community, it is not hyperbole or conjecture to say that the availability and accessibility of quality arts education for all young people is a challenge marked by numerous contradictions in policy and practice.

While many states, like Arizona, have specific requirements for K-12 arts education either in statute or administrative code, data show serious gaps in policy implementation by schools and school districts. Complicating the situation is the lack of enforcement authority by either the Arizona Department of Education or the gubernatorially appointed Arizona State Board of Education. Not surprisingly, the more serious gaps in arts education access often occur in schools and with students who also are deprived of other education resources.

Most education advocates readily agree that the arts are an important part of a young person’s education. Yet despite nearly 20 years of rigorous, expansive research, there is a puzzling lack of

understanding in the general education community, including policymakers, of the actual contributions the arts make to overall student learning, student self-efficacy and engagement, school environment, and the overall cohesiveness of a school community.<sup>1</sup> Some persist in referring to arts as a “special” rather than core subject and often treat arts learning as nice to have if circumstances allow. In the face of budget challenges, the demands of standardized testing regimens, and the priority placed on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education, the arts lose out.

Arizona is addressing challenges to equal access and equity in arts education for all K-12 students through initiatives by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the Arizona Commission on the Arts (ACA) and through their expanded grassroots advocacy in partnership with Arizona Citizens for the Arts (AzCA). In addition to increasing equity and access to arts education, these

initiatives intend to demonstrate to the Arizona State Board of Education, local school districts, and other policymakers that arts education provides real benefits to all students and that there are ways to make arts education available to all students even in the face of resource scarcity.

Beginning with participation in the Americans for the Arts' State Policy Pilot Program in 2014, these agencies have worked to build a common understanding about the value of arts education for every young person, to develop ways to persuade local schools to provide more quality arts education opportunities, and to use data and local success stories to motivate the state board to better use state policy to validate arts education as a necessary component of a well-rounded education.<sup>2</sup>

## Data Drove Action

The 2010 Arizona Arts Census Data Report sharply illustrated the shortcomings in access and equity in arts education. It revealed that, while 90 percent of Arizona students had access to at least one arts course a week, only 50 percent of K-8 schools offered visual art and music, as required in Arizona Administrative Code. Furthermore:

- 134,203 students (13 percent) lacked instruction by qualified arts educators.
- Only 56 percent of schools had adopted the state arts curriculum standards.
- Half of schools reported having no budget allocation for arts curriculum materials and supplies, and more than 79 percent of schools were spending less than a dollar per student for arts instruction.
- Thirty-nine percent of rural schools lacked qualified arts instructors, compared with 15 percent for suburban schools.
- Lack of course offerings and instructional resources was more severe in small schools.<sup>3</sup>

The 2014 arts census showed some improvement in access and required instruction, but inequities in small and rural schools persisted.<sup>4</sup>

The 2018 Arizona Arts Education Data project, a third iteration of the research, showed even more distressing trends:

- Seventeen percent of Arizona's 1.1 million students receive no arts education in their

schools; nearly a third of schools still offer no arts education.

- The number of students reported to be lacking arts education grew 20 percent between 2015 and 2016.
- The proportion of students lacking arts education was greatest in schools where 75 percent or more students were on free or reduced lunch.<sup>5</sup>

Of note, comprehensive data collection for these efforts was challenged because some school districts failed to fully report enrollment and other student data to ADE for subjects beyond English language arts and mathematics. More effort by the ADE and the state board to compel districts to report all data related to required curricula would provide fuller, more accurate, and more useful information for arts education and other core subjects.

Still, each successive iteration of the census provided more insight into access and equity issues and has formed the basis for agency action and advocacy.

## The Art of the Possible

With the passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, Arizona was required to file a state accountability plan with the U.S. Department of Education. State law also required updating the metrics and models for determining its K-8 and 9-12 school report cards.

Working with a broad cohort of arts educators, ADE concurrently updated the Arizona arts standards, which defined K-8 and 9-12 learning objectives in five major arts disciplines (music, theatre, visual arts, dance, and media arts) and reflected the model National Core Arts Standards and ESSA-defined learning objectives. The 9-12 standards also allowed high school students to sequentially pursue study through an "advanced" level. The state board approved the revised standards in September 2015.<sup>6</sup>

Armed with the updated standards and Arizona Administrative Code requirements,<sup>7</sup> advocates saw the accountability model updates as an opportunity to have credit for arts learning included as a metric of school success and quality. However, after a long public process, the state board excluded arts in the K-8 model

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because (as in many states) Arizona lacks an approved menu of standardized student assessments for the arts and therefore lacks a uniform student-level metric assigned to K-8 arts achievement.

Advocates persuaded the state board to include credit given for completion of Honors or AP art classes in the 9-12 model, but it declined to otherwise include credit for sequential, advanced arts study on par with similar study in English language arts and mathematics. This experience motivated ADE to devote more effort to developing the student learning objectives to measure mastery of the arts education standards, partly aided by participation in a three-state project funded by the State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education.

As those efforts continue, advocates believe Arizona is poised to leverage a soon-to-be-published update of the Arts Education Data Project as an appropriate tool to measure student access to arts education and enrollment as a qualifier for the A-F letter grade system, which would motivate schools to fully report student course data in the arts because they could be more highly rated for offering standards-based arts education. Until a full assessment process is developed, advocates believe, this effort is the most certain way to encourage arts education in schools where it is lacking.

With few other ways to compel policy compliance, ADE and ACA also have expanded their own efforts to provide federal, state, and local resources to support curricula, arts-based partnerships, program evaluation, and training and development for educators. Three key examples illustrate how these efforts are encouraging arts education offerings, as well as developing a larger portfolio of Arizona-based research about the impact of arts education.

**Strengthening Schools through Arts Partnerships.** In response to findings in the 2010 and 2014 arts censuses, the ACA and ADE in 2014 collaborated to develop the Strengthening Schools through Arts Partnerships program. In particular, they addressed a finding that 34 percent of Arizona's lowest performing schools (i.e., labeled "D" or "F" in the accountability system) offered no arts courses in any discipline, a rate far exceeding the statewide average of 20 percent.

The program provided funding and support for school-community partnerships aimed at strengthening teaching and learning in arts education, arts integration, or both, in these schools and encouraged relationship building between schools, communities, and local artists. The initiative was based on evidence that strong arts education programs, either integrated into classroom instruction or complementing the classroom curricula, improve student academic performance, deepen content, and engage more students in the learning process.

The work of an inaugural cohort of four partnerships confirmed the beneficial effects of integrating arts programs with school improvement plans or capacity building efforts, regardless of school type, grade level, or arts discipline: Participating schools saw increased academic achievement, self-efficacy, and student engagement. As a result, the ACA increased the funding for the program and expanded access to all Arizona Title I schools.

The second cohort focused on changing teaching practices to enhance the classroom experience for teachers and students. Student engagement increased, and thus teachers were affected as well. For example, they discovered that incorporating physical movement into their teaching helped students remember words and concepts, especially among English learners. Round two programs also were designed to respond directly to school improvement plans. With two years of funding to learn and experiment, these programs produced impressive results in academic achievement, student self-efficacy, and student engagement.<sup>8</sup>

To date, 13 Arizona schools have been awarded grants under the program. Outcomes continue to be evaluated, but they provide compelling Arizona-based evidence of the impact of arts education on student populations especially in need of interventions to support better learning.

**Title I-A and Title IV-A.** For years, ADE has had a dedicated arts education specialist to oversee state-level arts standards, professional development, and access to arts education and intentionally placed this individual within the federal programs unit so that arts and arts integration could be central to school improvement strategies. With the adoption of ESSA and the redefining of federal title programs, the Office

of Arts Education shifted from Title I-A to the new Title IV-A program (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants), which provides specific funding to Title I-eligible districts in the following arts-rich areas: well-rounded education, safe and healthy students, and effective use of technology. With the transition, ADE added an arts education director position in addition to the arts education specialist.

Anecdotally, the changes increased state arts education supports. More districts are choosing to use their Title IV-A grant funds to support, strengthen, or create arts education programming across all five artistic disciplines. Teachers are receiving more regular discipline-specific professional development, new resources and materials are being purchased, and the arts are being meaningfully engaged throughout state education initiatives and strategic planning.

**State Seal for Arts Proficiency.** An ADE educator advisory group first proposed the Arizona State Seal for Arts Proficiency to encourage high school students to pursue advanced arts study and then be recognized for their achievement at graduation. The idea was embraced by a legislative champion, who introduced a bill in the 2019 Arizona legislature. It passed overwhelmingly, and Governor Doug Ducey signed it into law.

The law directed ADE and the state board to create the recognition program in consultation with arts education stakeholders from across the state. ADE convened the group that recommended guidelines for student qualifications and the annual district seal application during summer 2019. After a formal rulemaking process, the state board approved the guidelines in October as recommended, so the first students will be eligible to earn the Arizona Arts Education Proficiency Seal in the spring of 2020. (Local districts must apply and qualify for participation in the program. However, ADE will cover administrative costs by using a portion of its state-level Title IV-A funds.)

The seal will be applied to the diplomas of qualifying students and noted in their official transcripts as a celebration and acknowledgment of completing a rigorous, but flexible program of artistic study, volunteerism, and a creative capstone project.

The overarching purpose is to elevate the achievements of high school arts students and

illustrate how arts education contributes to college and career success. It places a special focus on connecting the arts to workforce development and readiness through an alignment between the arts and specific CTE Creative Industries courses. Arizona boasts a healthy \$9 billion creative industries sector, and the seal also is intended to encourage interested students to explore the entire field.

## Building a Sustainable Movement

Despite some recent successes in encouraging more access to arts education, Arizona needs a collaborative, sustainable arts education advocacy effort going forward, and this collaboration should extend beyond arts organizations and advocates to include parent organizations, school administrators, school district trustees, general education reform advocates, the state board, and other policymakers.

By its end in 2017, the Americans for the Arts' State Policy Pilot Program team had achieved some progress. However, it lacked the personnel and financial resources to maintain an ongoing, sustainable coalition that could make real progress in closing the gaps in access and equity.

AzCA launched a grant-funded process in July 2018 to plan the Arts Education Advocacy Collaborative, an inclusive, unified voice for expanding access to arts education and providing more classroom and teacher resources in Arizona schools. Key to the effort's success would be recruiting education stakeholders to define the collaborative's purpose in a way that would support a common policy agenda, recognized diverse needs, and provide advocacy tools necessary to advance an agenda.

Over six months, a 30-member steering committee, including ACA, ADE, and AzCA, engaged more than 350 stakeholders in more than 40 communities across Arizona to produce a roadmap for a formal, collective-impact style collaborative whose mission is to drive the systemic change in Arizona to ensure that all Arizona K-12 students have equitable access to a high-quality K-12 arts education.

The governance model also emphasizes the enlistment of the public and private decision makers who drive general education policy: the state board, ADE, ACA, school boards,

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**Catherine "Rusty" Foley**  
retired as executive  
director of Arizona Citizens  
for the Arts in 2019.

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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).

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### *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.

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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).