

*Advancing research and innovative policies can move states toward universal access to a quality arts education.*

**Mary Dell’Erba**

# Expanding Access to High-Quality Arts Instruction

Researchers and policymakers alike recognize the lasting benefits of participation in high-quality arts coursework and in integrating arts into other content areas. Federal policymakers signaled their support for arts education by passing the Every Student Succeeds Act, with its inclusion of the arts as part of a “well-rounded education.” Yet many states and districts still lack the data or resources to ensure that all students have equitable access to arts opportunities.

The Arts Education Partnership at the Education Commission of the States houses more than 280 summaries of research on the impact of arts education. Collectively, the findings point to improved outcomes for students, educators, and schools. For example, students who participate in the arts demonstrate enhanced writing and reading skills, postsecondary success, and improved test scores.<sup>1</sup> Integration of the arts into other subject areas, such as math or history, increases engagement and facilitates learning.<sup>2</sup> Arts education helps students recall and retain information and fosters problem solving, persistence, creativity, and critical thinking.<sup>3</sup>

The effects of learning in the arts are even more pronounced for historically underserved students. English language learners and students from low-income backgrounds who engage in the arts are more likely than their peers who did not have access to arts opportunities to complete high school, have a higher GPA, and attend and finish college.<sup>4</sup> Arts learning connects students to cultural and social values, with greater effects for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. When engaged in the arts, students are more likely to be civically engaged than peers who do not have exposure to the arts.<sup>5</sup>

## Discovering Gaps

States vary in their arts education data

collection and reporting, and state boards of education and state education agencies often do not have access to consistent, reliable data to inform policy.<sup>6</sup> While many states collect data on course availability and enrollment, teacher assignment to arts courses, and instructional hours devoted to the arts, most do not report those data publicly. As of October 2019, 13 states publish data on arts enrollments in arts courses. California and New Jersey were early leaders in developing online data systems that include information on arts education.<sup>7</sup>

The Statewide Data Infrastructure Project for Arts Education, a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and Education Commission of the States, bridged the gaps in arts education and state data systems through reports and technical assistance to help empower policymakers and communities with the necessary information to help ensure all students have access to arts education. Through the project, states like Nevada, Rhode Island and Louisiana received technical assistance to help them with issues like improving quality of their data, requesting data for analysis and helping establish a data collection and reporting agenda that aligns with goals for arts education (see article, page 13).

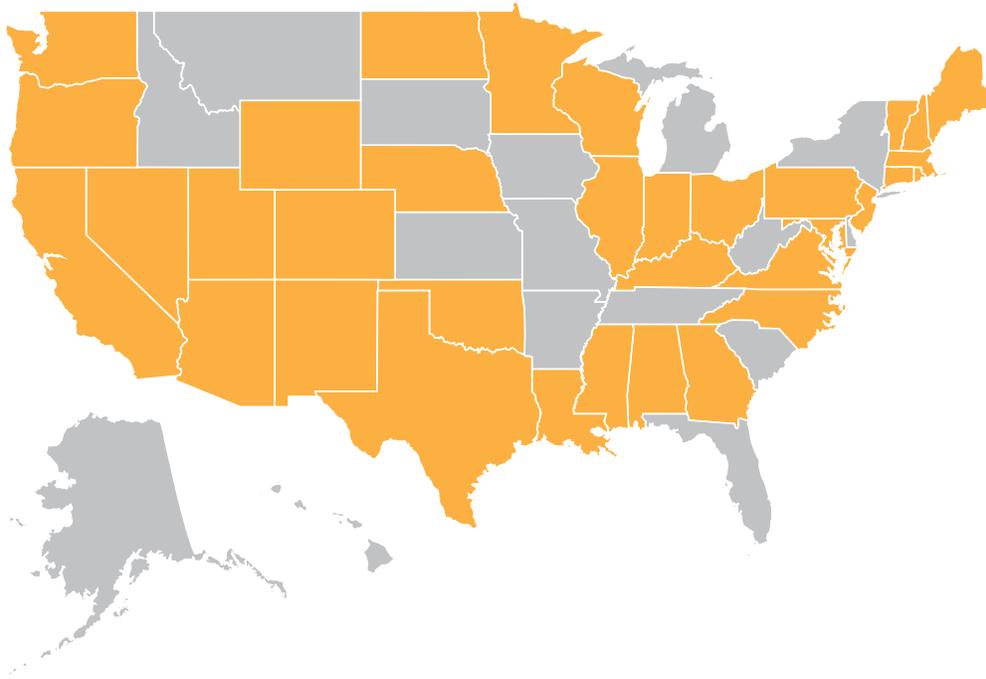
## Policy Levers

Beyond encouraging better data collection and reporting on arts learning, state boards can partner with state advocates and legislators in other ways to help improve access to the arts in education. Key policy areas in arts education span learning standards, instructional requirements, high school graduation requirements, assessment, state accreditation, teacher licensure requirements for non-arts and arts teachers, and grant funding (figure 1).

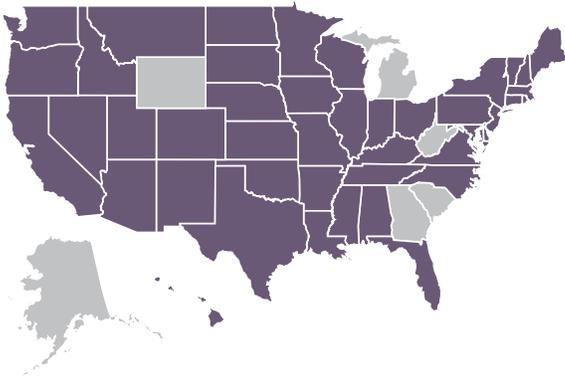
All 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted arts education

Figure 1. Arts Education Policies by State

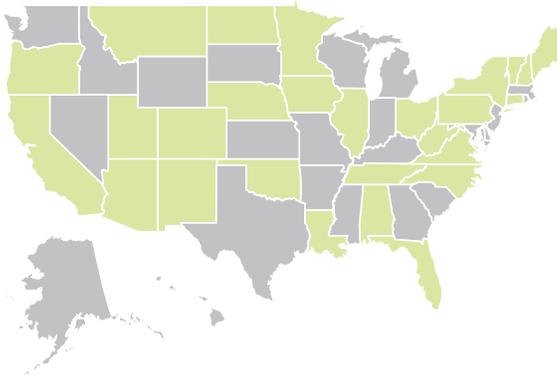
## ARTS AS A CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECT



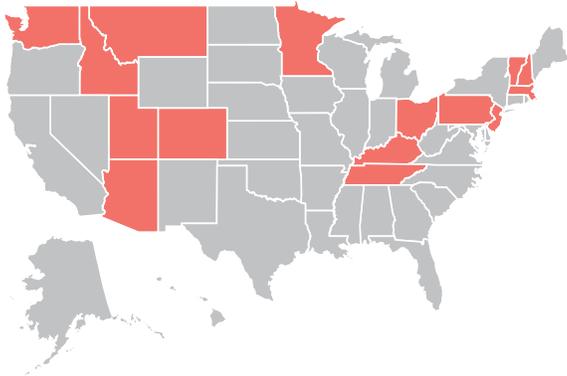
### LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR ARTS TEACHERS



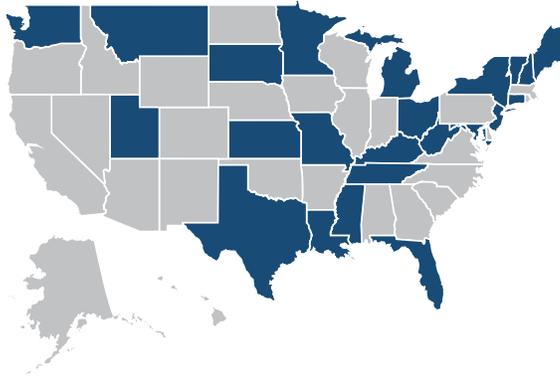
### LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-ARTS TEACHERS



### ARTS EDUCATION ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS



### ARTS REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



Source: Arts Education Partnership

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**Twenty-five states have adopted policies for arts education requirements for high school graduation but have varying approaches in implementation.**

standards for early childhood, elementary, and secondary education, and many state boards have recently updated them. However, not all states define the arts as a core or academic subject. In addition:

- In support of high-quality arts learning, 27 states include the arts in licensure requirements for nonarts teachers, and 45 include arts requirements for licensure for arts teachers in state statute or regulation.
- Assessment requirements are least prevalent in state policy nationally, with less than half of states requiring state-, district-, or school-level assessment of student learning in the arts.

Twenty-five states have adopted policies for arts education requirements for high school graduation but have varying approaches in implementation. Some states, such as Florida, allow speech and debate or practical arts—defined as a course that incorporates artistic content, techniques of creativity, interpretation and imagination—to meet this requirement. Other states, such as Kansas, defer to local school boards to define courses eligible to meet the requirement. Maryland regulation specifies that students earn the credit by completing a course in visual arts, music, theater, or dance.

Beyond these areas, policymakers have increased their focus on STEAM as an approach to advance skill development and achievement in fast-growing occupations in the arts and STEM fields.<sup>8</sup> STEAM education is defined as an approach to teaching in which students demonstrate critical thinking and creative problem solving at the intersection of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math. Through these five subject areas, students build new understanding and solve problems that are authentic to their lives. While some states began adopting STEM policies more than 20 years ago, many states have only recently adopted STEAM-related policies.

For example, in 2017, the Nevada legislature passed a bill establishing a statewide diploma seal for student achievement in STEAM. Nevada also established a subcommittee of the STEM Advisory Council to support professional development and increase access to high-quality STEAM education throughout the state. Georgia and Ohio expanded systems for STEM school certification to include the arts to recognize

schools and programs for their commitment to STEAM education. An Ohio state statute designates STEAM as a type of STEM school and authorizes the STEM committee to review proposals for STEAM certification.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the state education agency upholds Georgia's STEAM school certification.

State boards have the opportunity to support, promote, and adopt arts-related policies to expand access to the arts in high-needs districts and schools, including arts integration. They can also include the arts in approaches to ensuring a well-rounded education and providing targeted professional development for educators focused on the arts. From arts education standards and high-school graduation requirements to related policy areas like STEAM, state boards can affect the quality of arts education in their states and ensure that all students have equitable access to arts opportunities. ■

<sup>1</sup>Ken Elpus, "Arts Education and Positive Youth Development: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Social Outcomes of Adolescents Who Study the Arts" (Washington: National Endowment for the Arts, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Peter Gouzouasis, Martin Guhn, and Nand Kishor, "The Predictive Relationship between Achievement and Participation in Music and Achievement in Core Grade 12 Academic Subjects," *Music Education Research* 9, no. 1: (2007): 81–92.

<sup>3</sup>Emily Workman, "Beyond the Core: Advancing Student Success through the Arts" (Denver: Education Commission of the States, September 2017).

<sup>4</sup>Dorothy Craig and Johnna Paraiso, "Dual Diaspora and Barrio Art: Art as an Avenue for Learning English," *Journal for Learning through the Arts* 4, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>5</sup>Brian Kisida, Jay P. Greene, and Daniel H. Bowen, "Creating Cultural Consumers: The Dynamics of Cultural Capital Acquisition," *Sociology of Education* 87, no. 4 (2014): 281–295; 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).

<sup>6</sup>Claus von Zastrow, "Using State Data Systems to Report Information on Arts Education" Denver: Education Commission of the States (September 2018).

<sup>7</sup>Valerie Norville, "Focusing on Gaps in Access to Arts Education," *State Innovations* 23, no. 1 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, July 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Mary Dell'Erba, "Preparing Students for Learning, Work, and Life through STEAM Education" (Denver: Education Commission of the States, September 2019).

<sup>9</sup>Ohio Revised Code § 3326, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics Schools.