

# NCSBEE Voice

According to the Americans for the Arts, young people who participate regularly in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement than students who did not participate. As teachers can attest, exposure to the arts also builds students' creative skills and confidence.

But all too often, arts programs are the first on the chopping block when schools struggle financially. Because the arts are not often measured for federal or state accountability, they tend to be more vulnerable to budgetary pressure. Some states, however, are requiring schools to provide arts-related information on their statewide school report card. Connecticut, with its arts access indicator, and Kentucky, with its metric on access to visual and performing arts coursework, are among them.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child program helps communities develop and implement plans for expanding arts education in their schools, ensuring access and equity for all students in grades K-8. In the District of Columbia, the program mobilized over 30 representatives from across the city, including the mayor's office, arts organizations, corporations, and philanthropic organizations to advocate for a nonbinding resolution before the DC Council. Passed in 2018, the resolution calls for equitable funding and also for "reasonable instruction hours to meet state academic standards in arts education."

Many states already require arts credits for graduation, though the majority do so as part of a larger elective category. In 2019, Arizona passed legislation (SB 1111) creating a high school diploma seal to recognize students who achieve a high level of proficiency in the arts. The seal will be affixed to students'

diplomas and noted on their transcripts. The Arizona State Board of Education recently adopted requirements for graduating students to obtain the seal, which include a minimum G.P.A., at least four credits in artistic disciplines, at least 30 hours of arts-related extracurricular activities (increasing to a minimum of 80 hours by the 2022-23 school year), and a capstone project (also see the article on page 26).

Students need equitable access to arts education, in addition to English language arts, math, science, and social studies, which have traditionally been labeled as core subjects. An Americans for the Arts blog post from Vermont State Representative John Killacky summed up his experience: "Those of us with lived experience understand the profound transformative power of the arts; yet this does not resonate in a broader community context, especially for those disenfranchised. Art is still perceived as a luxury for the privileged, not a necessity for all."

It is imperative that state policymakers work to eliminate disparities in access to arts programs and experiences, especially as it relates to income, race, and demographic area, so that every student can achieve artistic literacy. As part of their work in providing all students a well-rounded education, state boards must consider school funding, staffing models, and regulatory support as they seek to increase equitable access to arts education. ■



**John-Paul Hayworth**  
Executive Director of the DC State Board of Education, was president of the National Council of State Board of Education Executives from 2017 to 2019.



**Alicia Williams**  
Executive Director of the Arizona State Board of Education, will serve as president of NCSBEE from 2019 to 2021.