Arts Education Policy Improvement Agenda

Draft as of October 28, 2013

All Illinois students, from early childhood to adulthood, will have a high-quality education that provides an essential foundation for success in the 21st century. Arts education provides Illinois’ students with essential skills and knowledge they need to be productive, college and career-ready citizens. These policy improvements will advance arts education access, equity, and quality in Illinois.

1. Strengthen arts education policy implementation capacity Illinois

As the result of previous efforts to advance the arts in Illinois public education and strong support for the arts within the Illinois State Board of Education, the current statewide public policy already in place in Illinois includes many of the elements necessary for success. But having the right policies in place is insufficient. The sad truth is that many, if not most, of the existing policy requirements are not being met in all Illinois schools. The same is true in other states.

Given the existing provision of many policies that support high-quality arts education for all students, what can be done to ensure effective implementation across the state of Illinois at all education levels? What funding and tools are needed to prioritize and implement quality arts education programs? What existing policies need to be modified to ease implementation? What barriers need to be removed? What gaps exist in the local district implementation of existing ISBE policies? What essential policies are missing?

Policy action

→ Illinois General Assembly empanels a legislative task force to make recommendations on arts education staffing, mandatory minutes, and exposure to multiple art forms as well as local, state, and federal resources to support enhanced arts education

2. Establish arts requirements for all secondary & post-secondary institutions

Youth who participate in the arts are much more likely to be high academic achievers, excel in extracurricular activities, and be involved in community service. Participation in the arts correlates to academic success in other subjects like math, science, and reading and better performance on standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT. Arts programs decrease drop-out rates and encourage students to stay in school. High school students engaged in the arts enroll in college at higher rates than their peers without arts experiences.

Although there is a requirement that Illinois high school students complete one year of instruction in art, music, foreign language, or vocational education, course credits in the arts are neither required for high school graduation nor admission to any of the state’s public colleges or universities. Linked
statewide arts education requirements for all public secondary and post-secondary institutions will expand access to the arts without restricting access to higher education for college-ready students.

Policy actions

→ Define and implement a high school graduation requirement in the arts
→ Define and implement an arts requirement for admission to public higher education institutions

3. Include arts education data in relevant education data systems

To what extent are the minimum requirements for preK-12 arts education now being met? What is the current level of access to arts education in Illinois public schools? Who is being served, underserved, and un-served? What is the quality of arts education being provided? Who is teaching arts education, and what are their qualifications?

To answer these fundamental questions about arts education, the knowledge gap needs to be closed concerning the true, real-time state of arts education in all Illinois public schools. While periodic survey findings are a useful tool for informing some aspects of policy reform, fully-integrated tracking of arts education through both statewide education data systems and local school reporting will serve as an even more powerful pair of tools for meaningful policy and practice improvement.

Policy actions

→ ISBE prepares public report on arts education using data from the Longitudinal Data System
→ Secure research partner to assist with qualitative analysis of arts education in Illinois schools
→ Include arts education in the Illinois 5Essentials Survey

4. Increase local stakeholder knowledge of access, equity, & quality

The Longitudinal Data System and 5Essentials Survey offer new and unique opportunities to collect data on arts education access, equity, and quality. In turn, there is unprecedented potential to educate parents, students, and community members about the true, real-time state of arts education in their school and schools across the state. This knowledge not only rallies stakeholder support for the arts, but also increases school accountability toward improving arts education.

Policy actions

→ Reflect arts education status in school improvement plans
→ Include arts education in school, district, and state report cards
→ Explore statewide deployment of the Creative Schools certification
5. Strengthen teacher recruitment, retention, performance, & professional development

Effective instruction in the arts requires knowledge of artistic processes as well as an understanding of the developmental needs and stages of children and youth. Licensed and endorsed arts teachers are experts in both their arts discipline and the pedagogy for their students. They are essential to ensure students receive the same quality instruction in the arts as in other subject areas, and they lay the foundation for arts partners to build upon. Moreover, integrating the arts across the curriculum can strengthen students’ critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

While Illinois has arts-related licensure requirements for arts teachers and some non-arts teachers, there is no specific requirement to study the arts as part of the continuing education and professional development of teachers.

Policy actions

- Work with ISBE to reduce the burden of documentation for pre-service education students
- Promote content-specific professional development for arts educators
- Engage in re-design of teacher evaluation processes

6. Improve school leadership knowledge of arts education

Committed school boards, superintendents, and principals are the strongest forces for ensuring high-quality arts education. In schools and districts where the administration establishes a clear and significant role for the arts, the path to high-quality education is defined and student success follows. Administrators must possess an understanding of the wealth of knowledge and skills that high-quality arts education imparts to students.

Arts teachers need to know that their work is valued and that their students’ accomplishments are understood and celebrated by the school. They need leadership that works in collaboration with them to create and execute a vision for arts education. Administrators must develop arts teachers as leaders, too, and engage the arts as potential solutions to education’s most pressing problems.

Policy action

- Incorporate demonstrated knowledge of arts education into the principal endorsement
- Incorporate demonstrated knowledge of arts education into the superintendent endorsement

7. Update and utilize state-level arts learning standards

In response to the roll-out of Common Core, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards is revising the National Standards for Arts Education. The standards were first developed in 1994 and last revised in 2005. Currently, the Illinois Learning Standards for the Fine Arts are based on a framework from 1985.
The new National Core Arts Standards, expected in March 2014, will frame the artistic literacy and practices that students should attain. Alongside visual arts, dance, music, and drama, they will also expand the definition of the arts to include media and technology. These standards are intended to affirm the place of arts education in a balanced core curriculum, support the 21st-century needs of students and teachers, and help ensure that all students are college and career ready. These standards will describe what students should know and be able to do as a result of a quality, sequential, curricular arts education. They will emphasize “big ideas,” philosophical foundations, enduring understandings and essential questions, and anchor and performance standards.

**Policy action**

- Adopt the new National Core Arts Standards as Illinois Learning Standards for Fine Arts