



The Kennedy Center

KCAAEN

# Arts Education Advocacy Tool Kit



KENNEDY CENTER ALLIANCE FOR ARTS EDUCATION NETWORK



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# Introduction

## Why Advocacy Matters: A Snapshot of Today's Challenges for Arts Education

Arts Education continues to face serious challenges. Despite model programs, studies, and research that demonstrate the value of arts learning, national education policies and budget constraints continue to put arts education programs at risk of being reduced or eliminated.

Although the arts were named as a core academic subject in 2001 (*The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind*), the Center for Education Policy reported in 2006 that 22 percent of school districts surveyed had reduced instructional time for the arts to make more time for math and reading—the subjects that are tested. Keeping the arts in the school day is one of today's critical advocacy challenges.

As school systems across the country face funding challenges and budget cuts, arts education programs are among the first to be threatened or eliminated. Many schools are forced to choose among a music teacher, visual arts teacher, librarian, guidance counselor, or nurse on staff. Many districts resort to asking communities to pass levies to help ease the financial burdens they face. Finding funding for arts education programs is another critical advocacy issue.

At the same time that school districts are reducing or eliminating arts education programs, a December 2007 national poll of American voters indicated that 80 percent of the respondents felt it was important or extremely important for schools to develop students' imagination, innovation, and creative skills. In addition, 88 percent said the arts were essential for doing so and were a sound educational investment (see full report at [www.theimagination.net](http://www.theimagination.net)).

Despite these challenges, successful arts education programs are thriving in some communities across the country. Where arts programs thrive, students are learning in the arts with high engagement, expressing ideas in a variety of arts languages, and engaging in creative and reflective work. We also see students learning through the arts—meeting objectives in both an art form and another subject area and constructing and demonstrating understanding in highly creative and personal ways. But quality arts programs don't thrive on their own. One of the keys to their success has been the active involvement of arts advocates with a powerful and strategic message.

What does it mean to be an arts education advocate? According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, an “advocate” is “one that pleads the cause of another; one that supports or promotes the interests of another.” Arts education advocacy pleads the cause for young people across the nation to have the opportunity to learn in and through the arts.

Arts education advocates know that the only way even strong arts learning programs can survive is when advocates actively promote their cause. Advocates help make the programs' value and impact understood and supported by all stakeholders—from parents, to community leaders, to school district administrators, to state legislators, federal policy-makers, and others.

Now more than ever, the challenges facing arts education must be met. Arts education advocates who work at the community, state, and national levels must act to promote the value of arts learning for all young people.

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### **Arts Education Advocacy Tool Kit**

The Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network (KCAAEN) has created this Arts Education Advocacy Tool Kit as a resource for those interested in developing the knowledge, skills, and habits to be effective advocates, at whatever level and degree of commitment they are willing to make. The Tool Kit focuses on three major topics:

- 1) the habits of effective arts education advocates,
- 2) the power of coalitions and networking, and
- 3) the components of an effective arts education advocacy plan.

Whether you are new to advocacy or have been working for many years to secure a solid place for arts learning in your community, this Tool Kit will help to improve your advocacy skills.