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*Advocacy Information Provided by New York State Alliance for Arts Education.*

## **STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING ARTS EDUCATION**

- A Checklist for Arts Teachers for Promoting the Arts  
*New York State Alliance for Arts Education*
- Parent Involvement in Promoting Arts Education  
*www.pta.org*
- Six Things Parents Can Do to Improve Arts Education in Schools  
*www.pta.org*
- School Board Leaders Making Arts Education a Priority  
*Americans for the Arts*
- Ten Things Superintendents Can Do to Make the Arts Matter in a School District  
*Dr. Carol Fineberg*



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## **A CHECKLIST FOR ARTS TEACHERS FOR PROMOTING THE ARTS**

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***Don't wait for a crisis in your school district to begin advocating for arts education programs. Establish a solid foundation for your school's art, music, dance, drama, literary and media arts programs by beginning now. Use the following as a guide for building support in and for your school.***

- ✓ Consider yourself a vital part of the faculty and act accordingly. Participate on school committees, attend special events planned by fellow teachers, see that the arts are on the table for discussing of all school policies.
- ✓ Plan and collaborate with other arts and non-arts teachers in your school. Make your role essential in the minds of colleagues.
- ✓ Art teachers: Display high-quality student artwork everywhere and often. Your exhibits should include wall texts that state the goals of lessons that stimulated the work. Provide evidence of the students' understanding of the assignment and its relationship to other subjects.
- ✓ Make sure that student work is exhibited in museum style. Higgledy piggledy displays may look cute, but they don't send the message that the art is a result of serious thinking, planning, and executing original ideas.
- ✓ Regularly invite your principal to your studio to see works in progress.
- ✓ Write your own Fall/Spring newsletters to send home with students. Include photos, any needed materials, student honors, exhibits, local museum highlights, etc.
- ✓ Write articles for your PTA/PTO newsletters. Highlight the importance of your students' projects in relation to their regular classroom work and New York State Learning Standards.
- ✓ Ask to make a brief presentation at PTA/PTA, School Board, or staff meetings in order to highlight on what your students are doing in their arts classes and how their work addresses the NYS Learning Standards. curriculum
- ✓ When the arts look threatened, ask parents, students, and other teachers to write letters or send postcards to your school board, superintendent, and principal telling them why the arts are important for the district's children. Cite research referenced in the NYSAAE Toolkit.
- ✓ Make an appointment with your principal to discuss how to strengthen the arts education programs in your school.
- ✓ Help to establish an arts column in your student-run school newspaper.
- ✓ Obtain a list of media contact information from your Chamber of Commerce. Personally invite the key media players to special events, recognitions, exhibits, fine arts festivals, etc. Also send written press releases in cooperation with your principal and district PR policies.
- ✓ Have arts education advocacy materials on display and available for students, parents, teachers and administrators whenever there is a performance or exhibition featuring students' work. Encourage browsers to take away the materials and share with other citizens. Check the specific research findings that support arts education in the NYSAAE Toolkit. It will help you to make educationally sound arguments rather than emotional pleas.
- ✓ Brainstorm pro-arts slogans and involve students in designing original bumper stickers. Have them laminated and distributed to stakeholders in your school community.
- ✓ HELP YOUR DISTRICT AND SCHOOL SET UP ARTS ADVOCACY ADVISORY GROUPS. Help your Advisory Group to make the case to maintain and expand arts programs to serve all students in all district schools.
- ✓ Attend local hearings that concern school budgets. Let your voice be heard. Be specific about policies that you want the district to consider that favor a strong and excellent arts profile for the district.



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## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROMOTING ARTS EDUCATION**

**From [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)**

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Why is arts education so important? Arts education not only cultivates imagination, self-expression, and creativity, but also plays a vital role in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It promotes visual literacy, which enables students to analyze and interpret the meaning of complex visual imagery that permeates the media and popular culture.

Additionally, the arts provide a point of departure for learning in other disciplines, including social studies, history, literature, science, and math. Research has shown that "arts education increases interest in academic learning, cognitive and basic skills development, and the development of academic achievement skills" (R.R. Konrad, *Empathy, Arts, and Social Studies*, 2000). Arts education presents a window through which students are exposed to a diverse and dynamic world of perspectives and cultures. And, among these many other benefits, arts education equips students with skills essential to success in the current economic environment.

Despite these findings and despite the fact that the arts are included as one of the "core academic subjects" in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in many schools faced with budget cuts, arts programs such as visual art and music education are all too often the first to go. Schools that provide little or no arts education are denying students the opportunity to hone those skills that will best prepare them for the highly competitive labor market of the 21st century. Arts education is a fundamental component of comprehensive learning for grades K-12.

### **How can parents make a difference?**

Parents play a vital role in the survival of sufficient arts education in schools. Collaboration among parents, teachers, and arts leaders can create a powerful constituency advocating for arts programs in schools. Parent involvement is an integral part of not only influencing decision makers to include arts education as part of the basic curriculum, but also guaranteeing the best possible education for all students.

### **Encourage education leaders and elected officials to support arts education.**

- Research the issues and debates concerning arts education, and know the facts about how arts education will benefit students.
- Investigate the existing arts education curriculum and standards for your state. (You can access this information on the website of your local and/or state board of education.)
- Assemble a group of parents who share the same concerns, and as a group, meet with the principal to assess the status and quality of arts education within the basic curriculum.
- Enlist the support of your local PTA in addressing the issue. Work with your local PTA's arts chair and federal legislation chair in generating support for arts education. There is strength in numbers, and it is important that there be a critical mass of parents and teachers working together on the issue.
- Solicit guidance and support from your state arts agency and community arts leaders. (Information about your state arts agency can be found at the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies website.)
- Attend school board meetings and hearings to voice your support for the inclusion of arts education in schools.



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## **SIX THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO IMPROVE ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS**

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**By Kathleen Welling**  
**From [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)**

**As parents who care about the quality of our children's education, we need to make sure that our schools meet high standards in all fields of study, including the arts. Each state is guaranteed the freedom to set its own standards, but this should not mean freedom for mediocrity. We all want our youngsters to receive the best education possible in math, English, and the sciences. We cannot deny them the same opportunity to learn, enjoy, and excel through access to the arts.**

- 1. Get Organized.** Many PTA units have a cultural arts chair who is a good source of information and who can be a powerful ally in matters of reform. Work with this person and with other groups to build a network of dedicated volunteers committed to arts education.
- 2. Get the Facts.** Obtain a copy of the National Standards for Arts Education, which can be found at <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards>, and familiarize yourself with its contents.
- 3. Analyze Your Situation.** Take stock of what your school's arts programs currently offer, and what they don't offer. Is your child being taught art, music, dance, or theater by qualified arts teachers? Determine if the content of each arts discipline is taught sequentially, each year building on what the child learned the year before, or whether each grade begins at "ground zero." Learn what (or who) should be added: for example, more (or different) teacher training and assistance. Learn whether your school lacks the necessary resources to accomplish the goals, and what can be done to get those resources.
- 4. Make a Plan.** Don't assume your goal is impossible. Help is available from many quarters, including local arts organizations, charitable foundations, and universities. Also, the U.S. Department of Education has earmarked funds for teacher training and other types of assistance.
- 5. Educate for Action.** Take your case to the public. Have volunteers write letters or send postcards to decision makers telling them why the arts in general and your plan in particular is important for education. Speak to your principal about strengthening arts education. Be a voice for arts literacy before community and civic groups.
- 6. Be Persistent.** Find out what the objections to high-quality arts education are in your community and respond to them. You may not carry the day on your first try, but don't give up.



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## **SCHOOL BOARD LEADERS MAKING ARTS EDUCATION A PRIORITY**

**Making arts education a priority begins with building a unified front among parents, faculty, administrators, and fellow school board leaders. It also involves a commitment on the part of the school board to allocate and secure funding for the future sustainability of such programming.**

### **Know Your Arts Education Policy**

As school board leaders, being informed is a critical part of your job. The federal law identifies the arts as a core academic subject, just like math, science, and language arts. Learn where your state stands on arts education by visiting the 2004-2005 State Arts Education Policy Database.

### **Build School Board Consensus**

Let's face it, very few people would admit to being "anti-arts education." However, building consensus on the value of arts education can pose a difficult challenge. In addition to the supportive research section, you can visit research highlights that concisely illustrate the role of the arts in student academic achievement. This will enable you to build a strong argument in support of the arts in your district and community without having to pour over volumes of research.

### **Identify Funding Sources**

A lack of funding and resources is the most common concern facing school districts. Funding does exist at the national, state, and local levels for arts programs in public schools. External funding can enable school districts to conduct a needs assessment and begin planning for a sustainable arts education program. In addition to identifying external funding sources, it is critical that school boards commit a percentage of the district's operating budget to fund arts programming. Visit the funding for arts education page to learn more about what funding is available.

### **Engage the Community**

Cultural institutions including museums and libraries often offer community outreach programs. Local arts agencies and organizations can assist school boards in the establishment of a district-wide arts education plan that uses community resources. The sustainability and success of arts education programming is due in large part to a shared commitment among schools, cultural institutions, businesses, and other community-based organizations. Visit the Americans for the Arts Online Field Directory to locate national, state, and local arts service organizations in your area. Many of the organizations listed can help you—through advocacy, funding, and programming—in your efforts to secure a place for arts education in your schools.



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## **TEN THINGS SUPERINTENDENTS CAN DO TO MAKE THE ARTS MATTER IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**By Dr. Carol Fineberg**  
**Presented at the NYSCOSS Conference on September 27, 2005**

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**The following points are based on research regarding school districts where the highest quality arts education and integrated arts education programs are in place.**

### **1. Establish an advisory committee.**

A cross section of arts organizations leaders, arts teachers, and citizen advocates for the arts can be a powerful lobby for support of quality arts programming in your school district.

### **2. Hire or reinforce in-place a district arts coordinator/director.**

With a coordinator/director of the arts, a district can take advantage of the variety of services available from community, state, and federal sources; a district-level professional with the arts as a major responsibility can also be the point person for the attainment of high standard of performance in the studios and can work to plan with colleagues representing the various other curriculum areas of the district.

### **3. Enable faculty to see models of excellence and “best practices.”**

Seeing an excellent program is always more impressive than talking about one. Arranging opportunities for staff to see “best practices” in other venues often sparks the development of new and better programming in schools.

### **4. Initiate a yearly internal evaluation process that leads to a report to the advisory committee and the board.**

Developing a report not only helps the writers focus on the accomplishments of a year, but also helps focus on the needs to be addressed in following years. Moreover, it gives the advisory committee and the school board and staff an opportunity to recognize the value of a vital arts program to the district’s students. The report can always be used to append to proposals for outside funding.

### **5. Invite outside experts to review the quality of your arts programs periodically.**

Encourage them to look at the quality of student work, K-12, in all of the arts domains, as well as the quality of the arts work in situations where the arts are used to enhance understanding of other parts of the curriculum.

**6. Enlist members of the advisory committee on an as needed basis when hiring teachers and resident artists.**

Not all districts have in house expertise regarding how to “read” potential arts teachers and resident artists. Members of the advisory committee may be helpful to district personnel officers when searching through candidates for arts positions.

**7. Review scope and sequence of all arts programming; find the holes.**

The arts have their own scope and sequence requirements; if students are to gain a complete arts education, arts teachers need to show how they are following a logical sequence of instruction that starts with the development of foundational skills and moves ahead accordingly.

**8. Review expenditures for the arts; consolidate, revise, redirect, and augment.**

Sometimes it is not a question of no money for the arts, but rather a question of how different kinds of money can be redirected toward a satisfying and complete arts program. District superintendents and/or arts coordinators need to check with their BOCES arts supervisors/coordinators to ensure that money spent for the arts is reimbursed and earmarked for the next year’s arts expenditures.

**9. Take advantage of the grant opportunities out there: federal, state, and local, grants, regrants, and awards.**

The New York State Alliance for Arts Education ([www.nysaae.org](http://www.nysaae.org)) can guide district arts coordinators through the grant acquisition process, helping to locate sources of funds and techniques for obtaining them.

**10. Incorporate your Public Relations Officer into a campaign for arts education in your district.**

The more the public knows about the achievements of students in art, music, dance, and drama, the more likely they are to support continuation of programs and, ultimately, expansion. Review the way the arts are featured in the district: festivals, exhibitions, performances of plays, musicals, and make a strong statement with them.

*Dr. Carol Fineberg is a nationally recognized evaluator of arts and education programs. The “to do list” above, is a result of her findings as a principal investigator of scores of programs in various venues across the nation.*



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## **NON-PROFITS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA**

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***As political campaigns heat up around the State, not for profit arts organizations are increasingly concerned about the kinds of activities that they may or may not engage in to protect their not for profit status. The article below answers a number of those questions for you. However, please remember that interpretation comes into play and this information is provided for your guidance; it is not intended to replace the advice of legal counsel.***

### **Voter Education by Nonprofits During a Political Campaign**

Nonprofits sometimes confuse working for the election of a political candidate with lobbying. These two kinds of activity are in fact very different. It is perfectly legal (and highly appropriate) for a nonprofit to work for the passage of a particular piece of legislation, during a political campaign or at any other time. Working for the election of a particular candidate, however, whether at federal, state, or local levels is strictly prohibited and is cause for the nonprofit to lose its tax-exempt status. While a 501(c)(3) group cannot work on behalf of or against candidates, there are a number of other voter education activities, such as those described below, that it can legally engage in. If you plan to engage in any of the following activities, consult a nonprofit law attorney for further guidance.

### **Electioneering**

A 501(c)(3) organization cannot endorse, contribute to, work for, or otherwise support a candidate for public office, nor can it oppose one. This in no way prohibits officers, individual members, or employees from participating in a political campaign, provided that they say or do everything as private citizens and not as spokespersons for the organization or while using the organization's resources.

### **Questionnaires**

Nonprofits with a broad range of concerns can safely disseminate responses from questionnaires. The questions must cover a broad range of subjects, be framed without bias, and be given to all candidates for office. If a nonprofit has a very narrow focus, however, questionnaires may pose a problem. The IRS takes the position that a nonprofit's narrowness of focus implies endorsement of candidates whose replies are favorable to the questions posed. The same applies when candidates are asked to respond to a nonprofit's position paper. Unless you are certain that your organization clearly qualifies as covering a broad range of issues, your organization should avoid disseminating replies from questionnaires.

### **Voting Records**

Many nonprofits follow the useful practice of telling their members how each member of a legislature has (over) voted on a key issue. There is no legal problem with this practice provided that if the information is presented and disseminated during the campaign it is done in the same manner as it is at other times. A problem arises if an organization waits to disseminate voting records until a campaign is under way. If your organization has followed the practice of disseminating voting records as votes occur throughout the year, then you are safe in publishing the record of a vote that occurs during a campaign. If, however, your organization has not published the records regularly throughout the year, your group may not, during the campaign, publish a recap of the legislative votes throughout the legislative session. That is permissible, however, after the election.

### **Public Forums**

Nonprofits may invite candidates to meetings or to public forums sponsored by the organizations. The invitation must be extended to all serious candidates. It is best to write to them all simultaneously and to use identical language in the invitations. It is not necessary that all candidates attend. Even-handedness must be maintained in promoting and holding

such a meeting or forum. The nonprofit should not state its views or comment on those of the candidates. If there is a question-and answer period, each candidate must be given an equal opportunity to answer questions, and the moderator should strive to ensure balance. Speeches or other remarks by candidates at the forum may be published as news items in the nonprofit's newsletter, if it is published regularly and if its circulation is limited to the organization's normal distribution patterns.

### **Testimony On Party Platforms**

As part of a lobbying effort, nonprofits may testify before party platform committees at the national, state, or local levels. Responses to testimony may be reported in regularly published newsletters. Both parties' platform committees should receive copies of the testimony. Any account of the testimony and responses may be reported in the Nonprofit's regularly scheduled publication.

### **Issue Briefings And Candidate's Statements**

Issue briefings for candidates must be extended to all the candidates running for a particular office. A candidate may publish a position paper or statement on the issue, but a nonprofit may not circulate the candidate's statement to the media, the general public, or the nonprofit's members until after the election.

### **Membership Lists**

The nonprofit may sell, trade, or rent its list to others, including candidates for office. If it does so, all candidates must be aware of the opportunity and be given the same access. An organization that gives or lends its membership list to a candidate is in effect making an illegal campaign contribution. To stay within the law, the group must be paid fair value in return.

***The foregoing information is for general guidance and is not intended to replace legal counsel.  
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