

Every Child Achieves Act of 2015---Every Student Succeeds Act ESSA Implications for Arts Education

On December 10, 2015 President Barack Obama signed S.1177, Every Child Achieves Act of 2015 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which is a bipartisan bill, supports the principle of educating the “whole child.”

The bipartisan bill passed by the House includes many of the key reforms the Administration has called on Congress to enact and encouraged states and districts to adopt in exchange for waivers offering relief from the more onerous provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The bill helps ensure educational opportunity for all students by:

- Holding all students to high academic standards that prepare them for success in college and careers.
- Ensuring accountability by guaranteeing that when students fall behind, states redirect resources into what works to help them and their schools improve, with a particular focus on the very lowest-performing schools, high schools with high dropout rates, and schools with achievement gaps.
- Empowering state and local decision-makers to develop their own strong systems for school improvement based upon evidence, rather than imposing cookie-cutter federal solutions like the No Child Left Behind Act did.
- Reducing the often onerous burden of testing on students and teachers, making sure that tests don't crowd out teaching and learning, without sacrificing clear, annual information parents and educators need to make sure our children are learning.
- Providing more children access to high-quality preschool.
- Establishing new resources for proven strategies that will spur reform and drive opportunity and better outcomes for America's students.

Each local educational agency, or consortium of such agencies, that receives an allocation under section 4105 shall use a portion of such funds to develop and implement programs and activities that support access to a well-rounded education...

States shall use the funds available under subsection for activities and programs designed to meet the purposes of this subpart, which may include—

- *identifying and eliminating State barriers to the coordination and integration of programs, initiatives, and funding streams that meet the purposes of this subpart, so that local educational agencies can better coordinate with other agencies, schools, and community-based services and programs; or supporting local educational agencies in providing programs and activities that—*
- *“offer well-rounded educational experiences to all students, as described in section, including female students, minority students, English learners, children with disabilities, and low-income students who are often underrepresented in critical and enriching subjects, which may include increasing student access to and improving student engagement and achievement in high-quality courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including computer science; **activities and programs in music and the arts;***

The following key points highlight the opportunities for arts education within the legislation.

- **Arts education advocacy at the state and local level will be more important than ever.** The overall approach of the bill shrinks the federal role in education reform and hands more

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decision-making to the states.

- **The arts and music are included in a definition of a "well-rounded education" - a term that has replaced the current definition of "core academic subjects," which had included the "arts."** The well-rounded education definition broadens the list of subjects and appears in provisions related to afterschool and expanded learning time, English language learners, literacy, and more. This means that advocates can encourage local and state education policymakers to use their federal funds in these areas to support arts music, dance and theatre education.

*"WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION.-The term 'well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **arts**, history, geography, computer science, **music**, career and technical education, health, physical education, and **any other subject**, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience."*

- **The subjects listed in the definition of a well-rounded education - including arts and music education – appear to be specified as eligible uses of Title I funds.** Title I funds are the largest pool of federal resources dedicated to ensuring equitable access to a complete education for all students.
- **The programs supported by the current Arts in Education fund are retained as a newly named "Assistance for Arts Education" fund.** This is a significant win as many other small programs of this kind were eliminated in the new bill. The Arts Education fund includes national competitive grants to support partnerships among schools and community-based organizations.
- **Arts and music education are specified as eligible uses for new, state-administered "Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants."** Local education agencies will apply to states for the funds and are asked to consult with community-based organizations and other public stakeholders when preparing their applications. Integrating the arts into STEM learning programs is also a specified area of eligibility for the new grants.
- **21st Century Community Learning Center funding is maintained, and arts and music education are specified as eligible for support under "expanded learning time" provisions.** Afterschool, out of school, and summer learning programs are key areas in which arts organizations partner with schools to support student learning in the arts.
- **Accountability requirements are more flexible.** While tests in reading and math are still required under the new bill, states are given flexibility in incorporating other measures of student success into their accountability plans - such as student engagement - and are encouraged to use portfolio and project based-assessment when measuring student learning, which may open the door to increased support of arts education strategies.

More information and materials are posted to the Department of Education's ESEA webpage www.ed.gov/ESEA. Additional questions can be directed to ESSA.questions@ed.gov.