

Focusing on the Classroom: Music Content Standards

The *National Standards for Arts Education* constitute one of the **biggest educational reform** efforts ever undertaken in American education. The standards focus on where the action is—at the local level, the grassroots level. The National Standards aren't prescriptive because **community control of local schools is a guiding principle** in American education. Community control, however, also means community responsibility. The **arts standards do set important targets** for a student's **academic knowledge and achievement** in music, dance, theatre and visual arts, as measured at the end of grades 4, 8 and 12. They give our communities the benchmarks we need to fulfill our **responsibility to our students**.

What are the National Music Content Standards?

- Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- Improvising melodies, variations and accompaniments
- Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
- Reading and notating music
- Listening to, analyzing and describing music
- Evaluating music and musical performances
- Understanding relationships between music, the other arts and disciplines outside the arts
- Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Implementing Standards

Excerpted from a presentation given by Paul R. Lehman, for the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education.

National, voluntary standards have been developed for music, visual arts, theatre and dance. Nearly every school in the nation offers instruction in music and the visual arts. Programs in theater and dance tend to be less widespread and less fully developed. Although we seek full implementation of the standards in all four disciplines, we recognize that different schedules for implementation in the four disciplines may be necessary. If you support arts education, you are urged to do these things:

- **Get to know the other arts educators in the schools in your community.** Find out if there is a balanced, comprehensive and sequential program in each of the arts offered in the schools.
- **Encourage the arts educators** in the schools of your community to adapt their programs to reflect the national standards.

- **Get to know** the principals, superintendent and other school officials in your community. Make them aware of your support for strong arts programs.
- **Explain to everyone** who plays a role in education decision making why the arts should be a part of the curriculum for every American child. Emphasize that both the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and *Prisoners of Time*, the report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, include the arts among the basics of the curriculum.
- **As standards in the various disciplines are released** and considered for adoption, point out to education decision makers that we now have national standards for arts education as well. Lobby for the adoption of the national standards for arts education at the state and local levels, and push as hard as possible for implementation.
- **When the arts standards cannot be fully implemented** immediately, encourage the development of an incremental plan for implementing the standards in each of the arts as completely and as rapidly as possible.
- **Whenever a newspaper columnist** or editorial writer suggests that the arts are not high priority or that we can get along without arts programs in our schools, write a well-reasoned but firm letter opposing that viewpoint. Let no negative opinion pass unchallenged, regardless of where you live.
- **Encourage business leaders** to support arts programs in the schools. Apart from the value of the arts for their own sake to all Americans, major corporations recognize the importance of education in the arts for their employees, and research shows that the economic impact of the arts at the state and local levels is enormous.
- Lobby for the appointment of a supervisor or coordinator in each of the arts if these positions do not already exist in your school district. The positions are necessary to provide leadership for each program and to ensure coordination, articulation and balance in the curriculum.
- Do not be satisfied with a program in the elementary schools in which the arts, especially music and the visual arts, are taught entirely by classroom teachers without the help of specialists. Very few classroom teachers can do an acceptable job alone. If classroom teachers are expected to play a major role, seek to ensure that the ability to teach at least two of the arts is a condition of employment.
- Do not be satisfied with a program that relies excessively on artists-in-residence or other enrichment activities. Exposure and enrichment are invaluable as supplements but are not substitutes for a balanced, comprehensive and sequential program in each of the arts in the curriculum. Make sure parents and administration are aware of the differences.
- Use your influence to ensure that the state of improvement plan being developed in your state guarantees a place for the arts.
- Encourage others to support the arts in the schools. If your friends and co-workers will recruit their friends on behalf of the arts, and they will recruit theirs, the number of supporters of arts education will eventually become overwhelming.
- Help to organize in-service education opportunities to help educators who may not be comfortable with some of the expectations of the standards.
- **Help to make education decision makers** and the public aware of what students are learning in the arts programs in your community. After a band parents' open house, one parent said, "I didn't know the kids actually learned things in band. I thought they just played." The same comment is often made about the visual arts, theater and dance. Don't let that happen in your community.
- **Work with the professional arts** education associations to monitor continuously everything that goes on in your state capitol with respect to education reform to ensure that the arts are treated fairly.

Arts Education Assessment

In September 1993, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) convened a consortium of states interested in developing large-scale, state-level assessments in arts education. The State Collaborative on Assessments and Student Standards (SCASS) Arts Education Project developed and refined arts-education assessment instruments (classroom, large-scale and portfolio) that address the voluntary National Standards for Arts Education. The consortium conducted a professional development survey in 15 member states and field-tested the assessment exercise sets with 3,400 students in 76 schools.

Want more tips for keeping music strong in your schools?

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