Meet Title I Goals Using the Arts

Research shows that the arts have a measurable benefit in the lives of students, from academic achievement to creative problem-solving to student engagement and perseverance. What’s more, the benefits are disproportionately higher for students at the greatest risk of being underserved. For example, in *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art* (2012), James Catterall describes that students in high-poverty schools who have access to the arts are five times more likely to graduate than those without, and those same students have much higher rates of civic engagement than their non-arts-participating peers. However, many schools still struggle to find ways to support these important opportunities for students.

Title I is the largest source of federal funding for education. Its goals are student engagement and achievement, parent and community engagement, and school culture/climate—all advanced with a deep immersion in the arts. Several states and cities have made an intentional effort to focus Title I resources to increase art integration as a teaching strategy. Insights from California are particularly helpful, inspiring school leaders to use the arts to help accomplish their Title I objectives.

**The Arts and Education Equity**

For the past four years, the California Alliance for Arts Education has been pursuing its Title I Initiative, an effort to clarify confusion around the appropriate use of Title I funds for arts education programs, and to provide tools to school leaders for planning and implementation. For the alliance, the initiative is not just about finding ways to provide more access to arts education; it’s about providing a high-quality education for every student. That high-quality education must and should include the arts.

Federal Title I funds are dedicated to closing the achievement gap for the nation’s most disadvantaged students. This is the largest amount of federal education funds distributed to the states. Title I spending in 2014 was $14.5 billion overall; every school district receives at least some Title I funding. Schools with more than 40 percent low-income students can be designated “whole school” Title I, and for these schools, Title I funds represent a potentially powerful supplement to their annual programs. Whole-school Title I programs have a great deal of flexibility, and funds can be combined with other federal and state grants to maximize impact.
Those funds, however, do come with strings attached. Title I programs must demonstrate that they use research-backed effective strategies to meet any one (or several) of the four Title I goals: student achievement, student engagement, parent involvement, and school climate/culture. A compelling body of evidence shows that arts strategies have been effective in reaching each of those four goals.

In turn, federal Title I policy clearly allows schools and districts to include arts education in their strategies to achieve Title I goals. At the state level in California, however, the alliance found that there was a lack of clarity about whether and how the arts could play a role in Title I. That lack of clarity, coupled with a fear of reprisal—the potential revocation of funding for programs that didn’t meet state or federal expectations—was keeping schools and districts from including arts education in their strategies for achieving Title I goals, or including them in a way that would draw no attention to those practices.

**California’s Title I Initiative**
The intent of the Title I Initiative, therefore, was to develop and clarify a policy pathway—a shared understanding aligned across school, district, state, and federal levels of leadership regarding what is allowable when it comes to expending Title I funds on arts education. This pathway, when fully activated, could have the effect of breaking barriers to access across the state for implementing proven, effective programming for some of the state’s most under-resourced students.

The process wasn’t rocket science. Progress is measured one step at a time. It’s exciting to see results in school districts that are actually doing the work, and hearing conversations around Title I shifting from “Can we do it?” to “How do we do it?” The alliance’s strategy has been to get the word out as clearly and as often as possible—and to empower others to have similar conversations. Following these recommendations could help your community access Title I funds for arts education:

- **Start with school-level, district, and community leaders** around the state talking about Title I goals and how art helps achieve them.
- **Use the alliance’s online resource, title1arts.org.** It provides guidance based on the Title I yearlong planning cycle, with each stage of the planning cycle having its own dedicated resource “room.” For example, the “Identifying a Strategy” resource room is dedicated to the Title I requirement of selecting a research-based strategy for a schoolwide Title I program. Use the research matrix that draws from the Arts Education Partnership’s ArtsEdSearch, with more than 200 vetted studies on the impact of arts education, and maps the studies onto the four Title I goals.
Identify the most significant needs in your school community. Then use the research matrix to help select appropriate arts-based strategies to help meet those needs.

Use case studies from other districts. For example, in the San Diego Unified School District—the vanguard of early action—Superintendent Cindy Marten set aside $3 million of district Title I funds in 2014 for a pilot arts-integration initiative in 22 Title I schools. Marten tapped Caroline King, principal of a high-performing Title I arts magnet school, to spearhead the initiative, and they worked with a team to develop partnerships, capacity, and professional development to build a high-quality initiative.

Use the short video clips on title1arts.org in presentations at the state and community level. Building on that work, we are now partnering with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association to pilot training at the county and district level this fall. The purpose of the training is to empower county and district leaders with specific tools to help them plan local initiatives, and build the alliances and relationships necessary to move from idea to implementation.

Distribute the alliance’s two-page flier, Four Things You Can Do to Start the Conversation about Title I and the Arts, with specific, suggested action steps.

With the passage of the new Every Student Succeeds Act, state and local advocacy is even more important and effective. Every educator and arts-in-education advocate has an opportunity to speak to the role of arts in education in general, and Title I in particular. The more school leaders know about the possibilities of Title I and the arts, and the existing examples of ongoing work, the more impact they will have within their own districts and schools.

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