What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education

Learning in and through the arts helps develop the essential knowledge, skills and creative capacities all students need to succeed in school, work and life. In building their leaders, school principals play a key role in ensuring every student has access to high-quality education that sets them up for success in life.... It’s a matter of equity. All students should have access to arts education, whether it’s through an arts-inclusive curriculum or an arts-integration program. Most importantly, this guide offers three concrete actions school principals can take to increase the arts in education in their schools:

A. Establish a schoolwide commitment to arts learning.
B. Create an arts-rich learning environment.
C. Examine the use of time and resources.

About the Arts Education Partnership

The Arts Education Partnership is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business and philanthropic organizations that was created in 1995 by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education.

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3. C. Examine the use of time and resources.
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Arts education makes school work for every student. It opens up pathways to a more productive future. It engages students with the arts and helps them see the arts as a way to make sense of themselves and their world. The arts broaden students’ perspectives, helping them develop skills for success in school, work and life. Arts leaders must advocate for arts education for their students.

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8. Each action is supported by low-cost or no-cost strategies that school leaders have used and found effective—whether in their own arts or other programs to enhance equity. All students should have access to arts-infused learning, and schools should be working to make this a reality for all students. ESSA reauthorization provides an opportunity to provide all students with a well-rounded education that sets them up for success in life ... It’s a matter of social justice. All students deserve the chance to learn arts and develop skills and strategies throughout school, and arts education can be the key to making that happen. School leaders need to work with their communities to make the arts part of every student’s experience and to build arts education throughout the arts in the primary grades,” Arts Education Partnership (2016).

9. Ibid.


11. For more research on the arts in education, visit the Arts Education Partnership website at www.aep-arts.org for additional resources.

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Studies show arts integration can further align educational goals and improve the impact of arts learning approaches. Arts integration has positive effects, from closing the achievement gap for elementary math and science students to improving reading scores and language acquisition among English learners. Engaging teachers using the arts in instructional practices can spark interest in their peers and other stakeholders. Principals can encourage teachers to collaborate with a local art studio to develop art experiences integrated with science and social studies curricula. Principals can also provide professional development opportunities for teachers to incorporate art into their curricular and instructional strategies. "Arts integration can happen across art content areas and enhance instruction for our students," said Dennis Guikema, principal of the Center for Arts Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

1. Articulate clear goals. Principals must set goals across art content areas, including arts education. To qualify under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), districts may need to conduct a needs assessment and identify areas for improvement to support a well-rounded education.

2. Establish a budget line item. Understanding the value of arts education is crucial to securing funding. Schools can secure funding by raising funds, writing grants or volunteering in other activities. The National PTA’s ArtsEd Leader’s Guide helps principals identify opportunities to engage parents.

3. Involve the local arts community. Reaching beyond school walls to arts and cultural organizations can produce many benefits, from engagement among students with disabilities to access to art museums. For example, some schools use virtual field trips to reach students who live in poverty, such as those who may not be able to travel to a rural school, we use virtual field trips to art museums to help our young learners around the world experience the arts.

4. Arts instruction and arts integration have a tremendous impact on engagement, achievement and student learning. A school that offers arts instruction or arts integration can happen across art content areas. At our school, attendance greatly improved and behavior issues remarkably decreased once we implemented our focus on arts instruction. Art integration allows greater access to other content areas, such as reading and writing, and provides opportunities for students to engage in meaningful learning experiences, such as integrating math and science with art.

5. Tap Title I and II funds. Schools can use funding under Title I, Part A of ESSA to improve the learning environment through arts integration, as well as Title II funds to support arts instruction. Some possibilities include providing arts-focused professional development and arts-based strategies in the classroom. Los Berros Elementary School, Coleraine, Minn., offers outdoor dance classes and programs using arts-based techniques or arts-integrated strategies to build student thinking skills.

6. Engage parents. Parents can use their children’s work to spark their interest in the arts. School principals can offer opportunities to engage parents by raising funds, writing grants or volunteering in other activities. The National PTA’s ArtsEd Leader’s Guide helps principals identify opportunities to engage parents.

7. Provide arts-based professional development. Educators who integrate the arts need students to be engaged, and that helps build student thinking skills. Principals may consider new strategies for professional development, such as asking arts educators to lead or coordinate professional development, work with their art teacher to incorporate arts into other content areas, or work with other arts educators to incorporate arts across various content areas.

8. Incorporate the arts into staffing and hiring decisions. When recruiting new educators, development leaders create job descriptions that require arts coursework or experience. Los Berros Elementary School, Coleraine, Minn., makes art a part of the school’s teacher selection process by requiring that lesson plans include art. He explained, “Regardless of the evaluation model set by the district or state, teachers and principals will have to improve their teaching and engage in teacher development strategies.”

9. Examine the use of time. Integrating the arts with other subjects in after-school learning can help reinforce in-school learning or even set an imitator to explore new teaching strategies that can complement the school day. Arts instruction and arts integration have positive effects on student behavior and attitudes after participating in after-school arts programs, improved arts and social skills and improved student engagement.

10. Use after-school time. Integrating the arts with other subjects in after-school learning can help reinforce in-school learning or even set an imitator to explore new teaching strategies that can complement the school day. Arts instruction and arts integration have positive effects on student behavior and attitudes after participating in after-school arts programs, improved arts and social skills and improved student engagement.
ESTABLISH A SCHOOLWIDE COMMITMENT TO ARTS LEARNING

1. Article to the arts. Principals set goals across all subject areas, including arts education. To qualify under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), districts may need a needs analysis identifying areas for improvement to support a well-rounded education.1 Utilizing opportunities to speak with various constituencies on the need for the arts, Principals can work with teachers, parents, and students. 

2. Identify the arts in the budget. Establishing a budget line item for the arts can further align educational goals and make arts learning visible throughout the school, the arts can be an integral part of what defines the school’s vision. For example, principals can agree to the importance of art instruction by making it a priority.”

3. Incorporate the arts in staffing and hiring decisions. When recruiting new educators, development opportunities that require arts coursework or experience in the arts. Art education is a priority at Leesville, and such opportunities include hands-on experiences or workshops. Leesville’s principal encourages the arts as a means of fostering collaboration and an inclusive learning environment for all students.

4. Support a schoolwide arts learning community. School principals can reinforce the commitment to the arts through a schoolwide arts theme, by sharing arts-related books and articles and by incorporating the topic into staff meetings. By seeing the arts in action, parents work with school leaders to “establish an ArtsEd committee and engage more families in school decision-making,”

5. Utilizing opportunity-to-learn data, arts leaders experience better collaboration among educators, innovative teaching practices, robust parent engagement and improved student performance.2

CREATE AN ARTS-RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. Bring the arts into daily classroom instruction. Studies show arts integration has positive effects from closing the achievement gap for elementary school students, improving teacher efficacy for effective advocates for inclusive and equitable arts education.

2. Principals who participated in our multi-year research study report that the arts changed their schools.3 Multiple measures suggest that this arts integration can happen across all content areas and enhance instruction for our students.

3. Arts integration and arts advocacy have a tremendous impact on engagement, student motivation, and learning outcomes for all students. At a school that offers arts instruction, students typically had higher test scores in a variety of subject areas. At our school, attendance grew greatly improved and behavior issues remarkably decreased since we implemented our focus on arts instruction. Art integration allows greater access to other content areas, for example, English learners or students with disabilities — have greater access to the arts when paired with the arts.

4. Vandyke teachers recognize how important art education and art experiences are for our students that living with disabilities — have greater access to the arts when paired with the arts. Los Berros Visual and Performing Arts Academy, Lompoc, Calif.

5. The arts are an integral part of the school’s vision. At Leesville, our arts education goals are to improve student achievement and behavior outcomes. As a small, rural school, we use virtual field trips to art museums to help our young learners experience the world of art outside of

6. Integrate the arts locally. Reaching beyond school walls to arts and cultural organizations can provide many lasting benefits. Teaching artists — professional artists from cultural institutions or the education sector — can play a key role in providing guidance, consultation, assessment techniques and resources in the development of curricular materials. These partnerships can enhance schools with rich, comprehensive programs — not simply add-on experiences that come and go with the availability of resources. The National Endowment for the Arts uses Title I funding to create in-school, after-school and summer programs that improve the education program of the entire school, including use of the arts as a tool. Los Berros Academy, Lompoc, Calif.

7. Funding provided under Title II, Part A helps ensure that all students have access to teachers and school leaders who can support them in achieving state standards. ESSA creates multiple avenues for including the arts in Title II grants. Principals may consider new strategies for professional development, such as hiring arts teachers to teach or coordinate professional development for other staff, or work with arts educators to integrate arts instruction throughout the school day.

8. Principals may consider new strategies for professional development, such as hiring arts teachers to teach or coordinate professional development for other staff, or work with arts educators to integrate arts instruction throughout the school day.

9. The arts can be an integral part of the definition of the school’s mission. Students receiving students of other subjects to decide how best to address the school’s educational goals and student learning needs. At Los Berros, Anderson uses a mix of strategies — including additional training for full-time educators, contracting with teaching artists, community artists and external organizations. For example, Los Berros also offers outdoor dance classes and programs using arts-based techniques or arts-integrated strategies to build on students’ interest in the arts.

10. The arts can be an integral part of the definition of the school’s mission. Students receiving special education services or who have experienced trauma. Student outcomes include improvements in behavior, performance in academic areas, from animation and digital art to orchestra and musical theater. Los Berros also offers outdoor dance classes and programs using arts-based techniques or arts-integrated strategies to build on students’ interest in the arts.

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Studies show arts integration has positive effects from closing the achievement gap for elementary-school students to improving mental health and academic performance for high school students. Teachers and students both report increased engagement, creativity, and motivation when arts are integrated into the curriculum.

1. Identify the arts in the budget. Establishing a budget line item for arts can raise the profile of arts learning and encourage new ways of thinking about arts education. Districts can consider funding through Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to invest in arts instruction. School districts may use Title I, Part A of ESSA to support arts instruction as one way to ensure that all students, particularly those in poverty, have access to the arts.

2. Create an arts-rich learning environment. Researchers found that students who were asked to solve a creative problem showed an improvement in academic achievement, increased self-confidence and self-efficacy, and reduced math anxiety. Another study found that when the arts are integrated into the curriculum, students’ performance on standardized tests improved.

3. Engage the arts in the instruction. Arts-integrated learning has the potential to reduce the achievement gap between white and non-white students. In one study, students who participated in an arts-integrated curriculum showed significantly greater gains in reading skills than those in a traditional reading program. Arts integration can also help students with special needs. Students with disabilities who participated in arts-integrated learning showed significant improvement in their reading, writing, and social skills.

4. Support a schoolwide arts learning environment. School principals can reinforce the commitment to the arts through a schoolwide arts theme, by sharing arts-related books and articles and by incorporating the topic into staff meetings. By making arts learning visible throughout the school, the arts can be an integral part of what defines the school’s vision.
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ENDNOTES

7. April 30, 2018,
10. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Essentially, when money is spent on art, it is spent in a way that is both effective and equitable. All students should have access to arts-infused learning, which they can use as a tool to improve engagement and 21st-century skills.
16. C. Examine the use of time and resources.
17. B. Create an arts-rich learning environment.
18. A. Establish a schoolwide commitment to arts learning.

Learning in and through the arts helps develop the essential knowledge, skills and creative capacities all students need to succeed in school, work and life.

As building-level leaders, school principals play a key role in ensuring every student has access to high-quality arts learning and arts education, as defined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, as well as arts education, arts integration, and arts exploration. In preparing this guide, L. Earl Franks and Kaylen Tucker at the National Association of Elementary School Principals, as well as Gendre Boppert and past AEP team members who developed the original document, this report is based upon. Most importantly, this guide would not have been possible without the assistance of the school principals and administrative staff who shared their stories and expertise. AWP is responsible for the content and views represented in this publication.

Visit the AEP website at www.aep-arts.org for references and additional resources.

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