



Dear PTA/O Member:

Your school and district is facing a host of budgetary challenges, in the coming year. You are not alone. Whether it is due to declining enrollment, shortfalls caused by the Legislature's "levy swap," or something else entirely, most of Washington's 295 school districts join you in having some difficult choices ahead. As you look at your programs, staff, and budgets and work hard to do what is best for kids, The Washington Art Education Association would like you to keep some important simple truths in mind.

Comprehensive K-12 Arts Instruction is the best practice for *all* of our kids.

Research has shown that students who receive quality arts instruction, every year, outperform their "arts poor" peers in nearly every way. They read for pleasure more, are more likely to participate in a science fair, more likely to run for class office, be in the honor society, participate in school sports, have far lower drop-out rates, are more likely to graduate on time, and have significantly higher SAT scores. Further study shows that the benefits of a comprehensive, sequential arts education reach beyond graduation. Students with comprehensive sequential instruction in the arts, termed, "high arts," students are three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree, almost twice as likely than their low arts peers to pursue degrees for high-earning professions. They are also more likely to be civilly engaged by seeking news sources on a weekly basis and by participating in elections at a greater rate. All of these rates and statistics include students with low socio-economic status. The translation? The Arts are the strongest, most readily available method we have for closing the achievement gap. We do not need to search outside of our own school and district for the solutions we need. The answers are right in front of us—right there in our own underutilized Arts staff. The benefits of learning in the Arts do not end at high school. The Arts mean business for Washington State. As of 2017, there were 17,642 Arts businesses in our state employing close to 70, 000 people. Those are huge numbers of people making their living, feeding their families, and paying taxes into our economy through their careers in the Arts.

Arts Instruction Is Not Optional Or Extra

Arts instruction is core and basic education in Washington State. It is also one of the essential instructional areas listed in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is our federal education law, under the heading of, **Well-Rounded Education**. Washington State defines Arts as dance, media art, music, theatre, and visual art and calls for students to have opportunities for learning in the arts from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Over the last several years, it has become increasingly common for schools to either do away with formal arts instruction or offer only one of the arts—most often music. The simple truth is that a school offering formal instruction in just music and saying they teach the Arts is no different than a school teaching only biology and telling parents that they adequately teach the sciences. In fact, the ESSA lists Music and Arts, individually, highlighting the fact that instruction in just one Arts area is not sufficient or in keeping with the law. Schools and districts also

often employ a docent program to bring visual art to their students. While it is true that this is better than doing nothing, a docent program which meets perhaps once a month is not the formal instruction in the Arts which is expected by our state and federal legislatures. It is certainly not what you and your children have been promised and deserve. Often, parents are surprised to learn that formal art classes no longer exist in their neighborhood school, especially when voter pamphlets passed out around levy time show pictures of kids painting and contain text describing the need to keep things like athletics and arts alive with your “Yes” vote. Imagine this: Replace the word, “art” before the word “docent” with any other traditionally core subject...math, for example. How open would you or your school or district be to doing away with its math teachers and replacing them with a math docent program? Not at all? Since there is no hierarchy among the core and basic subject areas, marginalizing Arts instruction with a once a month volunteer makes no more sense than it does to do it for math or science or English, etc.

We, at the Washington Art Education Association, don’t think anyone is “out to get” the Arts. We realize that our schools are under tremendous pressure and have finite funding. With that pressure comes difficult decisions for administrators. Surprisingly, many administrators are under informed about the laws and policies for teaching the Arts. Add to that the fact that there are currently no penalties from our state or federal government for not teaching the Arts in an equal, or even equitable, way as the other core disciplines of a well-rounded education, and you have a recipe for disaster for our kids’ Arts education. It may not be an *intentional* attack on Arts, but the result is the same as if it were. Like you, the WAEA wants our children to receive the education they deserve...not the education our schools can get away with giving them.

The Washington Art Education Association has a large, knowledgeable, and very caring membership. We want to partner with you—personally and with your parent organizations. We urge you talk to the certificated Arts teachers in your district. Get their thoughts and feelings on the state of Arts education in your neighborhood school. Make sure the Arts have adequate representation in the process of finding solutions to the difficult problems facing your schools and districts. Whether that is through district budget committees, school master schedule committees, staff & parent forums, or any other of a number of ways—your Arts instructors will be a valuable asset for helping you make sure your school or district keeps the promise of a well-rounded education to all of your students. As an advocacy and professional development organization, the WAEA will do all it can to assist you with any questions you have about policy and best practices. Our door is always open. We are here to help. Let’s do what is right for Washington’s kids—together.

Sincerely-

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Fortune". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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with James Andrews WAEA Advocacy Co-Chair (advocacy@waea.net) and
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on behalf of the Washington Art Education Association and its members