



Dear School Administrators and School Board Members

Your schools and district are facing a host of budgetary challenges for 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 students, 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* 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, are more likely to graduate, and to graduate on time, and have significantly higher SAT scores. Further studies 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 and 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 more likely to vote in elections. 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 schools and districts for achievement gap solutions. 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 visual art education is essential. 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 our parents and kids have been promised and deserve. Replace the word, “art” with any other traditionally core subject...math, for example. How open would 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 realize 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—but don’t you want to give your kids the education they deserve... not the education districts can get away with giving them?

Your Arts Teachers and WAEA Want to Partner with You

The Washington Art Education Association has a large, knowledgeable, and very caring membership. We urge you to include your certificated Arts teachers 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 a number of other ways—your Arts instructors will be a valuable asset for finding ways to meet your responsibilities to 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 "Fortune" with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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