

What School Leaders
Can Do to Increase

ARTS

EDUCATION

ARTS
EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP

naesp[™]
National Association of
Elementary School
Principals



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 and equitable arts learning as part of a well-rounded education. 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.

Each action is supported by low-cost or no-cost strategies that school leaders have used and found effective — whether it's beginning an arts or arts-integration program where none exists, strengthening an existing program or preserving an arts program against future cuts. While many of the strategies are drawn from elementary schools, they are likely to be applicable in a variety of grade levels.

Research confirms that students in schools with arts-rich learning environments academically outperform their peers in arts-poor schools.¹ When included as an integral component of the school day, the arts positively impact student attendance, persistence and engagement; enhance teacher effectiveness; and strengthen parent and community involvement.²

Leaders interested in increasing arts education in America's schools can adopt any of these actions and strategies one at a time or implement several at once. However, when implemented together, the effects may prove more cumulative, mutually reinforcing and sustainable over time.

“It takes principal leadership to set a schoolwide vision of providing students with a well-rounded education that sets them up for success in life ... It's a matter of equity. All students should have access to arts-infused learning, which has proved to be an effective strategy to improve engagement and 21st-century skills.

L. EARL FRANKS

Executive Director, National
Association of Elementary
School Principals

ESTABLISH A SCHOOLWIDE COMMITMENT TO ARTS LEARNING

- 1. Articulate clear goals.** 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 must conduct a needs assessment, identifying areas for improvement to support a well-rounded education.³ Utilizing opportunity-to-learn standards for the arts can help identify gaps in arts education.⁴ Jerry James, director of teaching and learning at the Center for Arts Education, maintains that principals committed to a clear vision of an arts-rich school discover the value of investing time and resources. James reports that these leaders experience better collaboration among educators, innovative teaching practices, robust parent engagement and improved student performance.⁵
- 2. Identify the arts in the budget.** Establishing a budget line item for the arts can further align educational goals and student learning needs. Arts learning approaches may include a combination of strategies — such as hiring arts teachers, purchasing arts supplies or developing partnerships. At Henry J. Kaiser Jr. Elementary School in Oakland, Calif., Principal Dennis Guikema formed strong relationships with county officials and parents to support the arts. “Arts education is a priority at Kaiser, and as such, it is a budget priority, even in tight financial times,” Guikema said, adding that they rely on multiple streams of funding — including funds from the county and PTA, and a Champion Creatively Alive Children grant from NAESP and Crayola. “While it is important to invest in arts, it is also possible to stretch these dollars to maximize the impact.”
- 3. Engage parents.** Parents love to see their children perform and to see students’ artwork, and when actively engaged in school life, they are often willing to do so much more. At some schools, parents provide support to help sustain programs, whether by raising funds, writing grants or volunteering in other activities. The National PTA’s *ArtsEd Leader’s Guide* helps parents work with school leaders to “establish an ArtsEd committee and engage more families in school decision-making, such as improvements to programs, practices and policies.”⁶
- 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 making arts learning visible throughout the school, the arts can be an integral part of what defines the school’s vision. Honoring students’ artistic and creative talents and achievements provides an opportunity to show where arts learning outcomes fit within the school’s overall educational goals.

“Principals who participated in our multi-year research studies report that the arts ‘changed their schools.’ Multiple measures suggest that this is true, which positions them to be effective advocates for innovative and equitable arts education.

JERRY JAMES

Director of Teaching and Learning,
Center for Arts Education

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 math students to improving reading scores and language acquisition among English learners.⁷ Engaging teachers using the arts in instructional practices can spark interest among their peers. At Vandyke Elementary School in Coleraine, Minn., teachers collaborate with a local art studio to develop art experiences integrated with science and social studies. Principal Susan Hoeft shares that “arts integration can happen across all content areas and enhances instruction for our students.”
- 2. Provide arts-based professional development.** Educators who integrate the arts reach students by creating dynamic and engaging lessons that help bolster student thinking skills.⁸ Principals may consider new strategies for professional development, such as asking arts teachers to lead or coordinate professional development or work with external organizations. Research shows that incorporating the arts into curricula increases teacher engagement and satisfaction in schools with significant numbers of economically disadvantaged students.⁹
- 3. Incorporate the arts into staffing and hiring decisions.** When recruiting new educators, develop job descriptions that require arts coursework or experience in integrating the arts. Principals can reinforce the emphasis on using the arts in teaching by making it a part of classroom observations, teacher discussions and the evaluation process. Brian Knippers, principal at Corinth Elementary School in Corinth, Miss., made art a part of the school evaluation model by requiring that lesson plans include art. He explained, “Regardless of the evaluation model set by the district or state, teachers and principals can agree to the importance of art instruction by making it a priority.”
- 4. Involve the local arts community.** Reaching beyond school walls to arts and cultural organizations can produce many lasting benefits. Teaching artists — professional artists from cultural institutions or the community — can play a key role in providing workshops, consultations, assessment techniques and assistance in the development of curricular materials. These partnerships can help infuse schools with rich, comprehensive programs — not simply add-on experiences that come and go with the availability of resources. By being proactive in communicating the benefits of the arts, principals can play a key role in marshalling support from the larger community.

“Arts instruction and arts integration have a tremendous impact on engagement. Students are more excited to attend a school that offers arts instruction alongside and integrated into other content areas. At our school, attendance greatly improved and behavior issues remarkably decreased since we implemented our focus on arts instruction. Arts integration allows greater access to other content areas. Students who struggle with language — for example, English learners or students with disabilities — have greater access to the content when paired with the arts.”

HEATHER ANDERSON

Los Berros Visual and Performing Arts
Academy, Lompoc, Calif.

EXAMINE THE USE OF TIME AND RESOURCES

- 1. Reallocate resources.** Schools may choose to prioritize limited resources to expand access to the arts in education. For example, some principals may consider carving out building funds for arts education or weigh the pros and cons of slightly larger class sizes that would free up more resources for arts teacher positions.
- 2. Tap Title I and II funds.** Schools can use funding under Title I, Part A of ESSA to improve the education program of the entire school, including use of the arts as a strategy to provide all students with opportunities to succeed. Some schools may use Title I funding to create in-school, after-school and summer programs that engage arts-focused learning to help academically at-risk students meet state standards.¹⁰ 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 grant funding, including professional learning opportunities for arts educators and programs using arts-based techniques or arts-integrated strategies to build the capacities of teachers.¹¹
- 3. Adjust schedules and repurpose space.** Rather than have the arts instructor or teaching artist covering another classroom teacher's planning time, principals may want to consider providing an opportunity for arts teachers to meet with teachers 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, combining grade levels and rotating classrooms — to provide daily dedicated arts instruction for a variety of elective content areas, from animation and digital art to orchestra and musical theater. Los Berros also offers outdoor dance classes and plans school activities to ensure that all students have access to the dedicated spaces. The school does not have an art room, but houses art supplies in a common area and includes foundational art supplies in every classroom.
- 4. Use after-school time.** Integrating the arts with other subjects in after-school learning can help reinforce in-school learning or even act as an incubator to explore new teaching strategies that can be expanded to the school day. Research shows positive effects on students' behavior and attitudes after participating in after-school arts programs, including improved arts and social skills and fewer emotional problems.¹² A new provision within Title IV of ESSA, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, provides funding for districts to support well-rounded education opportunities, including arts education programs like these.¹³

Vandyke teachers recognize how important art education and experiences are for our students that live in poverty and/or have experienced trauma. Student engagement increases for many of our students when an art experience is part of the instructional process. 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 our school.

SUSAN HOEFT

Principal, Vandyke Elementary School, Coleraine, Minn.

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

About the Arts Education Partnership

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States 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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ENDNOTES

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