

March 2017

Opportunities for the Arts within Pennsylvania's State ESSA Implementation Plan

Given that ESSA requires states to develop and submit a State Plan to the U.S Department of Education, PA has embarked on a process that explores four key areas of the new federal law:

- 1) Assessment,
- 2) Accountability,
- 3) Educator Certification, and
- 4) Educator Evaluation.

How, then, do other states and PA stakeholders in the arts perceive that provision for arts education, as part of a well-rounded education, should be described in ESSA state plans?

"The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has provided a major opportunity for each state to determine what degree music and arts education are incorporated into federal fund plans at the state and local level. The stage has been set:

- a) Decision-making is occurring at the state level rather than from the federal level,*
- b) State plans are currently under construction thus providing opportunities to have input via state organization, coalitions, and interested like-minded supports, and*
- c) A focus has been place on providing a well-rounded education which, among other subjects, includes music and arts so that all students may have access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience."*

(Neel, March 2017, *Choral Director Magazine*, Vol. 14 No. 2, p. 8)

A review of 19 state draft ESSA plans reveals citations for inclusion of arts education in two of the key areas identified by PA.

Accountability indicators

- a) Equitable access to arts education
- b) Quality of arts programs
- c) Arts integration and STEAM programs
- d) Extent of participation in arts education programs
- e) Instructional minutes in arts education programs
- f) The importance of arts education/integration with respect to school improvement programs, student success and school quality

Educator Certification indicators

- g) Professional development for teachers to assess student achievement in the arts
- h) Professional development for teachers to implement arts integration and STEAM programs

A survey of arts education stakeholders in PA reveals support for inclusion of arts education in PA's key areas as well.

Assessment

- a) Support arts educator in developing assessment literacy for multiple kinds of assessments

Accountability

- b) District level needs assessment should include a measure of access to the arts
- c) District level needs assessment should include data regarding arts specific professional development offerings for arts educators
- d) Include arts educators in district-level planning teams
- e) Encourage districts to include arts Advanced Placement courses as part of local accountability
- f) Insure that arts educators participate in the State Committee of Practitioners advising the creation and implementation of the new regulations
- g) Create a state award (Arts Ribbon) to honor schools that accelerate the arts school wide, patterned after the Green Ribbon schools which honor schools that accelerate environmental issues school wide.
- h) Include questions relating to the arts in any parent, educator or student surveys for accountability at the local level.

Teacher Certification

- i) Districts should allow school release time for arts educators to attend professional development specific to their needs
- j) Provide state level support systems for new teachers in the field
- k) Reinstate the Governor's Institute for Arts Educators as an institute for arts-based learning providing professional development for arts educators, non-arts educators and pre-service teachers.

Teacher Evaluation

- l) Districts should utilize and train administrators in the use of arts-content specific evaluation protocols and observation tools

In comparing these lists, two common themes emerge:

1. Equitable access to quality arts education programs
2. Arts-specific teacher professional development in two areas:
 - a. Arts assessment
 - b. Arts integration/STEAM

While these themes are common between state plans and PA Arts Education interests, they are by no means comprehensive.

For PA to specifically call out the arts in the State ESSA Plan will help LEAs to consider and better understand ways in which monies from Titles I, II and IV can be used to support a well-rounded education.

It is certainly understood at this point in time that the PA Department of Education would not want to make promises that cannot be kept based on the minimal amount of monies for education anticipated from federal and state sources. However, It is important that the PA Department of Education, in its ESSA plan, provide leadership to local school districts toward understanding the importance the arts play in providing a well-rounded education (as defined in ESSA). The PA Department of Education's State Plan will be seen as the model for local school districts' language when including the arts in their ESSA plans.