



*Advancing Art Education*

August 26, 2009

Race to the Top Fund Comments  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 3W329  
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Document ID ED-2009-OESE-0006-0001

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the nation's 90,000 professional visual arts educators, the National Art Education Association offers the following recommendations to strengthen the guidelines for the *Race to the Top Fund*.

Developed by NAEA, professional and content standards for *visual arts education* have been embraced nationally and are used broadly by art educators and school/district leaders who are actively involved with the development and implementation of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment of visual arts programs in America's public schools. The visual arts are essential to a high quality, effective, and balanced education. We share Secretary Duncan's belief that "the arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively."

Visual arts educators fully support and applaud the four core reform priorities identified by Secretary Duncan. However, to ensure equitable student access to a full and balanced education that is relevant to the 21st Century, *all core subject areas must be emphasized equally through these funding initiatives*. Overall, the draft guidelines have the unintended consequence of continuing a historic narrowing of the curriculum, thereby reducing opportunities for students to acquire critical skills in creativity, problem-solving, and innovation through learning in the arts. The development of these skills is increasingly recognized as essential for all students if our schools are to deliver a high-quality, 21st Century education that ensures our nation's ability to successfully compete in a global economy.

Specific recommendations are offered to the following sections:

**1. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)**

*Downgrade STEM from a competitive preference priority to an invitational priority.*

This is essential as competitive preference gives the impression that these are the only core subjects that are priorities for building creativity, innovation, and competitive problem-solving skills. It is widely understood that the arts uniquely provide optimum opportunities for building these skills. The guidelines should make it clear to applicants that the Department of Education encourages and supports the inclusion of *all* core subjects in their plans for reaching these priorities. All too often, the arts are cut from the curriculum when directives recommend a priority for science and math.

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These guidelines should align with Secretary Duncan's August 2009 letter to school leaders reinforcing a belief in and commitment to the importance of arts education. Major initiatives to address these priorities have been supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Model Development and Dissemination Grants Program-Arts in Education.

## **2. Great Teachers and Leaders**

*Implement a balanced scorecard approach to the measurement of teacher and principal quality that considers student achievement in all core academic subjects and includes data from student performance and portfolio assessments as well as state assessments.*

Assessing teachers, principals, and teacher preparation programs based on math and reading standardized tests will continue to cause professionals and institutions to ignore proven reform strategies and important measures of student achievement that include learning in and through the arts and contribute to overall student success. Additional data points should be included in areas such as peer and supervisor observations and school environment.

## **3. Statewide Data Systems**

*Require statewide data systems to gather relevant information for all core academic subjects as defined in ESEA.*

The requirement to create statewide data systems to support instruction is necessary for the continuous improvement of instruction. The systems need to specifically require the gathering of sample data points that also include student enrollment, pupil/teacher ratios, amount of instructional time, budget allocation, subject teacher certification, full time equivalent teacher employment, and/or other measures chosen by the state and significant in the subject area.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

National Art Education Association Executive Committee

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