

A Well-Rounded Education: Mapping Opportunities for the Arts

INTRODUCTION

In 1995, federal law introduced the arts as a part of the definition for “Core Academic Subjects.” With the adoption of ESSA in 2015, the term core academic subjects was replaced with a new term, “Well-Rounded Education,” and expanded from nine to 17 subjects – including the arts and music. Appearing more than 20 times throughout the law, a well-rounded education opens many doors to expand the arts learning opportunities for students across the country. This report provides information on where a well-rounded education is found in ESSA and explores how the arts can be engaged in the ESSA implementation.

Call-Out Box

A Well-Rounded Education

“The term ‘well-rounded education’ means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience.” (ESSA, Title VIII, Section 8002)

MAPPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ARTS

District Title I Plans – Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 1006 – A district seeking funding under Title I, Part A, must submit a plan to the state educational agency for approval that outlines how it intends to identify and address inequities in education to close the achievement gap across the district. Focused on ensuring all students are able to meet the state’s academic standards, these plans must include a description of how the district will provide a well-rounded education that meets the academic needs of all its students.

Opportunities for the Arts: The arts – as a part of a well-rounded education – can be included in the overviews of the educational programs that districts will provide. In particular, a district may include a description of arts education programming, its contribution to ensuring a student receives a well-rounded education, and how it will support success for all students.

Schoolwide Programs – Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 1008 – Schools with more than 40 percent of students coming from low-income families can establish a schoolwide program to improve the overall educational opportunities of the school. Based on a needs assessment of the school, these schoolwide improvement programs can include, among others, counseling, workforce development opportunities, and curricular improvements to strengthen student achievement. Districts also have the opportunity to integrate courses and programs that provide a well-rounded education into the school’s curriculum.

Opportunities for the Arts: As was the case under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ESSA’s predecessor, the arts may be included in the plans for schoolwide programs. The appropriate programs will vary based on the needs assessment conducted for a school but may include arts courses that expand the curriculum or co-curricular arts programs that engage students in the school and can strengthen school climate and culture.

Targeted Assistance Schools – Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 1009 – For schools that are not eligible for schoolwide programs, districts can institute plans to address the needs of specific groups of disadvantaged students. Funding for targeted assistance schools can be used to implement programs or classes that provide a well-rounded education for the identified student populations. These programs can be during the traditional school day, afterschool, or as part of summer learning opportunities.

Opportunities for the Arts: Unlike previous versions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), ESSA opens the door for districts to use the arts and other well-rounded education subjects as strategies for helping specific groups of students in targeted assistance schools. This could include the inclusion of arts courses in the school day, an afterschool “maker’s program” integrating the arts into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learning, or summer arts programs that extend learning beyond the traditional school year.

Title II Grants – Title II, Section 2002 – The purpose of the funding provided under Title II, Part A, is to ensure that all students have access to teachers and school leaders that can help them achieve the state’s academic standards. This includes a broad range of programs and practices such as professional development opportunities that increase the capacity for all educators – including arts educators – to support student success. In addition, ESSA includes programs to increase a teacher’s effectiveness in helping students succeed in a well-rounded education as a part of the definition for “professional development.”

Opportunities for the Arts: ESSA opens up multiple opportunities for including the arts in Title II grant funding. For example, districts may use Title II funds to establish professional learning opportunities for arts educators to further student academic success. In addition, because ESSA includes helping students succeed in a well-rounded education as a goal of professional development, districts can develop programs using arts-based techniques or arts-integrated strategies to build the capacity of teachers.

Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation – Title II, Section 2002 – Under this new program in ESSA, districts have the opportunity to apply for funding to support the development or improvement of a comprehensive literacy plan. As part of the application to the state, districts must provide a description on how they will integrate literacy into the provision of a well-rounded education. In particular, districts that are awarded a grant for students in 6th through 12th grade can use the funds to assess how well literacy is incorporated into a well-rounded education and provide opportunities for teachers to plan for the inclusion of literacy within the well-rounded education.

Opportunities for the Arts: Districts are able to include plans to help educators within the well-rounded subjects – including the arts – to integrate literacy as a component of their instruction. For instance, this could include professional learning opportunities to strengthen an arts educator’s ability to use content area-specific readings to build student literacy while also addressing the teacher’s arts-specific educational objectives such as a music teacher using readings to both help improve reading skills and increase the students’ awareness of the cultural and historical significance of a particular piece.

Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants – Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1 – A new provision within ESSA is the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, which provide funding for districts to support well-rounded education opportunities, safe and healthy students, and the effective use of technology. To receive a grant, districts must conduct a needs assessment to identify gaps within each of these areas and submit an application to the state outlining the programs and initiatives that the district will use to address those gaps.

Opportunities for the Arts: Depending on the gaps identified in the needs assessment, this new grant program makes available multiple opportunities for the arts in education across all three of the grant's priority areas:

- Well-Rounded Education Opportunities – As a defined component of a well-rounded education, arts education programs are clearly eligible as a part of the Well-Rounded Education Opportunities portion of these grants. Included in this priority area are opportunities for arts courses, programs that integrate the arts into other subject areas (such as STEM) and programs that focus on addressing student engagement and school culture.
- Safe and Healthy Students – In addition, the arts can be included in strategies to help ensure that schools help keep students safe and healthy. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's [ESSA Title IV, Part A Guidance – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program](#) identified trauma recovery programs that utilize the arts as a therapeutic measure as a potential activity.
- Effective Use of Technology – Although not specifically identified within the law, the broad language used for this priority area may include opportunities for arts educators. This could be in the form of professional development for arts educators to better utilize technology in the classroom or implement blended learning strategies.

21st Century Community Learning Centers – Title IV, Part B, Section 4203 – The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is designed to ensure all students are provided enriching learning opportunities to help them succeed in their education. Through this competitive grant program, states provide funding to districts and community organizations to provide additional learning opportunities including activities that support a well-rounded education.

Opportunities for the Arts: Not only are the arts included within the definition for a well-rounded education, but the arts and music are specifically identified as eligible activities for 21st Century Community Learning Centers to undertake in order to enrich the educational opportunities of students – particularly those from low-income families. This means that districts, community organizations, and other eligible organizations can include arts education programming as part of their applications to the state's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Program.

Call-Out Box

STEAM: Arts Integration & a Well-Rounded Education

With the passage of ESSA, federal policy has placed a new emphasis on the importance of a well-rounded education in helping address the academic needs of all students. In addition, ESSA emphasizes the beneficial role an integrated curriculum – one in which educational experiences in one subject can further learning objectives in another subject area – can have in schools.

This focus on integrating across subjects provides numerous opportunities for the arts in education – particularly in the area known as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), which is specifically referenced in the law. As research has shown, the integration of the arts into other subjects – such as integrating music and the principles of sound into physics class, the role of visual art in culture into social studies, the storytelling of drama into literacy instruction or the expression of dance and movement into communications classes – can have a profound effect on engaging students in the classroom, support student success across the curriculum and strengthen educator effectiveness.¹

Call-Out Box

Questions to Consider: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

1) *State Requirements*

- What requirements are included in the state's application process for districts?
- How much has the state been allocated for this grant program?
- Who at the state education agency is leading the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant program?

2) *Needs Assessment*

- Who is leading the needs assessment process for my district? Who is leading the development of the application to the state?
- What is the process for conducting the needs assessment? How are the arts included in the needs assessment?
- Who is engaged in the needs assessment process? Is there an advisory or working group in which I can participate?
- How much has been allocated to my district for this grant program? Are there opportunities to leverage funding from other federal, state or local funding streams to carry this work out?
- What are the priorities identified by the needs assessment?

3) *Opportunities/Roles for the Arts*

- Within my district's identified priorities, what are the opportunities for arts or arts-integrated learning?
- Is there evidence of the role the arts can play in addressing the priorities of my district? (Visit [ArtsEdSearch.org](https://www.artsedsearch.org) for a clearinghouse of research on the outcomes of arts education.)
- Are there models that other states/districts have employed to use the arts to address these priorities? How can those examples be incorporated into my district? (Visit [ArtScan](https://www.artscan.org) for a database of arts education policies across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.)

4) *District Implementation*

- Who is leading the implementation of the programs identified for this grant program?
- Is there an advisory or working group that continues to monitor progress? Is there a process for continued stakeholder engagement?
- How are the programs being evaluated and updated?

RESEARCH FROM ARTSESEARCH.ORG

[Closing the Achievement Gap](#). Studies find that arts education engages students who are often underserved in public schools – including students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, English language learners (ELLs) and students with special needs – and that these students do better in arts-rich schools than in schools that do not have robust arts programs. These students also show the greatest relative improvement in academic achievement when participating in the arts, though they are least likely to have access to arts learning. Studies further find that arts-integrated instruction offers alternative avenues for students to access information and learn in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics and may be more effective than traditional remedial programs, thus offering a resource in helping to close the achievement gap.

[Literacy and Language Development.](#) Research show a positive link between learning in the arts, particularly drama, and the development of skills in literacy, reading comprehension and language acquisition. In early childhood, arts activities such as theater prepare students for achievement in reading and writing by increasing and refining oral language skills and story-understanding. Drama and visual art-integrated literacy programs at the middle and high school levels have been connected to increases in the use of complex language and expressive ability. This positive impact of arts-integrated instruction on literacy development is especially strong for ELLs.

[School Climate and Culture.](#) Research demonstrates that arts-centered initiatives can improve school climate and culture and connect schools to families and communities. For instance, schools with extensive arts education opportunities have students who think more positively about and engage in classroom activities, have better student and teacher attendance, and maintain teacher satisfaction with and engagement in their work. In addition, arts education participation encourages parental and community engagement through attendance at school performances, community events and programs, and opportunities for volunteering.

[Student Engagement and Motivation.](#) Multiple research studies spanning the education system from prekindergarten through high school suggest that arts education supports development in the engagement, attention, motivation and persistence necessary for students to succeed independently in college and the workforce. Sustained attention and engagement in learning or in completing tasks are vital skills for college and the workforce, when students must work independently to complete work and succeed at discrete projects. Arts education can teach students how to turn barriers into opportunities, to persist in the face of challenges and motivate students to achieve mastery of skills.

[Teacher Engagement and Retention.](#) In addition, research finds that arts education can have a valuable effect on teaching, renewing the excitement that teachers feel for their profession and preventing the teacher burnout that is endemic to low-performing schools. Research also shows that teachers in K-12 schools who integrate the arts into their curricula find their teaching becomes increasingly dynamic and effective, are more engaged in and satisfied with their teaching, and exhibit lower rates of absenteeism.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESOURCES

[Notice of Final Regulation: Title I, Part A](#)

[Notice of Final Regulation: Title I, Part B](#)

[Fact Sheet for Final Regulations: Title I, Part A and Part B](#)

[Final Regulation: Accountability, State Plans, and Data Reporting](#)

[ESSA Title IV, Part A Guidance – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program](#)

To be expanded...

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH & RESOURCES

[ArtScan](#) – Arts Education Partnership

[ArtsEdSearch.org](#) – Arts Education Partnership

[ESSA' Well-Rounded Education](#) – Education Commission of the States

[ESSA Implementation and Music Education: Opportunities Abound](#) – National Association for Music Education

[Music Education for All Students](#) – League of American Orchestras

To be expanded...

¹ Burnaford, G., Brown, S., Doherty, J., & McLaughlin H.J. (2007). *Arts integration Frameworks, Research & Practice: A literature review*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.