

August 19, 2021

The Honorable Dr. Miguel A. Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We write as national arts and educational organizations to thank you for your leadership and for your often-voiced and personally demonstrated commitment to arts education. We stand ready to offer you every opportunity to use your bully pulpit for arts education and to spread your broader message on correcting unacceptable disparities in access, opportunity, and outcomes.

**As you know, disparities in arts education exist to a distressing extent.** It is all the more difficult for children to – in your words - “share their gifts and talents with the world” when they lack the opportunity to develop those gifts and talents in the first place. We also appreciate the comments of U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten during the June 22 U.S. Department of Education equity summit, in which she said, “The arts matter because we can’t talk about equitable learning experiences without investment in the arts and having our students have access to the arts. Equity lives there, as well.” We believe the Department of Education could take several steps to help rectify these inequities through better data and assessments, clearer communication with state and local officials, and engagement of senior staff.

**Data:**

**We ask that the Department of Education commit to data collection regarding access to arts education and student learning in the arts.** Insufficient gathering of quality data and assessments buttresses inequity in arts education. The 2009–2010 U.S. Department of Education Fast Response Statistical Survey (FRSS) — the most recent federal data collected regarding access to arts learning — found that schools with a higher concentration of students in poverty were less likely to offer arts education. These huge, persistent disparities in access to arts education, particularly in dance, theatre, and media arts, deserve data transparency to prompt action and change. Another FRSS for the arts, inclusion of the arts in the annual School and Staffing survey and other routine U.S. Department of Education data collection instruments, and the reinstatement of the arts on the calendar of the National Assessment of Educational Progress would all offer improvement.

**Communication:**

**We ask that the Department of Education issue a letter to state Title I Directors, Chief State School Officers, and Secretaries of Education specifying the eligibility of arts education for use of Title I funds.** The arts have been included for decades in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as important subjects of learning, and they are an eligible use of Title I funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Nevertheless, we hear too many instances of local education agency officials believing the contrary, as the data cited above bears out.

**Staffing:**

**We ask that the Department of Education create staff leadership positions to advise on the arts and art learning.** The Department of Education maintains several small grant programs for arts education, but there is currently no leadership or advisory position for arts education experts who can help fuel innovation in areas beyond these programs' relatively narrow focus. As well as advising on arts and arts learning strategies relevant to ESSA implementation, such as Title I, Title II, the Assistance for Arts Education Fund, Title IV-A Student Support and Academic Enrichment resources, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, such a staffer (or staffers) could explore the role of the arts across the Department's programs including civil rights, special education, English language learning, and the White House Initiatives, with a special emphasis on equity.

These requests are just a few near-term steps the U.S. Department of Education could take to advance equitable delivery of arts education as a more complete commitment to arts learning for all students is embraced at the federal level. We stand ready to discuss these and other longer-term actions, and we look forward to partnering with you as the Department leads our nation's education systems through the next school year of recovery and beyond.

Again, thank you for your support of arts education in Meriden and in the state of Connecticut. We have every faith that you will continue the work, with an even stronger focus on correcting inequity, in your new position. The undersigned organizations stand ready to partner with any and all efforts to incorporate the arts in federal education policy.

**Arts Letter to Secretary Cardona (July 2021)  
Signatories as of August 18, 2021**

American Alliance for Theatre & Education  
Americans for the Arts  
ArtPride New Jersey  
Arts Alliance Illinois  
Arts Ed NJ  
Arts Education in Maryland Schools  
Arts North Carolina  
Arts South Dakota  
ArtsEd Washington  
Association of Art Museum Directors  
Association of Performing Arts Professionals  
California Arts Advocates  
Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning  
Chamber Music America  
Create CA  
Dance/USA  
Educational Theatre Association  
Folk Alliance International  
Kansas Alliance for Arts in Education  
Kentuckians for the Arts  
League of American Orchestras  
Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education  
NAMM  
National Art Education Association (NAEA)  
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies  
National Association for Music Education  
National Dance Education Organization  
North Carolina Art Education Association  
The North Carolina Chapter of the American Strings Teacher Association  
North Carolina Dance Education Organization  
North Carolina Theatre Arts Educators  
North Carolina Theatre Conference  
Oklahomans for the Arts  
OPERA America  
Performing Arts Alliance  
Progressive Arts Education Coalition  
Quadrant Research  
Recording Academy  
South Carolina Arts Alliance  
State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE)  
Theatre Communications Group  
Vermont Arts Council  
Western State Arts Federation (WESTAF)  
Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts  
Young Audiences Arts for Learning