

ARIZONA

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS' STATE POLICY PILOT PROGRAM (SP₃)

Arizona has been selected, after applying on a competitive basis, to be one of ten (10) pilot states to participate in Americans for the Arts' comprehensive national campaign to advance arts education, the [State Policy Pilot Program](#) (SP₃).

Arizona's SP₃ Team will facilitate an action plan for the development and implementation of an arts education policy strategy for a 3-year period. Americans for the Arts will provide in-depth, customized, technical assistance and \$10,000 each year to assist Arizona in successfully creating its plan and achieving its planned goals. To ensure that best practices will be developed, both in the state and nationally, the team will attend an annual symposium to share learning with other state teams, participate annually in a meeting of the State Arts Advocacy Network, and produce a final report, outlining what worked and did not work during participation in the pilot program. These final report/case studies will be turned into policy development tools for the field.



Funding and implementing existing state policies would improve the access of all students to arts education.
[credit: Arizona Commission on the Arts]

In Arizona, the barriers to advancing arts education are not with policy per se, but in the [gaps between policy and implementation](#). Arts education policies addressing appropriate teacher certification, elementary and high school graduation requirements, and standards have been "on the books" for more than half a century. Implementation, however, is uneven and the policies themselves are vulnerable, given state politics and local decision making. Maintaining arts education access and quality for all Arizona students will require [organized collaboration](#) and [well networked advocacy](#), as well as access to models of how various communities around the state support arts education and how arts learning is delivered.

One challenge derives from the need in many school districts to seek [voter-approved budget overrides](#) to access funds from property taxes in order to fulfill public education goals. The law allows approval of up to a 15% increase in capital, operations and maintenance budgets for up to seven years. Override approval rates vary greatly from district to district; in 2015, half of the districts with bond issues or overrides on a ballot had experienced a previous defeat within the past decade. Because it has become common practice to list explicitly the education activities that will not be funded if an [override fails](#), the general resistance of voters to overrides in a given district can mistakenly be [interpreted as an expression of low value for the activities](#) listed by school officials, which may include the hiring of new teachers, the extension of kindergarten to a full day – or offering education in the arts. Arts education leaders cite the instance of a district with a strong history of investment in



AZ SP3 activities facilitate the effective collaboration of arts education stakeholder groups.
[credit: Arizona Citizens for the Arts]

music instruction and instrument purchase losing arts education classes because its override failed. In another district, students who started band instruction in the 5th grade did not have the option of continued instruction the next year when the override failed. Their families then had to consider the financial cost of private instruction and the transportation challenges of private lessons or public arts instruction in another school. [Economically disadvantaged districts are less likely than more affluent districts to provide arts education to their students.](#)

Another challenge that has emerged is [the recent rescission of the long-standing public university arts education admission requirement](#). An opportunity to address this issue is imminent as state education policy makers have scheduled review of higher education admission

requirements. Additionally, school “report card” criteria are slated for review in the context of the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act and effective advocacy could be a factor in [determining whether access to or participation in arts education will bear on a school's grade.](#)

Consequently, the Arizona SP3 team plans to use the three-year pilot program to strengthen the capacity of the state’s well-established arts education stakeholder groups to implement long-standing policies at the local level. The action plan will focus on:

- connecting and organizing the state’s arts education advocacy networks;
- building out the Voter Voice software of Arizona Citizens for the Arts to include school district overlays; and,
- ensuring that the inclusion of arts education in a school’s “well rounded” curriculum for all students is rewarded in the state’s accountability model for schools

Key outcome objectives include:

1. an influential network of stakeholders capable of establishing quality arts education among the state’s top education priorities
2. a statewide education community committed to arts education for all students
3. voter information produced and advocacy updates available school district by school district
4. candidate questionnaires produced, administered and results made available
5. a communication plan with effective messages to motivate stakeholders and a broad public constituency to advance arts education policies and practices

Since 2006, strong policy language has mandated arts learning for Arizona students. The Arizona Administrative Code provides:

- Music and the visual arts are included among the “Essential Skills” subjects for which students shall demonstrate competency, as defined by local governing boards, in the state-board adopted standards, prior to 8th grade promotion.

- District instructional programs “shall include an ongoing assessment of student progress toward meeting the competency requirements” in music and the visual arts.
- While not required, “Performing Arts” and “practical arts” are specifically mentioned as optional additional subjects that may be offered by local governing boards.
- For high school graduation, students are required to obtain at least one credit of “fine arts or vocational education.”
- Arizona public university admission standards require one unit of fine arts or any combination of 2 semesters of fine arts.

In addition, in 2006, the Arizona Board of Education determined:

- The Arizona Academic Standards in the Arts provide guidance on what a student should know and be able to do in all four arts disciplines: dance, music, theatre and visual arts. Every student should receive arts instruction through the intermediate level in all art forms, as well as reach an advanced level in at least one art form prior to graduation from high school.

In 2010, the Arizona Arts Education Census Project established baseline data on the availability, quality and achievement levels of art learning throughout the state. Findings revealed significant gaps between mandated policies and school realities. The most important overall findings were:

- Only 55% of Arizona schools provided the required instruction in music and visual art.
- Only 56% of Arizona schools implement the states arts standards via updated curriculum.
- The majority (53%) of schools only assessed student learning in the arts informally.

Additional findings included:

- 21% of schools making up 13% of AZ students reported no arts classes available for students.
- More than 134,203 AZ students attended schools every day with no access to arts education taught by a highly qualified teacher.
- 34% of rural AZ schools did not have a highly qualified arts teacher.
- Only 34% of elementary or middle schools used certified arts specialists for dance or theatre.

Furthermore, arts education in Arizona was characterized by being undervalued and underfunded:

- Only 39% of schools weighted arts courses equally with other academic subjects
- 50% of schools reported a budget of \$0 for curricular support in arts education.
- 79% reported spending less than 1\$ per-pupil per year or less than 1/2 of 1 cent per day.

Arizona’s SP3 Team views it as critical to engage the state’s most influential associations of educators and schools. They note that Arizona has more than 500 active charters serving 22% of the state’s school-age children.

For additional information and to participate in Arizona SP3 activities, please contact:

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Americans for the Arts' State Policy Pilot Program (SP3)

A three-year, 50-state initiative with a 10-state pilot component, the State Policy Pilot Program is meant to influence the implementation of federal mandates and programs around arts education at the state level, expand support for arts education policy and funding, and impact local access to arts programs and instruction for students. Through a set of data collection efforts, state-level capacity building, and the convening of a network for knowledge sharing and collective action, the State Policy Pilot Program will strengthen arts education nationally by improving state policy.

For more information, visit: www.AmericansForTheArts.org/SP3.