

May 10, 2011

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan,

Thank you for your open letter to America's teachers. We appreciate that you want to work with us and that you respect our opinions. Therefore, we would like to bring a few items to your attention on behalf of the music education community.

As you know, local budget cuts are leading to significant curtailment of school music programs, thereby depriving millions of students of an education that includes music. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, this erosion has been taking place for decades. It is absolutely imperative that the arts remain a core academic subject as designated by ESEA, and music is an essential element of the arts.

In your letter, you mentioned that you have met many teachers who are willing to be held accountable for outcomes over which they have some control. We agree wholeheartedly. We urge you to work with your colleagues in the United States Congress to ensure that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides a reasonable relationship among music teacher responsibility, state and local curricular control, and accountability.

Every student in the United States should have the opportunity to reap the benefits of a high quality music education experience, including curricular offerings in choir, band and orchestra, as well as broader engagements for the general school population. While we are thrilled about the upcoming release of the new complete Fast Response Statistical Survey (FRSS) on the arts, eleven years is far too long to wait for information that is crucial to the national state of music and arts education.

Therefore, we ask that the Department of Education engage in the collection of robust data on the presence of music programs across the nation so that Americans can be assured that our students are receiving a well-rounded education, and so that music advocates can better understand how to apply their resources. Comprehensive questions about music education should be included in the Department's routine Schools and Staffing, Teacher Follow-up, and Principal Follow-up surveys. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts should be implemented once every five years.

Music education provides students with the opportunity to develop creativity and to hone skills that will benefit them throughout the rest of their lives. In addition to its inherent cultural value, music teaches everything from coordination to self-discipline, and provides a variety of unique avenues for intellectual growth. Music and the other arts are among society's most compelling and effective pathways for ensuring 21st century readiness for every student. These skills include the 4 Cs: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity & innovation, and are gained through sequential music instruction. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to express thoughts on behalf of the music education community.

Sincerely,

The National Association for Music Education – MENC
American String Teachers Association
League of American Orchestras
Music Publisher Association of the United States
Music Teachers National Association
National Guild for Community Arts Education
National Office for Arts Accreditation