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Art Education

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Organizations Voice Support for Art Education

The current renaissance in art education began over a decade ago with the back-to-basics movement. Many states passed legislation mandating that state education agencies review the curriculum to determine what subjects are essential to a child's education. As a result, the three Rs were re-emphasized, and the arts gained fresh relevance as a basic course of study in a balanced curriculum.

Instructional leaders, professional organizations, and private foundations have become increasingly committed to the visual arts in education and have produced a number of reports and studies. Among these, the Getty Trust's *Beyond Creating: The Place for Art in America's Schools*¹ has received widespread and serious attention. The report recommends a discipline-based approach to art education consisting of art production, art history, criticism, and aesthetics. As the debate over the proper content and approach to art education continues, instructional leaders at all levels are joining art educators in lively discussion of the purposes of art education in schools.

In addition, numerous organizations have voiced support for arts education.² Many of them also support *Quality Art Education: Goals for Schools*,³ a statement of the National Art Education Association that emphasizes three major goals for art education.

1. *All elementary and secondary schools shall require students to complete a sequential program of art instruction that integrates the study of art production, aesthetics, art criticism, and art history.* Two subsidiary goals are for art instruction to be

conducted by teachers certified in art and for visual arts courses to be required at *all* levels. Nine states now mandate certified art educators in grades K-12. More states need to recognize that specialists in art are essential to a child's education as they are in music, physical education, or reading. Also, visual communication skills do not cease to be important when a child completes elementary school and then regain relevancy when a child reaches high school. Too many junior high and middle school students are being deprived of a visual arts education.

2. *For graduation from high school, every student shall be required to complete at least one year of credit in one of the fine arts.* The National Art Education Association states that "although one year of visual arts instruction is not sufficient to ensure the rich learnings one could gain from a complete program in art," one quality course of study in the visual arts could give "students insight into how art affects and influences their lives." Effectively planned, such a course of study could "help students interpret the visual material they encounter daily and make decisions about visual experiences that are based on understanding and knowledge. . . . Visual illiteracy is as inexcusable as is verbal or mathematical illiteracy; society needs citizens whose awareness of the quality of their visual surroundings is such that they will strive throughout their lives to improve it and enhance it." Twenty-three states now require art as a part of high school graduation requirements, and more are expected to follow suit. According to the National Art Education Association, an acceptable course of study in the visual arts should include in-depth study in the techniques

of at least one art medium; practice in several media; and studies in art history, aesthetics, and criticism.

3. *For admission to a college or university, every student shall be required to have at least one year of credit in the visual arts.* The college board considers the arts to be one of the six "basic academic subjects" valuable to a high school student's preparation for college. Although only four states now mandate or recommend the arts as a basic academic subject for preparation for college, a number of states have proposals under consideration. □

1. Getty Center for Education in the Arts, *Beyond Creating: The Place for Art in America's Schools* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1985). Educators may receive a complimentary copy of the report by writing to: The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1875 Century Park East, Suite 2300, Los Angeles, CA 90067-2561.

2. These organizations include the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council for Basic Education, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of State Arts Agencies, National Commission on Excellence in Education, National Conference of State Legislators, National Endowment for the Arts, National Parent-Teacher Association, and the National School Boards Association.

3. National Art Education Association. *Quality Art Education: Goals for Schools, An Interpretation* (Reston, Va.: National Art Education Association, 1986). Educators may purchase single copies for \$2 by writing to NAEA, 1916 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091.

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