

*The Critical Link* is a quarterly newsletter featuring articles and resources on emerging issues related to arts education and promising practices from AEP's partnering organizations.

## Message from the Director, Richard Deasy

Congress has begun the process of reviewing the *No Child Left Behind Act* to determine what the reauthorized version of the law will look like. Major education associations and commissions are weighing in on both sides of the question whether the requirements of the law should be tightened and strengthened or made more flexible. Recall that some 61 arts and education organizations have signed on in support of recommendations to enhance arts education in the law. See the reference below to that "Unified Statement" and how to access it. While attention focuses on the law, other major reports are being issued that call for a much broader reconsideration of how education and learning should be pursued in the 21st century. Two of these are cited below: *Tough Choices or Tough Times* and *A New Day for Learning*. Both provide additional arguments for the central importance of the arts in education, society, the economy, and civic life. Both will be controversial, urging major restructuring of schooling and a greater integration of learning in school and learning in the community: concerns that have been addressed in recent AEP national forums and will be again when we meet in Oklahoma City in June.

## Federal Arts and Education Updates

On January 29, 2007, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released specific recommendations to strengthen and update the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the "No Child Left Behind" Act. CCSSO is calling on Congress to update and strengthen ESEA through a set of core recommendations which do the following: promote innovative models and reinvent the peer review process; improve accountability determinations; differentiate consequences; improve assessment systems; properly include students with disabilities and English language learners in state assessment and accountability systems; enhance teacher quality; and strengthen resources to appropriately reflect the increased roles and responsibilities placed on states. Please visit [http://www.ccsso.org/whats\\_new/Press\\_Releases/9575.cfm](http://www.ccsso.org/whats_new/Press_Releases/9575.cfm) for more information.

As part of an on-going strategy to communicate the benefits of arts education to policymakers, the national arts education advocacy community developed a unified statement, *Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life*. The statement is an advocacy tool for communicating the benefits of arts education to policymakers at all levels as federal lawmakers begin the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The reauthorization process will be a multi-year effort and has already begun with public and private hearings and town-hall meetings. The messages outlined in *Arts Education: Creating Student Success in School, Work, and Life* also provides talking points for individuals and organizations weighing in during these early days of the reauthorization debate. Please visit <http://www.aep-arts.org/new/index.htm>.

The U.S. Department of Education is pleased to announce the newly remodeled and updated Federal Resources for Education Excellence (FREE) website. It now provides richer, more expansive resources to teachers and students alike. There are over 1500 resources to take advantage of at FREE, ranging from primary historical documents, lesson plans, science visualizations, math simulations and online challenges, paintings, photos, mapping tools, and more. This easily accessible information is provided by federal organizations and agencies such as the Library of Congress, National Archives, NEH, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian, NSF, and NASA. Check it out today at <http://www.free.ed.gov/>

## Partnership Updates

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) recently hosted a national forum focused on a core question: *What are we learning about the role of the arts in system-wide and whole-school improvement?* The forum began by looking at the systemic effects to date in the forum's host city of Dallas, TX, and the comprehensive plan of the city for moving forward. For example, The Wallace Foundation recently awarded a three-year, \$8 million grant to help establish the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative (DALI). Joining major funders and arts and education community leaders, Dallas School Superintendent Dr. Michael Hinajosa expressed his support for arts in district-wide improvement.

A second major plenary looked at the efforts of other funders throughout the country to bring about systemic change in other school districts and the role the arts might play in those efforts. Discussions examined the theories, strategies, and experiences of funders, education leaders, and practitioners in communities across the nation. Please visit [http://www.aep-arts.org/forums/reports\\_archive.htm](http://www.aep-arts.org/forums/reports_archive.htm) to download the forum agenda and breakout descriptions, plus two of the plenary powerpoint presentations!

**The next AEP forum will be June 10–11, 2007, in Oklahoma City, OK.** Attendees will be able to register online at <http://www.aep-arts.org/forums/registration.htm> in May.

## Featured AEP Publication—*Making A Case for the Arts*

### ***Making a Case for the Arts: How and Why the Arts are Critical to Student Achievement and Better Schools (2006)***

This brochure describes the benefits of arts education based on new research published by the Arts Education Partnership and can be used for many advocacy purposes. The research from *Third Space: When Learning Matters* and *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement* are highlighted in this brochure.

Copies are available for \$.25 plus shipping and handling, with a minimum purchase of 20 copies. Please visit [http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication\\_id=25](http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication_id=25) for more information.

## Partnership Updates (Continued)

**Arts for Academic Achievement**, a program of the Minneapolis Public Schools that improves education in and through the arts for over 9,000 students each year, is the recipient of this year's Sally Ordway Irvine Award in Education. The Sally Ordway Irvine Award program, established in 1992 by the noted philanthropist whose name it bears, recognizes organizations, programs, and individuals who make a valuable community difference through their contributions to the region's artistic and cultural resources. Arts for Academic Achievement was cited in the Education category for "its significant impact on education in the arts contribution to increasing knowledge about the arts throughout the community."

Since 1997, Arts for Academic Achievement has integrated the arts into the education of thousands of students in Minneapolis Public Schools, propelling them to greater success in school. The program is noteworthy for its role as a state and national model for how collabora-

tive projects between artists and teachers can weave the arts into the core curriculum and prove an enormous impact on education. For more information about Arts for Academic Achievement, contact: Uve Hamilton, Program Manager, at [Uve.Hamilton@mpls.k12.mn.us](mailto:Uve.Hamilton@mpls.k12.mn.us).

The Arts Education Partnership staff works closely with the **State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education** (SEADAE) when updating State Policy Database each year. SEADAE consists of those persons at state education agencies whose responsibility is quality, comprehensive, sequential, standards-based education in the arts (Dance, Music, Theater and Visual Arts) for all students PreK-20. Their mission is to support the professional effectiveness of individual members and provide a collective voice for leadership on issues affecting arts education. If you have specific questions regarding your state arts education policies, please visit their website at <http://www.seadae.org>.

## Spotlight on Research

**From Anecdote to Evidence: Assessing the Status and Condition of Arts Education at the State Level** (2006) Without solid evidence about the status and condition of arts education in the nation's public schools, it is difficult to make a convincing case for the arts. This research and policy brief draws on the experiences of five states — Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington — as the basis for a discussion of various approaches and methodologies for conducting state-wide arts education research. Please visit [http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication\\_id=24](http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication_id=24) for more information.

The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce — a bipartisan panel of former Cabinet secretaries and governors, federal and state education officials and business and civic leaders — created **Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce** (2006) to chart a course for the United States in a much more complicated global economy. The final report makes the case that America's economic preeminence hinges on the preeminence of our educational system. Unfortunately, America has been lagging behind on key educational indicators for quite some time. Nothing short of radical change will turn the situation around. The final report proposes a restructuring of educational priorities that will have a major impact on all levels of education — from preschool to college and beyond. Please visit <http://skillscommission.org/> for more information.

A January 2007 report, **A New Day for Learning**, suggests that access to quality educational opportunities throughout the day, as well as year round, is crucial to helping school-age children—and their families and communities—succeed in an increasingly complex and global society.

The report is based on findings of the Time, Learning and Afterschool Task Force. The Task Force, formed in 2004 with the support by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, is exploring how the afterschool field can help rethink issues of student time and learning. Members include policymakers, researchers and afterschool practitioners, as well as leaders from the business, education and philanthropic sectors.

Dr. Milton Goldberg, an educational consultant and member of the Task Force, notes that children today are

shaped by a world of rapidly changing technology and cultural diversity. These forces, he says, along with rising academic requirements, require that schools and communities reconsider how time and resources are used to educate youth.

"Learning doesn't begin and end at the school door, and the processes that support it must be more timeless, cutting across hours and organizations," says Goldberg. "The future well-being of our young people, and even our country, requires a new conception of the learning day."

Specifically, the Task Force report calls for federal, state and local policies that support the exploration and redesign of the nation's learning system, including the structure of the traditional school day and academic year.

A new system, the Task Force asserts, should:

- redefine—beyond the acquisition of basic skills—the meaning of student success;
- be based on research of how children most effectively learn;
- integrate various approaches to acquiring and reinforcing knowledge;
- collaborate across communities and government bodies; and
- ensure leadership roles and professional development opportunities for those involved in teaching and managing the learning system.

To read the full press release, full report, and see a video presentation, please visit [http://www.edutopia.org/php/article.php?id=Art\\_1769](http://www.edutopia.org/php/article.php?id=Art_1769).

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## News from the Field

On March 12–13, 2007, the arts advocacy community is holding their annual **Arts Advocacy Day** on Capitol Hill. Entering its 20<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, Arts Advocacy Day is the only national event designed to bring together a broad cross-section of America's national cultural and civic organizations. These groups will join hundreds of grassroots advocates from across the country to underscore the importance of developing strong public policies and appropriating increased public funding for the arts and arts education.

For more information, please visit <http://ww3.artsusa.org/events/2007/aad/default.asp>.

Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, in a New Yorker magazine article ([http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/070108fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/070108fa_fact)) adopts a distinction from the economist Gregory Treverton between "puzzles" and "mysteries". The distinction could be used to describe efforts to improve schools. Gladwell's definitions and examples go this way:

- Puzzles...require more information to solve, often involve factual information, e.g. Osama Bin Laden's whereabouts.
- Mysteries...require analysis of what can often be too much information, they often require judgments and the assessment of uncertainty, e.g. what would happen in Iraq after the fall of Saddam.

The distinctions resonate with the indicators of school success that are used and the policies and programs that are crafted in response. That is, teaching and learning are often construed as "puzzles" rather than "mysteries", susceptible to specific and narrow "solutions" rather than multifaceted approaches considering a broad range of factors and conditions, some quite uncertain. The shift in the latest indicators used for the *Education Week Quality Counts: 2007* report suggests that we are all becoming aware that transforming teaching, learning, and schools requires a sense of the mystery of education as defined by Treverton and Gladwell.

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