

The Well-Rounded Curriculum April 9, 2010

Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the Arts Education Partnership National Forum
Below are 10 relevant excerpted paragraphs. #49 highlighted is key. For full text refer to
<http://www2.ed.gov/news/speeches/2010/04/04092010.html>

1. If there is a message that I hope you will take away from today's conference it is this: The arts can no longer be treated as a frill. As First Lady Michelle Obama has said, "the arts are not just a nice thing to have or do if there is free time or if one can afford it... Paintings and poetry, music and design... they all define who we are as a people."
2. All of you know the history all too well. For decades, arts education has been treated as though it was the novice teacher at school, the last hired and first fired when times get tough. But President Obama, the First Lady, and I reject the notion that the arts, history, foreign languages, geography, and civics are ornamental offerings that can or should be cut from schools during a fiscal crunch. The truth is that, in the information age, a well-rounded curriculum is not a luxury but a necessity.
12. Today, sadly, that is no longer the case. And that is one reason why I believe education is the civil rights issue of our generation--and why arts education remains so critical to leveling the playing field of opportunity. Robert Maynard Hutchins, the former president of the University of Chicago, put it well when he said that "the best education for the best is the best education for all."
27. In the coming debate over ESEA reauthorization, I believe that arts education can help build the case for the importance of a well-rounded, content-rich curriculum in at least three ways.
28. First, the arts significantly boost student achievement, reduce discipline problems, and increase the odds that students will go on to graduate from college. Second, arts education is essential to stimulating the creativity and innovation that will prove critical to young Americans competing in a global economy. And last, but not least, the arts are valuable for their own sake, and they empower students to create and appreciate aesthetic works.
32. Low-income students who play in the orchestra or band are more than twice as likely to perform at the highest levels in math as peers who do not play music. In James Catterall's well-known longitudinal study, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*, low-income students at arts-rich high schools were more than twice as likely to earn a B.A. as low-income students at arts-poor high schools.
49. Now, what can the federal government do to support high-quality arts education and a well-rounded curriculum? Let me answer that question by telling you first what we cannot do. We will not endorse or sanction any specific curricula--and the Department is in fact appropriately prohibited by law from endorsing or sanctioning curricula.
68. Too many schools still fail to offer a standards-based course of study in all four arts disciplines. We all know that unacceptable disparities in arts education between low-income and affluent districts continue to persist.
69. Despite these challenges, and the tough budgetary climate, arts education must not just survive but thrive. A well-balanced curriculum is simply too vital to our students and our national character to let the teaching of the arts and humanities erode.
73. I thank all of you for your tireless commitment to supporting arts education. And I urge you to continue the fight to provide all of our children with a well-rounded and rigorous education. Let the arts, as President Kennedy said, establish the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment.