

TENNESSEE ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION'S COLLABORATION FOR ART EDUCATION

by

Jim Dodson, Art Teacher, Jefferson Middle School, Oak Ridge, TN

Kathy Hawk, Art Teacher, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Kingsport, TN

Gene Pletcher, Curriculum Coordinator for the Visual Arts, The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, TN

Judy Williams, Art Teacher, Thomas Intermediate School, Shelbyville, TN

The importance of the role of our state association in local advocacy efforts has been reinforced by Dr. Gene Pletcher in his discussion of how Metro Nashville Schools accomplished the hiring of 90 new elementary art specialists for the 1997-98 school year. Pletcher credits the NAEA and the TAEA with providing the resources and support over the past years in this endeavor.

One of TAEA's advocacy efforts involved writing letters to newspaper editors and decision makers regarding the differences in art education and art entertainment/enrichment as stated in the NAEA publication, *A Priority for Reaching Higher Standards*. The awareness of art educators that visiting artists, television art programs, and brief exposure to the visual arts is not true art education, inspired the association's leadership to stimulate a letter writing campaign. Names and addresses of newspaper editors were obtained from the Tennessee Press Association Director and the Tennessee Department of Education. The association financed the cost of the mailing, which was handled by the executive board.

Supervisors of Instruction across the state received a letter from the TAEA president along with a copy of the NAEA publication, *Why Art Education?*, in an effort to encourage their use of Basic Education Plan funding to provide art specialists at the elementary level. Basic Education Plan funding formula provides money from the state which may be used by local school districts to lower class size, fund art, music, and/or P.E. specialists, and other needed reforms. However, it is the decision of the local district to use these funds for arts specialists or other purposes such as lower class size, school nurses, etc., which makes Metro's decision all the more commendable. The letter was written from the viewpoint of an elementary art educator who had personally witnessed the effects of an established art program. Although the efforts of classroom teachers to provide art education were recognized and commended, the letter explained, "most of them lack the proper training and physical facilities to conduct the critical responsibility as it should be." The supervisors were encouraged to order a copy of an NAEA publication, *Elementary Art Programs: A Guide for Administrators* to assist them in implementing an elementary art program in their district. The cost of this advocacy effort was financed by the TAEA.

A brochure dealing with the value of art education in our student's lives, along with the necessity for a sequential art program administered by an art specialist, was mailed across the state to various decision makers. These brochures were funded with matching funds from the TAEA and the National Art Education Foundation. TAEA members were provided copies to use at the local level. The text of the brochure was developed by one of our higher education members who outlined the benefits of art education and the steps that must be taken to gain these benefits. The TAEA treasury was able to finance this brochure through various fundraisers such as a silent auction of members' artwork and a wallhanging quilted by one of the members. This brochure, which was mailed through the assistance of the Arts Education Program of the Tennessee Department of Education, helped raise the awareness level of many decision makers in the state.

Many of these advocacy efforts were possible due to the use of established NAEA documents. As members, we are challenged to take the available materials and modify them for our needs. Further, we are challenged to participate in many ways in support of our discipline. When we respond, our voices will be heard. The key word is "we." There is power in numbers, and working together as "the well oiled machine" for art education has proven productive, but advocacy is a never ending task. We must not forget that what we do each hour of each day in the art room or classroom is the most powerfully effective and most enduring advocacy for art education. We must develop quality programs that prove the necessity of art education's place in the curriculum.

A selection of helpful NAEA Advocacy Publications available:

Elementary Art Programs: A Guide for Administrators

NAEA Pamphlet Series:

Staffing for Excellence in Elementary and Secondary Schools

Why Art Education?

Quality Art Education: Goals for Schools

A Priority for Reaching High Standards

Checklists Developed for:

Elementary Principals

Secondary Principals

School Board Members

Legislative Perspectives: A Checklist for Action

Parents

The National Art Education Association publishes many other helpful pieces of literature. Contact NAEA Publications, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1590; (703)860-8000; Fax 703-860-2960; **Orders Only:** 800-299-8321; or e-mail: naea@dgs.dgsys.com