

NAEA Advisory

The National Art Education Association, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1590

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Excerpts from Testimony Regarding Reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Samuel Hope and I am submitting this testimony at the behest of four national arts accrediting associations: the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), founded in 1924; the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), founded in 1944; the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), founded in 1965; and the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), founded in 1981. These four associations, involving approximately 800 programs in four disciplines, work through peer review to raise standards of professional education and training in colleges, universities, professional schools, and conservatories. A large percentage of American artists active today have benefited from studies in one or more of these institutions. I serve as the Executive Director and chief staff officer of the four organizations. The current Presidents are: NASM — Dean Robert Werner, the University of Cincinnati; NASAD — President Roger Gilmore, the Portland (Maine) School of Art; NAST — Professor Paul A. Distler, Virginia Tech; NASD — Professor John Wilson, the University of Arizona.

We support reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts. We believe that the federal government has an important responsibility to advance principles and values inherent in the ideas of great art and high civilization. The Endowment has played a role in this cause in the past and it must continue to do so in the future

Within the broad mandate of the Endowment, our own special competence is in the areas of professional education and general arts education. On this occasion, we wish to focus our testimony on general arts education, a matter of great concern to all who care about the future of our cultural life. What is the Endowment's role in this important area?

Anyone who has looked carefully at arts education in the United States knows of great disparities: excellent programs that are appreciated, funded and successful operate in close geographic proximity to programs that are underappreciated, underfunded, and thus unsuccessful. Outstanding programs have been created primarily by outstanding individuals who have devoted their careers to teaching one of the arts disciplines. We submit that these teachers are the unsung heroes of America's cultural advance, and we believe that they deserve far more respect and philosophical support than they have received from the arts community as a whole. These teachers are part of a large system; the aggregate expenditure for K-12 arts education in the United States is in the billions, mostly local and state tax dollars. However, this system was established and effective long before the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. All of us know that the nation's arts education effort is not primarily funded through arts agencies, but rather through education agencies. This fact must be a primary consideration in the formulation of federal approaches to arts education, including policies about the appropriate role for the Endowment.

A historical review of the relationship between the National Endowment for the Arts and the professionals responsible for arts education shows a less than satisfactory state of affairs. It is neither necessary nor useful here to review this history in detail. Let it be said, however, that to our knowledge, the Endowment has always wished good things for curriculum-based arts education, but found it difficult to promote or work with the world of education of which it is not an intrinsic part. It is in these circumstances that the Endowment has built and advocated its own education-related programs. In terms of knowledge and skills development among students, the results are disappointing. The question thus remains, "How can the National Endowment for the Arts contribute most positively to general arts education?" A wise answer will be based on realities such as the fundamental preservation/communication/creation mission of the Endowment, the relatively tiny amount of Endowment funds available for arts education activities, the great size and scope of the nation's professionally-directed effort in arts education, and the nature of substantive education in the various arts — practice and study, not just exposure. These realities tell us that the National Endowment for the Arts has an important role to play in arts education, but in most all aspects, it is a service rather than a leadership role.

There is one major exception The National Endowment for the Arts should be *the* federal advocate for strong, serious, curriculum-based arts instruction in the nation's public and private schools

We believe that the Arts-in-Education program at the Endowment need not receive significant infusions of new funds to accomplish the goals we espouse. In fact, the present structure of the Arts-in-Education program is consistent with the priorities we have outlined

Our point concerning these [residencies, state planning grants, research and development] and any future efforts is that no program, process, or structure has intrinsic value unless it is centered on substantive content. During the past year, we have been concerned about efforts within the Endowment to redefine the arts disciplines for educational policy purposes. On one list, music, theatre, and dance are no longer disciplines but have been reduced to subsets of a vague and shadowy aggregation called performing art. In another list, the visual arts are fragmented into art, design, museum studies, and media, all of which are designated as separate disciplines, an inappropriate division for K-12 settings. Over the strenuous objection of the professional arts education associations, whose members have struggled for years to place serious, comprehensive visual arts, dance, music, and theatre programs in the schools, the Endowment has persisted in developing various listings and programs that contradict each other. Here, the Endowment, seeking to appear on the "cutting edge," is fighting the arts education profession rather than helping it. The new administration must give them time to make the necessary corrections. But the NEA leadership and staff should be encouraged to hurry because the present situation demonstrates that the Endowment is at risk of being out of touch with reality and dangerously close to the fact of open and bitter opposition from prominent professionals and organizations.

We have also been concerned over the past year about grants given by the Endowment to develop curricular models for schools. We do not believe that the National Endowment for the Arts, or any other federal agency, should be establishing detailed curricular patterns. Although the Endowment's response will surely be that such activities are of an advisory nature, the enterprise seems perilously close to the development of national curricula. Let us make clear that we do not object to the Endowment's articulating broad principles calling for sustained study of serious content. If such calls were coordinated to support the work of the arts education professions with even a portion of the intensity the Endowment supports the work of professional artists, great strides could be made in states and localities throughout the nation. When the Endowment wants to support symphonic music in Boston, it gives a grant to the Boston Symphony. It does not establish a National Endowment Orchestra in Boston to compete with the Boston Symphony. By the same principle, the Endowment should not be establishing detailed curricular models and endorsing, promoting, or funding these for replication in other places. We all know what the response would be if the Endowment began to write guidelines for a model symphony program, or a model dance or theatre season, or a model museum show. The Endowment avoids such action with respect to the arts; it should take the same position with respect to arts education — broad principles, not detailed curricula; advocacy that supports local expertise, not federal usurpation of professional judgement.

Given the points we have made, we request that the Congress, in reauthorizing the National Endowment for the Arts, work with six principles:

1. *The primary function of the National Endowment for the Arts must remain preservation, communication, and creation of art.* All but minimal portions of its funds must support this primary function.
2. *The Endowment has an important advocacy role to play on behalf of substantive arts education centered on learning the arts disciplines.* It must keep the highest principles of art and civilization before educational policymakers and the public. It must promote reliance on and respect for local professionals responsible for daily instructional content.
3. *Appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts should not disadvantage preservation, communication, and creation of art in favor of arts education, particularly at current funding levels.*
4. *The Endowment should be strictly proscribed from activities that would result in the writing and promotion of specific model curricula for any or all of the arts disciplines.* We request that Committee report language make this proscription clear and unequivocal.
5. *The Endowment should work more closely with the discipline-centered arts education professions in developing agency services that support general arts instruction.* The Endowment has a long history of productive consultative relationships with national organizations representing artists, presenters of the arts, and arts agencies. A similar strategic planning relationship has never existed with the national organizations professionally concerned with arts education. Such consultation is essential if the Endowment is to make the best use of the small resources it has for arts education. We request that the language of the Committee report mandate such consultation for the Endowment.
6. *Panels dealing with arts education, and particularly those concerned with matters affecting schooling should be composed primarily of individuals whose professional records indicate significant reputations in the content of visual arts, dance, music, and theatre instruction.* Experts in arts and educational agency procedures and policies should be present, but they should not dominate the panel process. We request that Committee report language promote a new presence for content-based professionalism on Arts-in-Education panels

The quality of our nation's cultural future depends on our results in arts education. In turn, the cultural context determines much of the nation's values and capabilities. We recognize that discussion about the arts and arts education can be silly and superficial. However, vapid ideas are not confined to matters of art and teaching. We must not allow the presence of silliness and superficiality to turn us away from the serious business of cultural development. There are important choices to be made, and our choices will determine our cultural destiny.